

A Revolution

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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Year C: Advent 4: Luke 1:39-55
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In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Songs give us joy! Songs give us hope. Songs have for history led people in times of resistance. Mary speaks boldly of a future that she believes has already come into being. May we sing in such belief as well! Christ is coming!

God is here! So let us sing! What is your favorite Christmas carol? The one that you look forward to singing the most? (Get answers, and sing the first verse)

Yes! Singing does fabulous things for our hearts. Song lifts us up! Songs inspire us. Songs bring us hope. Music can do what the spoken word cannot. It reaches down deep inside and pulls out our yearnings, and hopes. Which is why I'm delighted the choir is singing for us this morning. We need to hear you. We need your music, like we need the music of our bell choir when they play.

When Mary arrives at her cousin Elizabeth's home, the text says, that Mary spoke the words which are all too familiar for us. Yet, none of us can hardly hear those words without a song behind them. We call it 'The Magnificat', from the first word in Latin, magnify, praise. It has been put to music by JS Bach, Vivaldi, and in our own beloved Holden Evening Prayer.

Perhaps it has morphed into a song because it parallels Hannah's song in 1 Samuel. Barren herself for years, God grants her prayer for a child. Hannah sings about her soon to be son, Samuel, and everything God will accomplish through him. (Ch 2:1-10)

Mary's song tells of the incredible character of God. This God is the one who has been promised by the prophets of old to one day come and release God's people from bondage. God will turn the world upside down; bringing the powerful ones to naught, and lifting up the lowly.

We saw this in real life, just two short weeks ago. The Syrian people were out in Umayyad (oo-mai-uhd) Square dancing and singing upon the destruction of Assad's regime. The tyranny was over. A new day had come. Hardly able to believe they could say his nick-name in public, 'donkey,' the people celebrated their liberation. Said one 80 year-old woman, "I was 30 when the big donkey came into power. For 50 years, we were squeezed, and I was praying all the time, asking God to get rid of him. And now he had. We can breathe again," she said, her eyes moist with tears.'

As Rev. David Lose says, 'When your back is to the wall, you see, and all looks grim, one of the most unexpected and powerful things you can do is sing.'ⁱ

In the book of Exodus, chapter 15, God led the people through the Red Sea away from their Egyptian captors, and they arrived safely on the other side. What did they do? Moses, the Israelites, Miriam, and all the women, began to sing! "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." (verse 1)

In our country, it was 1965, marchers both blacks and whites marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama for voting rights, and people sang. Their songs became an album titled 'Freedom Songs' which included titles like, "We are climbing Jacob's Ladder", "This Little Light of Mine", "Go Tell it on the Mountain", and "We Shall Overcome."

These, like Mary's song, are songs of resistance. People sing with hope. They sing of a future they believe God already has, or will soon make right. Therefore, they sing boldly. Faithfully. Trusting in God's providence and power.

It all comes to pass as Mary says. Jesus challenges the status quo. When asked if it was lawful to pay taxes, He says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." (Mark 12:17a) When the Pharisees called Jesus' disciples out for working and eating on the sabbath, Jesus said, "The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath." (Mt 12:1-8) The Magnificat is truly a song to praise God. For it is God alone who deserves our praise and bold trust.

Another example of Mary's song being lived out in real time is actually about Antonio Vivaldi, the composer of Magnificat. Vivaldi was also a Catholic priest and he lived at an orphanage. It was Vivaldi's job as choirmaster to compose music by which the orphans could literally sing for their supper. The songs and concerts were meant to attract wealthy people who could finance the orphanage through donations.

A close look at the vocal score reveals that Vivaldi wrote the bass parts for girls to sing. For it was the boys who left for apprenticeships, the girls had to stay and sing in the choir. In a very real sense, these young girls were modern day 'Mary's'. They depleted the pockets of the wealthy to lift up themselves; the orphaned poor, lonely and downtrodden. It was a fascinating business model, but a true living out of the Gospel of which the first Mary sang.ⁱⁱ

Mary spoke with hope and conviction of God who had acted in the past and would act in the future. This song of resistance and many would even say revolution has echoed far past its initial reciting. Mary sang with joy, but she sang boldly, hopefully, trusting in God. If you believe what you find on the internet, it has been told that many countries have even outlawed this text, Mary's song due to its subversive nature.

Do we sing our Christmas carols in the same way? Truly, the world will be turned upside down a mere three (two) days from now. Christ will come! The babe will be born in Bethlehem. One person, fully God, who changed the course of history. Its true! God has already changed the world through acts of resistance and hope one person at a time. One heart at a time. We can start naming names. Martin Luther King Jr. Mother Teresa. Princess Diana. Missionaries. Preachers. Teachers. Doctors without borders. Pro bono public attorneys. Custodians who

listen to troubled youth. Mothers and fathers of school shooting victims. You. Me. God has already changed us. Yes?

We sing believing that reality, whether we can see it or not. Our hope is sustained by the Holy Spirit who is at work in our world this day. Syrian refugees are returning home. Ukraine continues it's fight for freedom. Closer to home, children of incarcerated parents will get Christmas gifts. The hungry homeless in many cities will be fed a Christmas meal. God calls us to resistance work; for the sake of His kingdom, and for all of God's children.

St. Augustine once said, "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are." (repeat) What is God calling you and me to be angry and courageous about?

Elizabeth and Mary birthed two sons; John the Baptist and Jesus. Yet, those two men through their devoted lives, have birthed in us anger and courage. Advent is all about stirring things up! Perhaps, just perhaps underneath the joy of our favorite Christmas carols will be born anger and courage for the new year. May God lead us to sing like Mary! For there are lives of others who are depending on it.

Amen!

ⁱ <https://www.davidlose.net/2015/12/advent-4-c-singing-as-an-act-of-resistance/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-02/vivaldi-s-business-plan>