

Pastor Ellen: At this time of year, I deeply appreciate the gift of the arts – the performing arts, the visual arts, drama, poetry, music, and song. I find the arts become a pathway to deeper understanding of the meaning of Christ’s presence in this world. The writer of Luke’s gospel also seemed to appreciate the arts. Luke is an excellent storyteller and he used the gift of poetry and song to capture the meaning of Christ entering this world in the person of Jesus. Today, we hear Mary, her response to God’s call, and her transformational song, one of the most beautiful songs in all of scripture. Today, God speaks to us through the gifts of poetry, song, and drama. So, we invite you to open your hearts and minds to receive that gift and be transformed.

St. John of the Cross once wrote:

If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy, and say,
“I need shelter for the night, please take me inside your heart, my
time is so close.” Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the sublime intimacy, the divine, the Christ, taking
birth forever, as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God, each of us.
Yes, there, under the dome of your being
does creation come into existence eternally,
through your womb, dear pilgrim – the sacred womb of your soul,
as God grasps our arms for help: for each of us is his beloved
servant, never far. If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the
street pregnant with Light and sing....

Narrator: In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

Commentator: Nazareth? God sent an angel to the podunk, insignificant, nothing of a town called Nazareth?

Narrator: Yes, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,

Angel: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

Narrator: But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Commentator: What kind of greeting is that Mary? Had you ever been called favored before? Mary. They are all called Mary aren't they? Mary the sister of Lazarus, Mary from Magdala, that other Mary, and Mary the mother of Jesus. So common a name. Almost as though when the writers couldn't remember a woman's name, they just automatically called her Mary. Like Jane Doe – it's just this side of forgettable Mary. So common, but yet now angelically deemed "favored one". What kind of perplexing greeting is this calling a common Mary "favored one." Did you look behind you to see if someone else named Mary was standing behind you? Mary; common and favored.

Narrator: The angel said to her,

Angel: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Commentator: **You** found favor with God? Or was it more that, with God, you are the favored one though not so much favored elsewhere. What did you do to become so favored? We aren't given a litany of all the things you did and personality traits you inhabited that made you favor-able. Perhaps it is the fact that you are **chosen** by God that makes you favored, **not** that your favorableness made you choose-able.

Angel: "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor

David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Commentator: Mary, you are a marginalized young Jewish girl living in the midst of an occupied land. But, you now hear these words “throne ...reign ... kingdom.” This is nothing less than cultural, political, religious, and spiritual insurrection for the common to be favored and the favored to be common.

Narrator: Mary said to the angel,

Mary: “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

Narrator: The angel said to her,

Angel: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Commentator: Elizabeth – barren yet pregnant. One of God’s favorite ways to prove that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts is to create out of nothing. God’s ways are not our ways...God seems to be continually challenging and even violating our polite family values. Elizabeth – barren and pregnant. Mary – common and favored. This is the invasive fruitfulness of God. Willing life where there is **no** life. Making a way where there is no way. Messing with all of us in the way that only true love and mercy can do.

Narrator: Then Mary said,

Mary: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Narrator: Then the angel departed from her.

Commentator: Mary, did we correctly hear what you just said? You said, “Yes,” to this proposition! You said, “Here I am.” ...just like Isaiah after the coal touched his mouth. Here I am you say. Send me. Did it burn you too, like it burned Isaiah’s own lips? Let it be with me according to your word you said. “Here I am, the Servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to

your word”. So beautiful. We try and domesticate you Mary like a trinket of docile, submissive womanhood, but you are so much bolder than that, even almost defiant. Some, like Moses and Jonah and Elisha try to hide from their calling. But, **you** said “Here I am. Sign me up.” Did you know what this word was going to mean for you?

Narrator: And Mary said,

Mary: (*Magnificat is sung as psalm chant by Mary*)

My soul proclaims the greatness | of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in | God my Savior,
for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your | lowly servant.
From this day all generations will | call me blessed;

Commentator: Is that what being blessed looks like? **We** go around and use that word so carelessly, quite differently. You know, like, “*You’re so blessed to have that new boat.*” Or, “*I am so blessed to have a good job.*” We tend to connect that word to our material belongings. So, Mary, how exactly are **you** using that word? Did you feel blessed as your unwed belly grew under the gaze of disapproving others? Did you feel blessed when you went into labor and gave birth amongst sheep and cows and straw? Mary, common and favored...Did you feel blessed when your heart dropped realizing you left your 12-year-old son in Jerusalem? At his arrest did you feel blessed seeing rope dig into the wrists of both God made flesh **and** the flesh of your flesh? Did you feel blessed when they lifted him up on a cross? No one else was his mother. Just you. Blessed are you among women. Common and favored. And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. God and Man. It is interesting; Martin Luther once proclaimed, “We hail Mary, Queen of Heaven because in her **we** come to know that ours is the God who comes nearest to us in our **brokenness.**”

(*Mary continues psalm chant*)

You, the Almighty, have done great | things for me,
and holy | is your name.
You have mercy on | those who fear you,
from generation to | generation.
You have shown strength | with your arm;
and scattered the proud in | their conceit,
casting down the mighty | from their thrones
and lifting | up the lowly.

You have filled the hungry | with good things,
and sent the rich | away empty.
You have come to the aid of your | servant Israel,
to remember the prom- | ise of mercy,
the promise made | to our forebears,
to Abraham and his chil- | dren forever.

Commentator: Wow! There's nothing like a song to warm the heart. But, **this** song is about upturning the whole social order! Mary, **you** are singing about turning the world upside down and rearranging the whole social order! That is rather scary.... Hmmmm..... So maybe that's what God is up to here. Transgressing the boundaries of human society. The podunk, insignificant town of Nazareth becomes a Jerusalem. The favored become common and the common become favored. The barren are pregnant. The hungry are filled. The rich become hungry. The proud are leveled and the downtrodden are lifted up, until it's all blurred past distinction. You are a prophet, Mary, and you are prophetically singing in the **new**, inverted reality of God's kingdom on earth, and this is the fight song of God's new reality. And, it's **your** song, people, all of you gathered here. A song of this God who entered so fully into this muck of human existence, and upturned **our** expectations and religiosity and self loathing and self satisfaction so much that God ushers in a whole **new** reality. And this reality is that **God** became one of us so that **we** might become children of God. Gregory of Nyssa

writes, “What was achieved in the body of Mary will happen in the soul of **everyone** who receives the Word.” It is all about saying **yes** to **God’s incarnate love** as it breaks into the most unexpected places and in the most surprising ways in each of our lives, saying **yes** so God is again borne into this world.

You, all of you, each and every one of you, are **blessed** and **full of grace**. So, may the God through whom **nothing** is impossible help each one of you to **become** Mary....carrying the gospel into this hurt-filled, broken and beautiful world. May it be with all of you according to God’s Word.