

Advent 4, Year C

- With all due respect to hymn writers, and to some of our favorite Christmas songs and hymns, I have to set the record straight about something: Mary was not exactly meek or mild
- The line just prior to our Gospel reading is that important moment of Mary's 'yes' to God, and to the Incarnation – that moment when we hear Mary say, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” –but it's often intimated that her 'yes' is meek and mild, – that she then simply says nothing, pondering this meekly in her heart – how many of you have seen a Christmas pageant where that's the case?
- We never know that more clearly that Mary doesn't fit our preconceptions about being seen and not heard than after the reading we just heard, the great song of Mary called the Magnificat
- There's an option to use the Magnificat itself as a Canticle instead of the Psalm this morning, and I know some churches that not only use it there and in the Gospel reading, but are also singing some version of the Magnificat during the service
- That may seem like overkill, but if I'm honest I'd have to tell you I strongly considered doing the same – because this song of Mary is just that important
- It's hard to overstate the importance of this particular song, this particular hymn of the power of God – this song's particular emphasis of what exactly God is up to
- For one thing, it's the longest piece of dialogue from any woman in the New Testament, which would be remarkable even regardless of content – just for such a lengthy speech to come from the mouth of a woman in an Ancient Near Eastern civilization where men were the ones most often given the chance to speak
- But that's before even thinking about just how revolutionary the content of this song is
- Hopefully it's a song that you've heard before – it's a song that historically was sung at every Evensong in the Anglican Church – but other than there, if many of us have heard it, we've heard only the beginning, only the first half of it – the part that goes:
- "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor 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."
- It's a pity that we so often stop there, though if I'm honest I have to say I think it's intentional – because the rest of the song has the possibility of making us very

uncomfortable

- Because Mary goes on, “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 forever.”
- For this to be the song of a woman, living in Palestine in antiquity, is rather remarkable
- And for it to be included by Luke the Evangelist as the first of the four songs he uses as a way of framing his Gospel – the first hymn meant to shape the way we think about the Gospel, the Good News of God in Jesus Christ – the very first statement of his Gospel’s thesis, if you will... is nothing short of incredible
- God, Mary sings, has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty.
- It is a world-shattering statement of who God is, and who God’s people are meant to be
- And it’s every bit as revolutionary, every bit as paradigm-shattering as some other speeches that we know a bit better:
- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
- “That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free”
- “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!”
- “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”
- It’s even every bit as revolutionary as another passage in Luke’s Gospel: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe

to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.”

- The message of Mary’s song seeks to demolish our thoughts about the way the world is, and instead tell us the way the world ought to be, the grand vision that God has for the world, and for all the people in it – it’s one of the most revolutionary speeches ever spoken, every bit as world-changing as some of those other famous speeches – only even moreso because it speaks to the truth about who our God is
- So even though we only heard it read once, I’m glad that at the end of our (10:30) worship, the last song we will sing as we approach Christmas, the last song we’ll sing to prepare the way of the Lord and get ready for the Incarnation is the hymn called “Tell out my soul” – a hymn based on that great Song of Mary, the Magnificat
- Because Mary’s song is a new, great, earth-shattering ‘yes’ to God – to the Incarnation and the subsequent upheaval of the way that the world is – a ‘yes’ to those disenfranchised and disempowered, a ‘yes’ to the kingdom of God here on earth, a ‘yes’ to those in need – to all of us in need – in need of God’s help, in need of God’s presence here among us, in need of our Emmanuel, our God-To-Be-With-Us
- That doesn’t sound meek. And it doesn’t sound mild.
- It sounds bold. It sounds incredible. It sounds like Good News.