

Like Mary the Prophet I Sing<sup>1</sup>  
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC  
December 19, 2021  
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Luke 1:39-55 Mary prepares the way to Love

**39** In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, **40** where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. **41** When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit **42** and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. **43** And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? **44** For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. **45** And blessed is she who believed that there would be[e] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

### Mary's Song of Praise

46 And Mary[f] said,  
"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
52  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
53  
he has filled the hungry with good things,

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this sermon is a riff on a line from the song "When The Mighty Wind Of God" by Curran Reichert. The line is "Like Miriam the Prophet I sing."

and sent the rich away empty.

54

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

55

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

## Sermon

Long ago, God saw an oppressed people and called upon an unlikely one to lead them.

To Moses, God said, “I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” **11** But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” **12** God said, “I will be with you...” (Exodus 3) And so it was, that the people were free.

Long ago, God sent Miriam along with her brothers Moses and Aaron, and as they led the people across the Red Sea:

The prophet Miriam...took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. **21** And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;

horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” (Exodus 15) And so it was, that the people crossed over.

Long ago, an unlikely woman gave birth to a son, long hoped for, and Hannah sang, too:

“My heart exults in the Lord;

my strength is exalted in my God.” (1 Samuel 2)

And that boy, Samuel, heard God calling. He responded: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3) And Samuel led the people.

Long ago there was a boy of lowly estate, a shepherd, who was anointed king, David.

Long ago, there was a boy named Jeremiah, an unlikely prophet, whom God asked to speak:

**6** Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” **7**  
But the Lord said to me,

“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you.

**8**

Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the Lord.”

(Jeremiah 1)

Long ago, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me!”

Long ago, a messenger of God came to one who was unlikely (but most prophets are unlikely). Long ago, a young woman was asked to do something extraordinary, to be Theotokos: God-bearer.<sup>2</sup> Like Hannah, she would be the mother of a holy child. She was told, like Jeremiah before her, not to be afraid. Like Moses, she heard good news: you are not alone. Like Jeremiah, her youth was not an obstacle for God’s calling. Like Samuel and Moses and Jeremiah she had questions, how can this be, and she asked and she came to understand that nothing is impossible with God. Like Samuel and Isaiah before her, she said YES: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” And like Hannah and Miriam before her, she sang.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....”

The Prophet Mary knew.

The prophet Mary knew this about God:

God touched her life. As a young woman of humble origins, Mary knew that God looks with favor upon the most unexpected people. God works amazing good in unexpected places. God is good, all the time.

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<sup>2</sup> Among others, Martin Luther used this term to describe Mary.

And Mary knew this about God:

God is the source of love, the giver of justice, the righter of wrongs.

Mary knew this about God, in the way that prophets of old have proclaimed God's steadfast love and righteousness, past, present and future:

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;... filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

Do you know those words, Mary's words, have literally been outlawed by certain oppressive regimes?<sup>3</sup>

Do you know, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian who was executed by the Nazis, called the Magnificat 'the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung'?"<sup>4</sup>

As Cheryl Lindsay puts it, "[Mary] delights in it. Because she believes in it. Her words of praise aren't empty statements, they are full of hope and trust that God is faithful, God will act, and God fulfills promises. The world will change because of God's plan, and she marvels that she gets to participate in it."<sup>5</sup>

Mary, who heard the message, Mary who said yes, Mary who preached a word, Mary who mothered God's son...Mary knew what God was doing in the Christ Child.

The Prophet Mary knew. Do we know?

The Prophet Mary was called to prepare the way for Love. How will we prepare the way for Love?

The Prophet Mary was called to bear God into the world for the salvation of the world. We may not be called to give birth to Jesus but we are called to bear God's love and justice into the world for the salvation of the world.

May we, just as a likely unlikely one did long ago, respond to God's call with a YES. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://kairoscenter.org/sermons-bible-studies-liturgies/politics-christmas-roman-empire/marys-magnificat-luke-146-55/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2018/12/20/marys-magnificat-bible-is-revolutionary-so-evangelicals-silence-it/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ucc.org/sermon-seeds/sermon-seeds-to-she-who-believed/>