

August 17, 2014
Mary, Mother of Our Lord
Pr. Michelle L. Sevig

Mary's Song

I first learned of Mary's Magnificat while in college, as part of a small campus ministry. Together we sang the evening prayer composed by Marty Haugen.

My soul proclaims your greatness O God and spirit rejoices in you. You have look with love on your servant here and blessed me all my life through. Great and mighty are you o holy one; strong is your kindness, strong your love. How you favor the weak and lowly one, humbling the proud of heart.

I still fondly remember the quiet Advent evenings—the worship space glowing with candles, and a small group of college students singing together about God looking with favor on those who are weak and lowly, praising God for strong justice and a love that perseveres throughout all generations.

You have cast the mighty down from their thrones and uplifted the humble of heart. You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and left the wealthy no part. Great and mighty are you O faithful one strong is your justice, strong your love. As you promise to Sarah and Abraham kindness forevermore.

Since that first experience, this song has become my song...the one I go to when I feel alone or scared, overwhelmed or anxious about the future...about life. It is a song I know by heart and sing often when I need a pick me up or I need a song of praise to see me through the day.

My soul proclaims your greatness o God and my spirit rejoices in you. You have looked with love on your servant here and blessed me all my life through.

No one knows what Mary's song actually sounded like when she first sang it, but the lyrics of the Magnificat have inspired numerous musical pieces in a variety of styles. And it's no wonder her song has inspired so many. In the magnificent Magnificat, Mary sings not only of her own situation, but sings a song of praise that relates to all of us in every generation.

Mary sings about God who has "looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant," but this word lowliness is often misrepresented as humility; when instead it represents her *poverty*. Mary, although poor, pregnant and unmarried finds the courage to sing of God's faithfulness. Even though she is likely to be despised and rejected by her community and family, she sings. In the midst of oppression and an unknown future, she trusts God's promise to be with her, just as God had been with Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses and countless others who had gone before her. She sings! And as she sings, Mary becomes a willing partner with God in a divine dance that embodies love and grace and beauty.

As biblical scholar James Kay reminds us, "Mary sings not just a solo aria about her own destiny, but a freedom song on behalf of all the faithful poor in the land. She sings a song of freedom for all who, in their poverty and their wretchedness, still believe that God will make a way where there is no way. Like John the Baptist, Mary prophesies deliverance; she prophesies about a way that is coming in the wilderness of injustice. She sings of a God who "has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts"; who "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly"; who "has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." She exults in the God of Abraham; she exalts the God of Jesus Christ. Here at the beginning, Mary rejoices in God's destiny -- for her, and for a world turned upside down."

Surely, our world feels as upside down as ever this week: chaos on the streets in Ferguson, Missouri; refugees starving on a mountain in Iraq; continued war in Gaza; more than 1,000 now dead from the Ebola virus in West African nations; children and mothers trying in desperation to enter our country with hopes for a better life; and the suicide of a beloved American icon that touches a painful chord in many of us who struggle with depression, addictions and hopelessness. This is our wilderness of injustice. We are in need of Mary's song as much today as we ever have been.

And yet, I've had a hard time singing *any* praises this week. The violence of these last days has robbed many of us of our voice. But it will not always be so. "Songs are powerful," as preacher David Lose says and we'll eventually "catch our breath, hold on to each other, and remember that we are not alone. We will be able once again to lift our voices in lament and praise, promise and defiance" And when we can't, we count on the community of faith who can and will sing for us, empowering us to hear and believe the promise that God does wondrous things, that the lowly will be empowered, and the powerful will be brought down, so all God's people can participate in the divine dance of love, grace and beauty.

We have a unique opportunity on this feast day for Mary, Mother of Our lord to sing with her and enter into the promises of which she sings. Mary sings of God's mercy, promising that God lifts up the lowly, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. So as we take up her song, we call upon God to remember all who suffer.

Perhaps it is in this sacred space that we catch our breath in the silence, so that we recover our song. Surrounded by icons, even one with Mary and the Holy Child, we remember that Mary points to Jesus, who is with us in our darkest hours and deepest despair. And who invites us to join him in speaking for the oppressed, challenging those who abuse power and wealth, and to work without ceasing to bring God's rein of mercy and justice to our broken world.

My soul proclaims your greatness O God and my spirit rejoices in you. You have looked with love on your servants here and blessed us all our life through.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nABzv_TInaI#t=62