

“Mother of God”
Advent III, December 12, 2021
Scripture: Luke 1:26-55

Just as last week we learned from Luke’s gospel a little about John the Baptist’s origins and his father Zachariah, this week we learn about Jesus’ mother Mary. Luke is the only gospel writer who tells us very much about her. She’s mentioned in Matthew’s gospel, but never speaks. Mark and John make little mention of her, in fact in John she’s never given a name, only referred to as “his mother.” But here we find a young woman who is determined and strong, possibly the bravest person in the whole New Testament.

We meet Mary as she’s visited by an angel who greets her with respect and explains to her what her role could be in God’s redemption drama. Most scholars agree she would have been very young, maybe 15 or 16, possibly younger. She’s a peasant girl with no formal education or prospects. She’s been promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, probably also a peasant. To call them peasants isn’t to say they’re inferior or anything. It just means they had no property of their own, no possessions to leave their offspring. All they had to offer was their work which I’m sure at times was grueling.

But Mary is special, nonetheless. And not because of her condition. The Church has often focused on her virginity in its reverence of her, but the story doesn’t dwell on that. What’s special about her is her courage. Mary accepts the angel’s challenge to leave behind a life that was poor but secure and predictable and become the mother of God, an identity no one would understand and many would deride. Yet she doesn’t seem to hesitate to go along and become a co-conspirator with God. And not with the naïve enthusiasm of a child, but with the clear-eyed determination of someone who can see God at work in the world and is willing to be God’s instrument for justice and love.

Another sign of her courage and single-mindedness is revealed in her decision to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. It’s always struck me as remarkable that Mary would travel alone to see Elizabeth. She doesn’t live in a world where that kind of travel is easy or safe. A young woman alone is a target for predators who might rob her or much worse. Yet she does it in the knowledge that only Elizabeth can understand the significance of her pregnancy; only Elizabeth can relate to the excitement and anticipation she must feel. And maybe it’s only with Elizabeth that Mary can sing about God in the way she does.

Mary’s song is part of today’s readings, but we’re going to sing it together in a little bit. Mary’s song describes God as the One who reverses the world’s circumstances. God throws the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. God feeds the hungry with good things and sends the rich away with nothing. Through her song we discover that Mary is more than just a chess piece on God’s cosmic board or merely a vessel to carry a child. Mary is a prophet and a warrior. Her courage is expressed through her absolute devotion to a God who turns the world

upside down. There's no fear in her, no sentimentality; she knows who she is and what her role is to be in God's great reversal.

And I think that's what makes Mary more than just a character in the drama of Jesus' life but a role model for every disciple. Mary represents who we're all called to be. Her traditional identity is *theotokis*, a Greek term that means "God bearer" or mother of God. What we learn from the story of Jesus' birth is God is continually seeking to be born in the world. And God turns to the ordinary and lowly to accomplish it.

Mary is our champion. She shows us the courage it takes to participate in God's designs and be a co-conspirator in turning the world around. And when we celebrate her we express our desire to have a part in God's work. We want to join Mary in bearing God in the world; we want to become mothers of God. And, really, how else can God enter this world except through those willing to bear God? Mary teaches us what it means to make that choice. She shows us how risky it is to leave security and predictability behind and how joyful it is to be a part of the unfolding of God's reversal in the world.

Today we're three weeks into our four week journey through Advent, this time of preparation for the emergence of Christ in the world. And what we keep realizing through the stories we hear and the songs we sing is we're not just preparing to celebrate a day or an event, we're preparing to turn our lives around, to become entirely new so we can set about the work of building a new world for God to inhabit. Today Mary's story opens the door to that world and it's up to us to claim it as our own and walk in.

So, I invite you all, as you're able, to stand and raise together Mary's song as our affirmation of faith. Let it inspire you to become God bearers in the world, mothers of God, as the world is about to turn....