

“A Song for All Seasons”

Luke 1:46b-55 (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)

Mary’s voice was probably as tender as Vismaya’s.¹ And even though these verses were most likely a song—we have no reason to believe that it was typical for this fourteen year old girl to break into song when she got good news—or when she was happy or full of joy. She might have hummed to herself as she did chores or sung along to the songs at Temple. Or—heaven forbid—Mary, the one to whom we attribute this beautiful song—the Magnificat—the muse of composers and performers across the ages— might have been tone deaf.

But for the sake of tradition and of preserving the beauty of Christmastime that we imagine and create for ourselves—let’s say Mary had an angelic voice, that wasn’t perfect perhaps, but was strong and uninhibited. Not strong and uninhibited like the Salvation Army volunteers who sing *Jingle Bells* in an off key sort of shout (no offense to them—I couldn’t sing all day in the cold ringing the same bell over and over again). And not strong and uninhibited like the incessant holiday carols that follow you into every store and coffee shop this time of year.

¹ Vismaya is a young teenager in Calvary’s congregation who read the scripture text of Mary’s Song before the sermon.

Let’s say, for the sake of this third Sunday in Advent, that Mary’s voice was strong and uninhibited because she was singing *with joy* from her heart—and not just singing on autopilot from the recesses of her memory.

It is true that Hannah, another mother of long, long ago—had sung a similar song when she handed over her miraculously conceived son, Samuel, to the Temple to dedicate him to lifelong service to the Lord:

My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in God ... There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God ... the bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil ... the barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn ... He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap ...²

Mary probably knew this song. She probably knew of this woman who had a son, after years of longing, and then had to give him up to the Lord. But Mary had no way of knowing, as she rejoiced and recounted God’s

² Select verses from 1 Samuel 2:1-10, the “Song of Hannah.”

strength and mercy and love, that though she did not have to wait at all to have a son . . . that she, too, would have to give up that son. Hannah's song was sung from the heart— from the depth of her soul— having experienced God's faithfulness. Mary's song was sung from the heart too— yet it seems more likely that it sprung from the surface of her surprise, having yet to stir the deep recesses of her soul.

Songs are like that. They can come out of nowhere in a moment or they can arise from the longest held memories in our hearts. Christmas Carols do both, don't they? I mean, one moment we might find ourselves singing along spontaneously to a song on the radio or in a store— without really thinking about it (*sing: Angels We Have Heard on High* . . .), and in another moment we find ourselves in church, holding a flickering flame, singing, *Silent Night*—the whole of history reflecting back to us in both Light and Word— as we absorb God's love in the deepest of ways through the message and melody of song.

Songs are both from the elusive Spirit and from the human heart. They can express the whole spectrum of our emotions and even more, as English critic and novelist Aldous Huxley³

³ Aldous Huxley (26 July 1894 – 22 November 1963) was an English writer who spent the latter part of his life in the United States. Considered by many the

said, “*After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.*”

So, we must hear Mary's Song as not just amazing words of thanksgiving and proclamation—but as evoking a joy so powerful that it has soared throughout history— from generation to generation— a joy that literally comes to us at Christmas—Jesus Christ, *God with us*, Emmanuel. This is a song that comes to Mary in a moment of joy—but its words and tune have been sung for generations— all the way back to Hannah and beyond—and they will be sung for years to come. If **we** continue to sing them, that is.

Mary's Song illuminates, for the first time, the *identity* of Jesus—the identity, purpose, and character of our Savior. Mary seems to be describing both *God* and the *Son of God* simultaneously. Mary speaks of a faithful God—a Lord who has looked with favor on lowly servants, who has done great things, who has shown strength and scattered the proud, who has brought down the powerful, who has lifted up the lowly, who has filled the hungry, who has sent the rich away, who has helped his servant, who has kept his promises.

“spiritual father” of the *hippie movement*, he is best known for his novels and wide-ranging essays, short stories, poetry, travel writing, and film stories/scripts.

Like all of our Advent texts—the *Magnificat* reminds us that God’s world runs by different principles than our world. The tides turn—and the blessings of life now become available to *all* who follow— and are held back from those who don’t. The foreshadowing of the Beatitudes in Mary’s Song is intentional, I think. Mary is teaching us *how to praise the very God* that Jesus will come to teach us to follow. She is both the foreword to what will become an epic story, *and* one of the key players in the epic itself.

Where are we in this story?

If Mary is teaching us how to rejoice in our Savior, then we as people of faith are to learn how to carry on this Song of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love—this everlasting Song of Life and Light.

So— how are you doing? Are *you* carrying Mary’s Song in your heart and singing it with full faith and joy? Or are you just humming along with those around you ... half-heartedly proclaiming the joy of Christ to the world? Or, have you become so preoccupied with the busy-ness of the Season that you leave rejoicing to this one hour of worship—for four Sundays of the year? (Well, five if you count Christmas Eve.) Or are you singing a different song altogether? Meister Eckhart, a most insightful medieval theologian wrote:

“What good is it to me if the son of God was born to Mary 1400 years ago if Christ is not born again in my time and in my culture? We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to His Son if I do not also give birth to Him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: when the Son of God is begotten in us.”⁴

So—are you with child? Are you preparing to birth Christ anew in your life? Do you feel the kicks and stirrings in your soul of the living Spirit of God? Are you ready to birth the wide-eyed wonder of the Christ child?

What song is in your heart this season?

See this [YouTube video](#)

Synopsis:

Man walking with cookie—finds stethoscope. Holds stethoscope up to each object and hears the following songs:

Cookie: *Sugar, honey, honey*

Pole: *Lean on me*

Hood of Car: *If you start me up*

Fire Hydrant: *Who Let the dogs out?*

Hand/Walk Sign: *Stop in the name of love*

Rock: *I am a Rock...I am an island*

⁴ Quote found in *Advent Journal: The Fullness of Time* (Tuesday, December 9, 2008), an entry on “Don’t Eat Alone: Thoughts on Food, Faith, Family, & Friends,” a blog by Milton Brasher-Cunningham. (<http://donteatalone.blogspot.com/2008/12/advent-journal-fullness-of-time.html>)

Puppy: *Bad to the Bone*
Slurpee: *Ice Ice Baby*
Man's Heart: *Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah*

Final quote on video:

"The mystery is that Christ lives in you and he is your hope of sharing in Christ's glory."

I just love, that after hesitating and doubting what he might hear, the man hears perhaps the greatest Christian chorus of all times: the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's *Messiah*. Beautiful.

The literal meaning of *Hallelujah* is "praise" "God" in Hebrew.

You know the Magnificat is a song for *all* seasons—not just the Christmas season. Jesus' call for us to reverse the way the world works so that justice, peace, and mercy abound is a song we are to sing year round. Like the man, we may fear to look inside of ourselves to see what song is longing to burst forth from our souls ... from our hearts. But I think we, like him, will be happily surprised. Christ has already come and dwells within us even as we await him to come again in full glory.

And if you don't feel this way, hear this wisdom from this *New York Times* "bestseller children's story" by David Lucas, [The Robot and the Bluebird](#).

There once was a Robot with a broken heart. The others did their best to fix him, but it wasn't any good. So he was sent to sit on the scrap heap with all the other old machines.

He tried talking to them. He said, "My heart was broken, you know."

But they didn't answer.

So he lay down and looked up at the sky. He lay there through the long, dark nights and the empty days. He lay there rusting in the autumn rain. He lay there when the first snows of winter fell.

And there, one day, was a Bluebird, fighting against the freezing wind. She landed on his shoulder.

"What are you doing here, little bird?" he said.

"I'm flying south," she said weakly. "South, where the sun shines. But I'm so cold and tired I can go no further."

"I'm sure you don't want to stay here," said the Robot. "I'm rubbish."

But the Bluebird just shivered and said nothing. "There's a space where my heart used to be," the Robot said gently. "You can sleep there if you like."

So the Bluebird settled down to sleep on a nest the Robot made. And as the Robot looked out into the night, he was astonished to feel as if he had a warm, living, beating heart. And when the Bluebird fluttered, he felt as if his own heart were fluttering.

The next morning, the door to his heart opened and the Bluebird sang, sweet and bright in the icy air. "My old heart only ever said *ticktock*," said the Robot, "but now my

heart is *singing*.”

And the Bluebird flew a little way up into the air, and the Robot felt like his heart was *flying*. And, creaking, he got to his feet, and danced a creaking, clanking dance ... and the Robot carried the Bluebird in his heart—all the way South—and eventually made her home in his heart ... flying out to sing and coming home to nest.

And the bluebird lived in his heart *always*.⁵

Advent means “coming”—God comes to us and God is with us—“Emmanuel.” It is not our job to put God inside of us. God wants to nest inside of us and fill us with sweet song—we just have to make room in our heart—and open ourselves to the presence of Christ. And at times the song may try to escape us—but ultimately—it dwells in us forever.

Are you singing the song of Christ
will full heart and soul?

Do you have the faith and courage
and energy to keep singing Christ’s
message of justice, peace, hope, and
love? To keep serving God through
thick and thin? For this is a song for
all seasons, not just the Christmas
one.

Hallelujah Calvary! Let’s join the
chorus! May our hearts join with
Mary and every generation past and
every generation to come with strong

and uninhibited rejoicing: “*Our Soul
magnifies the Lord, and our Spirit
rejoices in God our Savior.*”

Amen.

⁵ Lucas, David. The Robot and the Bluebird. Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 2007.