

And Mary said,  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

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I don't know where the world got the idea that Mary was meek and mild, but wherever it was, it wasn't from a story that they read in the Bible. It certainly wasn't from this passage, called the Magnificat after its first word in Latin.

First of all, Mary survives being an unwed teenage mother. No small feat in any age, but perhaps even harder then than now. Then, at least as the Gospel of Matthew tells it, she and her family become refugees, fleeing the murderous rage of their king, who is so terrified of the boy she's raising that he declares all the kids of his age in town to be put to death.

Never mind that she's raising the person who ended up being so important that time itself was split into 'before' and 'after' him. Never mind that she put up with it when he thought he was hot stuff and told her he didn't need her anymore. Never mind that she even watched him die.

Even if all that hadn't happened, the Magnificat alone would be enough to qualify her as one die-hard mother. Picture it: in her mid-teens, pregnant, her hands resting on her growing belly, her eyes narrowed and chin up, and threatening the rich and powerful with nothing but her womb and God's promise.

Mary embodies the sentiment written by the author Sarah Bessey who wrote "there is something big buried in the small words." Mary's words are her reckoning, they are her

sharpness, her weapon, her method and her message. The entirety of Jesus' work is buried in these words.

The philosopher Jacques Derrida talks about two different types of futures, one we can call the expected future and the other we can call the unexpected future. The expected future is the future we pay most of our attention to. It is the relatively foreseeable future that we can wrap our minds around. It's the future that we plan for, because for the most part we can know what to expect. We think about what kind of job we wish to pursue, what kind of income will make us happy, and we wonder how in the world our student loans will get paid back.

In the expected future, we are responsible for paying attention to investment plans, pension plans, insurance plans, all kinds of things you are either already paying attention to or are getting ready to pay attention to. The expected future is the future in which we live and move and have our being. The expected future demands our best efforts, always and uncompromisingly, and we're foolish not to plan for it.

Yet there is a different future - what can be called the unexpected future - that is a far cry from the conventional expected future. In the unexpected future, we are taken by surprise, overcome by a dream or experience or longing that takes us where we could have never have imagined going, that keeps us hoping and sighing and dreaming for a life that is not beholden simply to what we can think or imagine, what we can plan for, but is open to what we, in all our best efforts, can not quite make out. The dream of an unexpected future shatters the conventional horizons of all our reasonable expectations and best-laid plans. Just like with Mary, her dream of an unexpected future makes our heart beat, our feet dance, our voices sing.

The unexpected future is proclaimed here. Mary declares this unexpected future, even before it is assured, even before it's fully dreamt. She declares God's promise so strongly that she sings it in the past tense, claiming that it is already here, already true, already the present, not just the unexpected future, but the unexpected present.

It is here that we have to acknowledge the oddities surrounding Christian belief in the messiah that we no sooner proclaim that he has come than we're praying for the messiah to come again. To outsiders it must seem like the messiah was present and had arrived, yet now the messiah has gone missing, AWOL, absent, like Jesus has left the building. Christians celebrate the coming messiah yet at the same time mourn the messiah's absence. It's like Christianity needs to make up its mind already.

One of the problems that logic dictates is that it tends to think about these things along either/or lines: Either the messiah has arrived, or the messiah has not arrived; either the kingdom is here, or the kingdom is not here. If it's not here yet, then - depending upon one's perspective - it will either come one day in the future, or it will not come at all. It will appear one grand and glorious day, or it will never appear at all. It's messiah or no messiah. Kingdom or no Kingdom. This or that. Now or later. Either/or.

But what if in the Bible we encounter a much more radical approach than that? What if Christ is coming and Christ has already come - and what if somehow they depend on each other? What if the trace left in the aftermath of the Messiah leaves our hearts forever hungry to catch a glimpse of the Messiah yet again?

Walter Benjamin says that praying for the messiah to come is not about praying for an arrival way off in the future, at the end of time or even outside of time, because, he says, *the heart of every moment - the heart of every moment - contains the little door through which the Messiah may enter.*

Many of us have caught traces of our heart's longing, our unexpected future, in the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus - in sharing and receiving cups of cold water, in breaking of bread with friends and strangers, in loving our neighbors and (crazy enough) our enemies - and as we catch these glimpses, these traces, we become dissatisfied with anything less; these glimpses keep us hoping and praying and dreaming and weeping for the messiah to come not once, but again and again and again; not way off down the road, but today, this week, now!, we desire with a desire beyond desire and a hope against hope, that exceeds even what Mary sings about.

In the aftermath of the coming Messiah, in the trace that tears our heart and leaves a void, we are left forever singing, inviting, calling, and longing, hoping, sighing, and dreaming - and thankfully so.

And it is there that is where we see the heart of Mary live again, and again, and again.

She's Rosa Parks. She's Elizabeth the first. She's Wangari Maathai (Wang-gari Maa-thai). She's Joan of Arc. Or she would be, except that she's the one who formed the one who enabled all those others to do what they did.

When our world is shattered, and hope seems lost, we must, like Mary, pray for the messiah to enter, not just once but a thousand times.

When I hear the words of the Magnificat spoken or sung aloud, I am in awe of this God-bearer, this *Theotokos*, this pregnant teenager, this unlikely maiden, this hidden gem, this worthy one. When these words surround me and embrace me as they have done this week, I am reminded that Christ will come into broken places in us and in the world where healing is needed. Their rhythm reminds me that we are all pregnant with the possibility of new life, becoming more than we are, for God is with us and God is in us. We are all worthy, like Mary was worthy, because God declares it so. God declares us worthy to carry God's gift of wholeness into our fragmented world.

Yet, because our memories can be very short, we need Mary's song to remind us of God's twofold promise to deliver God's people and to lift up the poor. Mary sings because she has new life in her. She sings because God has called her worthy, and promised to reveal that worth to

the world. Mary sings because the world needs to hear the good news that all will not remain as it is, but will be transformed, that what will be torn down, will be rebuilt in three days. Mary sings because the world needs to hear that God will raise up and bless the poor, the weak, the hungry among us, those this world often forgets.

Mary sings because she gives voice to not only what people need to hear but, at least occasionally, what they want to say, "Yes, that is it," comes the response; "that is our message; that is our faith."

Divine promises need articulation, they need communities of faith to recall them. This song needs to be read and sung again and again. This song will be our call this Advent season. For these words need hearts like that of Mary to sing them aloud, to speak them. To remind all that God calls us into a stance of solidarity with all whose condition is shared by Mary's child. Seeing the present, the unexpected future, into the deep heart of things, to all the metaphors for liberation, that even surround us now.

Amen. and Amen.