

**Mary, Mother of Our Lord**  
**August 15, 2010**  
**"Give Us the Courage to Enter the Song"**  
**Saint Luke 1:46-55**

*"He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly." St. Luke 1:52*

According to the liturgical calendar and our Evangelical Lutheran Worship – August 15 is designated as Mary, Mother of Our Lord. Yes, Lutherans hold Mary in high esteem. She is indeed the bearer of the Christ.

So, today we reflect on her song: The Magnificat.

The context for today is Advent/Christmas. Mary has just received the news of her pregnancy. Although she willingly accepts the angel Gabriel's announcement that she will give birth to Jesus, Mary's pregnancy was a surprise to her. It was a mixed message. Messiah was coming, but she is pregnant out of wed-lock. So, she goes to her cousin Elizabeth who having been barren for year is also suddenly pregnant.

What a couple they made: Mary and Elizabeth two ends of the spectrum – Elizabeth – old and in jeopardy and Mary young and in jeopardy. Both seemingly out of control of their situations. One can only imagine the kind of conversation they had with outbursts of fear and cries of joy. St. Luke shares Mary's cry.

Mary's Song – the Magnificat – "My Soul Magnifies the Lord" is the traditional canticle for Evening Prayer. The poetry of this song has captured the imagination of artists, musicians, and storytellers throughout the ages. Mary sings of reversals and the surprising upside down way of God's justice. Throughout history it has often become the song of the oppressed.

But what does it say to us today?

Does it tell us that the promise of God has yet to be fulfilled?

Is it a word of warning to those of us who are "mighty" and "wealthy" and "proud"?

Does Mary's song offer hope for a world now already redeemed, yet not fully restored?

Now I'm going to ask you to participate in this sermon: at certain points in the sermon I will say:

"Give us the courage to enter the song!"  
and you will repeat:

**"Give us the courage to enter the song."**

Let's try it: Give us the courage to enter the song...

**"Give us the courage to enter the song."**

It is a slight tale but true. A few months ago after giving devotions at Carpenter's Place one of the homeless guests lingered until everyone left. We meet in large gathering place filled with about 30 chairs.

He just quietly stayed behind while the others went off to the eating area for coffee and rolls.

When everyone had gone out of the room he came up and shook my hand. He looked me in the eye and said, "I have something for you." He pulled out a half of fist full of change. "It is all I have left but it is yours – take it. Your church needs it more than I do."

I received his gift without protest. I smiled, and thanked him. He left the room to go for coffee with a smile on his face and a spring in his step. Then I just stood there for a while reflecting on what had happened. A homeless stranger just gave me his last dimes for the ministry at Gloria Dei! Since everyone was gone, I got out my Kleenex and shed a few tears.

It is a minor incident and this stranger probably would not want me telling it. The reason I tell you is that it reflects what's happening in Mary's Song.

You see I bought into that system of the wealthy and the lowly that Mary tells us is being torn down. The system we all so easily fall into of 'them and us.' It is a way for us to put up barriers and insulate us from poverty and hunger.

We so easily divide our world between them and us – 'the have's' and the 'have nots.' At one time or another we profile people based on dress, tattoos, skin color, or ethnic origin. We keep our distance and maybe do nice devotions for a half-hour or send money.

But then there is a break through and the lowly speak and the barriers fall and our neat world is turned upside down.

On that morning at Carpenter's Place Mary's Song had come true. I, a wealthy and powerful person was humbled and emptied of my pride.

"Give us the courage to enter the song."

**Give us the courage to enter the song.**

We live in a time when Mary's cry needs to be sung from the roof tops.

- We live in a day when tribalism sparks massacres throughout the globe whether in Sudan [Darfur], India, Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- We live in a time of profiling strangers to keep them from entering our borders.
- We live in a time of building walls rather than bridges as cable news pundits use fear mongering and disinformation to incite hate.
- We live in a time when racism still mocks our Nation's great ideals.

Mary's powerful song that tells of God's action in the coming Messiah needs to be sung with full volume today.

There is no more powerful message than the Gospel that got Jesus killed. That message is that the walls separating us from God and each other have been demolished. God in Christ is turning the world upside down and re-ordering our lives.

In contrast to pundits who appeal to our lower nature, God's people, the church, are called to shape life for the better, to do what is right in life, even when what is right is also difficult.

"Give us the courage to enter the song."

**Give us the courage to enter the song.**

What does it mean to *enter the song*...to enter Mary's Magnificat?

Mary is a little zealot fomenting a spiritual revolution. The Jesus revolution affects how we view 'different' people.

Notice that Christ in his ministry reached beyond his borders, went out of his way to eat with the outsider, even forgave the thief dying with him on the cross.

The church is pretty homogeneous, yet, the Lord of the Church calls us to welcome the stranger – those who differ from us. Profound differences among God's people are not a reason for division, but the crucible for grace. God stirs us up and leads us to encounter our differences, not overlook them. In that crucible we not only learn tolerance, but divine love.

God did not wait for us to make up for our differences. No! God sent us Christ – born of Mary. While we were still sinners God came to us – reached across the chasm and made us one.

That powerful act is what Mary is singing about. We see it played out in the ministry, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ reached out, healed, and reordered the lives of so many people.

God lavishly bestows grace on us. All of us in the church need 'grace-healed eyes' to see others as created in God's image. I hope you heard what I just said, you and I need 'grace-healed eyes' in order to see others –especially those so different from us -- as created in God's image.

That simple act of grace from the homeless stranger helps me to reflect on the word of Mary's song:

*"He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."*

There is an ironic lesson that I learned at the homeless shelter that day: I thought I was rich only to find myself empty. But true to form, God then filled me up with the good things of his love.

God repeats this cycle for us until we get it!

"Give us the courage to enter the song."

**Give us the courage to enter the song.**

Amen