

*“Mary’s song encourages us to name, specifically, the injustices and inequalities of human life.”*

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### **A Song of Hope for the Repairing of the World, Luke 1:46-55**

*Luke 1:46-55*

*And Mary said, “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. 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.”*

Ben Wildflower is a Philadelphia printmaker. His prints, he says, are inspired by how different traditions uplift some pieces of scripture and ignore others. He has a powerful piece that is Our Lady of Guadalupe - a vision of the Virgin Mary speaking in a native Aztec language. In Wildflower’s icon, the Virgin crushes a snake underfoot and raises her fist in a symbol of solidarity, her jaw set. Around her are a few key words of her famous song: above and below it says, “Cast down the mighty; send the rich away,” and closer to her, “fill the hungry, lift the lowly.” The icon reminds us that when Mary sings, she may have been young, but she wasn’t naive. The Magnificat is the song of a mother preparing to bring her child into a world prepared to destroy him. The Magnificat will not settle for peace without justice. The Magnificat is a song of hope for the repairing and reordering of the entire universe.

Since becoming a parent myself, I have never been able to pull this song away from that moment: the moment the test is positive, the moment you first feel the stirrings of life inside you, the earth-shattering moment of a baby’s first cry. We cannot dislodge this story from the excitement: the feeling of new life, the plans you make, the future you imagine. We cannot dislodge the story from the dread: the fear of miscarriage, the concern for the mother’s health, the creeping feeling that this could be a mistake. Each tragic newspaper headline begging the question, “What kind of world am I bringing a child into?” But there is no walking back now, no reversing course. We are left with one option: hope.

Richard Swanson, professor of theology at Augustana College, notes that we can read Mary and her song in two ways. In the first way, the unfortunately more common way, Mary is a lowly young woman humbly submitting to a power stronger than her. Not too put too fine a point on it, but this reading assumes Mary is a “proper woman:” she accepts without question whatever any male authority demands of her. This is no challenge to the status quo, then or now. But, Swanson says, “Mary’s song establishes her as a resister, a woman energized by her faith and the faith of her grandmothers to insist on the fulfillment of God’s promises, to demand the justice promised by life in God’s creation.”

Mary’s song is the song of the mother in a refugee camp, unexpectedly expectant. Mary’s song is the song of infertile mothers, and women who choose not to bear children, and fathers who parent alone, who must reckon with the world’s definition of a mother. Mary’s song is the song of a black mother, carrying a child in a world that questions exactly how much this child’s life will matter. Mary’s song is the song of an expectant mother awaiting her COVID test results. Mary’s song is our song. The world is hell-bent on our destruction, but God is equally determined to restore us all, completely.

Mary’s song encourages us to name, specifically, the injustices and inequalities of human life. Mary’s song encourages us to demand that God act as God has in the past: to right-side-up the world; to take the side of the lowly and fill the hungry. Mary’s song encourages us to see that we are all bearing a sign of this work; we are all co-creators with God in the work of reordering the world and repairing its flaws. This is not a passive song. This song is a call to action. It is a call to all generations to be the fulfillment of her prophecy. It is a call to see in every child born not just Jesus, but the Christ - the messiah, the savior, the hope of the world. Not that every child born will be the incarnation of God’s self, but that every child born will be brought into God’s work to repair, reorder, renew.

And so, beloved, sing. Sing about the world as it is: sing about devastating pandemics and debilitating partisanship. Sing about all the -isms that divide us. Sing about your cancer, and your loss, and your pain. And then, beloved, labor and bear into this world a real hope that, by the grace of God, things will be different.

Amen.