

Favoured lowliness.

It is a challenging thing to hear Mary's song each December. Luke 1:46-55 doesn't sound like the typical rejoicing of an expectant mother. Mary's defiant hope extends beyond a desire for a healthy, happy baby. She is not concerned for herself or her growing family; she is anticipating remarkable changes in the order of things. And it is challenging because we don't usually think in terms of social upheaval in our Christmas preparations. Change is not on our Christmas lists. We want hope, peace, joy and love (liturgically in that order!) to prepare us for our celebrations with gift exchanges and food and nearness and love... but maybe, just this once, we are ready for some change to the order of things.

I'm not talking about mere changes in government - the quadrennial game of musical chairs that comes with fresh promises of new, best practices. And I'm not talking about surface level changes - decorative and pleasing to the eye - that come from once-a-year outreach disguised as 'good will to all.'

I'm talking about REAL change.

The change that Mary sings about is a recognition of God's sovereignty; the acknowledgement that the world has, for too long, been shaped by a selfish humanity. And - according to Mary - God is ready to remind us all of the true nature of God's desire for Creation.

And that reminder will be given in the form of a beloved child.

Mary is a good mother. She knows that she's in a dangerous predicament. This is an untimely pregnancy, and so she turns to her cousin Elizabeth - who has some experience in this sort of thing (being unexpectedly pregnant herself.)

These two women (indeed all women) have no power in society except the power that is managed for them by their husbands. These women bear the gift of life in them, and that is a power that men have never really understood (and long feared.)

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Between them they give voice to the ancient hope that the one who holds the power of life and love over all creation also has the power to upend the sad, selfish state of the world.

This song is even more important to here this year. There is even more evidence of the selfish state of things as we struggle to understand what it means to live through a pandemic. Fear of the almost universal uncertainty that we are enduring has driven some to offer simple, selfish solutions. But there is no single, simple solution that answers the questions of public safety and global health.

Though we benefit from generations of technological, social and economic advances; and while we enjoy the benefits of efficient global travel and trade, we are quick to forget that the world is a vast, complicated place full of diverse, complicated people. Mary's song is not the simple plea of a faithful person - she looks to God to untangle (one strand at a time) the mess we've made of God's gift.

The child that moves Mary to sing about social revolution is Jesus, whose birth we soon celebrate.

By looking to Jesus, we will be invited to re-imagine the way the world is ordered. The gospel accounts of Jesus life, death and resurrection offer us new models for relationships, and new ways to describe our connection to the loving and grace-full heart of God. This is not a simple solution either. To follow Jesus is to carefully and compassionately re-examine our approach to everything. It will take time to unravel the fabric of our 'me-first' approach to everything, and once unraveled, the strands that bind us together must be fashioned into a new garment, one that offers the same benefits, the same opportunities, the same care and compassion to everyone. Suddenly Mary's song sounds like a Christmas project for the world.

While we scramble to 're-make' our Christmas traditions; as we mourn the fellowship and the family gatherings that will be strangely diminished; maybe we might consider that these too are difficult but necessary steps on the journey to redeem Creation. Maybe - just maybe Mary's song will begin to sound like a Christmas carol.