

**Rev. Adrienne Meier**  
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**Saint Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

### **Revolutionary Hope**

#### **Luke 1:46b-55**

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 the rich he has sent 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.

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Mary is a revolutionary. The powerful words of her song speak uncomfortable truth to power. God casts the mighty down from their thrones, fills the hungry but sends the rich away empty; God keeps the promises made to Israel. Mary's song sounds warning shots to Empire, to tyrants and despots everywhere, to anyone who hoards power and continues the oppression of others: this will not stand. Mary song is a song of radical hope. As the storyteller and activist Zhailon Levingston writes, hope powerfully claims "Another world is possible and on its way."

Christian history loves to paint Mary as "meek and mild:" docile, young, even naive, believing only a vulnerable, ignorant, young woman would consent to this whole scenario. Pregnant out of wedlock, making plans at the supposed behest of a divine being no one else sees. What are the options, really? Either she is a child, or she is crazy. Or she is a revolutionary.

If we situate the birth of Jesus around 4 of the Common Era, Mary's own birth would have occurred just a few years after Herod the Great restored and rededicated the Temple. Her parents—history calls Mary's mother St. Anne—would have been children when Pompey entered the Holy of Holies and the Roman "statesman" Crassus plundered the Temple treasury. Jews did not yet celebrate Hanukkah, but the memory of the Temple's

desecration and the Maccabean revolt that holiday celebrates—these were fresh memories. Some Jewish boys dreamed of being Maccabees—faithful revolutionaries and regular challengers of Roman authority.

When I read Mary's story, I imagine her among our siblings in Christ in Chichipate: Mayan people—native people—who raise their children in the shadow of an empire bent on their exploitation and destruction. Empire see the people as useful as laborers, and covets their land, seizing it in order to plunder the valuable, precious metals buried there—not gold and diamonds, but nickel, used in almost every battery on earth. But when the people protest, the Empire tells them exactly how expendable they are. It is nothing to disappear someone who protests too much; to place an entire province under a state of siege when they demand safe drinking water and healthy lakes for fishing.

That's where Mary was raised. It is interesting that we're not really sure what Luke meant when he wrote that Elizabeth and Mary were cousins, living as far apart as they did. Rather than biological cousins, perhaps, they were sisters of the revolution—related by imaging together the possibility of another world, on its way.

This is the hope we need. This hope is honest. It looks at the world and says, nope, nope, nope. This is *not* the way God intends for things to be. It looks at vandalism at a mosque—the wreckage made of the place where children play—and says, this is not the way God intends for things to be. It sees a Swastika, and another and another - six, maybe more! Hate pollutes our air, it sullies our water. But hope says, No. Hate is not a language God speaks. Hope sees exhausted health care workers, maxed-out therapists' schedules, families estranged over the holidays because of vaccinations and mask regulations and omicron surges. This is not how God intends for things to be. No, hope says, but "another world is possible and on its way."

The days continue to shorten. Our march toward Christmas continues. We stand on the precipice of something—if not a revolution, a revelation. The question of the end of Advent isn't will God be revealed to us, but *how*. In the book *Rally: Communal prayers for lovers of Jesus and justice*, a compilation of essays and liturgies edited by Britney Winn Lee, Zhailon Levingston, who I mentioned earlier, takes on the topic of hope: saying, "another world is possible on its way." Levingston says that when he feels himself giving into fear and hopelessness, he "refocus[es] his light in the direction of the people, places, and things that aren't given the same platform as [his] fears." There, he says, "I will see people choosing life in spite of death, creating things anew, and making the hope I seek as real as the air I breathe."

This hope starts small. For Mary and Elizabeth, it begins as small as what they carry inside themselves: that another world is possible and on its way for and because of the children they carry. We all know people who have had the small seed of hope planted in them. Will it grow? Will we nurture it?

Beloved, we all carry with us something that, when use with intention, can be a medium of hope. A tool for imagining that another world is possible and on its way. I'm talking about...a cell phone. But each of us has the potential to nurture the seeds of hope in our neighbors, to fan a spark into a flame, to watch for the evening star that heralds the magnificent constellations to come. Take a second, Beloved, and text or type up a quick email - or you can make a note on your bulletin, too, to connect with someone later - and encourage someone who is imagining the possibilities of another world on its way. We are such a connected congregation—we know hope-filled people near and far, we know people who are doing the real work of justice, the real work of hope. So, text the ICU nurse, the COVID-test-site manager, the preschool teacher who shows up day after day even when they are afraid. Text the person for whom protesting and speaking truth to power is their true vocation. Send a note of hope to the person with cancer, with a kid in the hospital, with a family member at risk. Tell them one way in them you see that "another world is possible and on its way."

Hope comes when we turn away from the center, turn away from the seat of power, and turn toward those whose vocation is to challenge, to revolutionize, to change, to reveal what is already arriving. Levingston's liturgy ends by saying, "A new world is both here and arriving. We wait for it, usher it, greet it as a hopeful people."

Amen.