

Good News...Really?

Luke 1:46-56

Thank God for Luke. Of the many insights Luke gives us, his glimpses of Mary are especially profound. Were it not for Luke's Gospel, we would know very little about Mary. Mark skips the birth altogether, and in his Gospel, Jesus seems indifferent to Mary when she does show up. Matthew's Mary is mute. Not one word comes from her lips. She is present, but passive and silent. John shares her presence and her story, but little of her words or thoughts. And Paul... the bulk of the New Testament...never even mentions her.

We Protestants have tended to avoid Mary as if she belonged only to the Roman Catholics, and in the process perhaps we have missed the beauty and the power of her place in the sacred story. Jason Byassee reminds us that in Mary, the church makes its radical claim to "Incarnation;" that in fact through her, God has become human flesh, born of a woman, nursed on a mother's knee, diapered and wiped, calmed and encouraged, taught and tutored by Mary. The very ordinariness of Mary proclaims the church's faith in a God who becomes one with us, in human flesh, in Jesus Christ. Byassee says:

In Mary, the church ties a string around its finger to remember the particularity of its belief about God in flesh, made known in a baby.

Other New Testament writers minimize her, the Protestant church tradition ignores her, but Luke remembers her. Luke's Mary is neither silent nor passive. Her humility is the humility of strength. Her submission to God is a bold act of faith. Her courage carries her from the shocking announcement of the pending birth to the overwhelming agony of the cross.

And in Luke's Gospel, Mary sings!

James Kay says:

Mary just keeps singing, ranging high on her scales of praise, soaring in her expectant and revolutionary libretto, because God has reached so unexpectedly down to where the least and the lowly still struggle for life.

So Mary sings her incredible song which has the power to transform and challenge our lives, as well as hers, and turn the world right-side up...

My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

He has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts,

put down the mighty and exalted those of low degree.

He has filled the hungry with good things

and the rich he has sent empty away. (Luke 1:46-55)

Sing, Mary, sing. How we need to hear your song in our lives today. Listen. Listen for the song of Mary, the song of Good News for the poor and the suffering, the song of hope for those in despair.

Sing, Mary, sing your song.

It is really quite a revolutionary moment when you come to think about it—a humble, poor woman singing of the Lord God. One would expect this kind of song from the high and the mighty, the grand, the splendid. Maybe the Mormon Tabernacle Choir accompanied by the New York Symphony, assisted by the Archbishop of

Canterbury, or something set to the strains of Handel's Messiah or Bach's St. Matthew's Passion. You would expect this kind of anthem to be accompanied by thunder and lightning, cymbal crashes and rolling drums, a cloud of smoke and a pillar of fire...at least a burning bush!

But the fact is, God's praise is placed on the lips of one so common, so ordinary, so earthy. A God who is so far beyond us, we can hardly catch a glimpse of his glory; a God who is so holy, sinful human beings should draw near in fear; a God whose name is spelled only with consonants so that it can't even be properly spoken by the human tongue. This God who is above every God, whose name is above every name, is now known and praised, sung and proclaimed by a poor, simple, teen-age bit of a common village girl. In Mary's song, the magnificent Magnificat, she sings praise to the God who has done great things; she tells of her Savior who has "looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."

James Kay reminds us that the Greek word for "lowliness" is not talking about humility, it's talking about poverty.

Mary (he says) was poor...dirt poor. She was poor and pregnant and unmarried, she was in a mess. But still she sings. Why? Because this lowly one, this wretched one, this woman, God raises up. Mary, despised and rejected, is favored by God and will bring the Messiah to birth. And so, she sings.

So the question is: If Mary can sing, in all her poverty and lowliness, why can't we?

Why can't the praise of God flow out of our mouths and off of our lips? If Mary can sing praise for the Lord God Omnipotent, so can we!

My soul magnifies the Lord

and my heart rejoices in God my Savior.