

Rev. Lisa Schrott
12-19-21
Luke 1:46-55
Close to Home: A Home for All

We are continuing to prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus Christ, which we celebrate on Christmas Eve – next Friday. Last week we heard the angel Gabriel give the news to Mary that she will bear a son and the child to be born will be holy and he will be called Son of God. The angel also told Mary that her relative Elizabeth, advanced in years, was pregnant, for nothing is impossible with God. We heard how Mary traveled to visit Elizabeth, and when they greeted, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leapt with joy, and Elizabeth exclaimed, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” We pick up the story here this morning, as Mary responds with a song of praise. Hear now these words from Luke chapter 1 verses 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.” **This is the Word of the Lord.**

Throughout Advent we have been exploring the theme of close to home using liturgy from *A Sanctified Art*¹, acknowledging that when something hits close to home, it affects us deeply. We journey through scriptures and rituals that are tender, heavy with emotion, and can leave us vulnerable. We carry the memories and truths of this season close to our hearts. Close to Home acknowledges the “already but not yet” tension of our faith: Emmanuel is with us, and yet, God’s promised day—our everlasting home—is not fully realized.

That tension of “the already and not yet” is on full display in our scripture this morning, in Mary’s song of praise. Following Elizabeth’s declaration that Mary is blessed because she has believed there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord, Mary responds not with a self-deprecating “aw shucks anyone can do this – I’m not so special,” nor with an

¹ Sanctifiedart.org

arrogant “I am so exceptional and unique and that is why God chose me.” Rather Mary responds with humility and praise – this was an act of God. Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

Mary proclaims that she will be called “blessed” not because of her actions, but because of God’s work. And this is a real “bless her heart” moment. Now those of you who have spent any time in the South or know people from the southern US or watched *Steel Magnolias*, know that when you hear “bless her heart” it is not usually a good thing. “Bless her heart she added whipped cream to the pie to make it home made.” No, in this case it is a recognition – an understanding by Mary that future generations will admire her because of what God has done. As Professor Stephen Cooper comments, “The central affirmations of the Magnificat are God’s capacity to act, God’s holiness, and God’s mercy. God’s history with Israel functions as a guarantee and a proof of the efficacy of the revelation in Christ.”²

Mary praises God for fulfilling the promises made to her ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants. She celebrates the greatness and faithfulness of God, God who fulfills covenants established so long ago. God who fulfills the words of the prophets like Isaiah, who spoke about the need to “...loose the bonds of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke, to share bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into houses.”³ The prophets called out the treatment of the poor and oppressed and promised there would come a servant of God who would reverse their treatment. There would come a servant who would lift the lowly, bringing down the proud.

The motif of reversal is found throughout the Gospel of Luke and Mary’s song of praise is the first time we hear it articulated. Luke’s gospel has an emphasis on salvation. And while this is often expressed in terms of individual salvation and the forgiveness of sins, there is also another layer to salvation in the Gospel of Luke. Salvation is the reversal of the status quo. As New Testament scholar O. Wesley Allen says, “Salvation is social, not simply spiritual. It is less something that happens to an individual and more the overturning of social structures that keep some downtrodden while others lead a life privilege and advantage... Luke’s salvific preference is for those who are socially, economically, ritually, and physically marginalized.”⁴

Jesus himself affirms this in his own introduction to his ministry in Luke 4. After his temptation in the wilderness, filled with the power of the Spirit, Jesus returns to Galilee. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes

² Stephen A. Cooper. *Luke 1: 39-45 (46-55) Exegetical Perspective*. Feasting on the Word. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (eds.) Westminster John Knox Press, 2009; p33.

³ Isaiah 58:6-9

⁴ O. Wesley Allen *Luke*. Theological Commentary of the Bible (ed. by Gail R. O’Day and David L. Petersen). Westminster John Knox Press, 2009; p332-334

of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Mary anticipates this fulfillment in her song of praise. She praises a God who is coming to make a home for all. To be a savior for all. To redeem all people. All people, not just the ones whom the religious leaders or those in power would choose to redeem. All people, not just the ones whom you or I think are worthy of redemption. For all people. The unlikable and annoying; the ones who irritate us the most because of their views on fill in the blank topic. Because God coming in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ means there is a home for all.

In the latest issue of the magazine *Christian Century*, the article entitled, “Tis the Season for Royal Christmas Movies” is subtitled “What exactly is it about the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that says “tiara romance”?”⁵ In this article, author Catherine Hervey explores the phenomenon of royal Christmas movies. She says, “Royal Christmas movies mostly adhere to a general set of principles. There’s an unassuming (White) American woman with as ordinary a life as possible, and there’s a (White) prince from a nonexistent country in Central Europe called Aldovia or Balemont or Belgravia or Castlebury, where everyone speaks with a British accent. (Presumably it would feel too odd and tasteless to set one of these films in England itself.) There’s a power-hungry aristocratic love rival or an upcoming loveless arranged marriage; there’s probably a ball on Christmas Eve. And wow, is it *Christmas*. I might not be exaggerating when I say that some of these movies have a Christmas tree in every frame. In *The Princess Switch*, there’s even a Christmas tree in the stables.”

Hervey muses about the popularity of these movies, saying, “The religiosity of the holiday is too ill-defined to account for the vast Christian audience appeal of these films. Maybe it’s the well-worn, overwhelming Whiteness of the European fairy tale that we find so comforting, though we are less comfortable acknowledging it. It is so easy to take no notice of the exclusivity of the proposition—or of my own latent willingness to accept every one of the structures and tropes of a royal Christmas movie as a chance to imagine, for a couple of hours, that I could be the one.” I could be the one. Hervey explores how that idea, so prominent in fairy tales, is about the one who gets chosen, while everyone else remains a peasant, toiling away in drudgery.

I was struck by Hervey’s article, because – confession time – I am one of the legions of people for whom the Hallmark Christmas movies (of which the royal tiara genre is a staple) form a backdrop for the season, playing in the background while I am doing other activities, the ubiquitous holiday Muzak soundtrack that accompanies life this time of the year. I even have a shirt to prove it – “my hallmark Christmas movie watching shirt.” And while I may cheer on (or shed a tear) when the heroine finds love, I am always left feeling bad for her best friend who supported her on the journey to true love and gets left behind with crumbs of the wedding cake.

Hervey says that growing up she embraced the “choose me and me alone” narrative, saying that her earnest desire was to be chosen. She says, “*Choose me*. Tell me I am more than I seem, you whom no one would dare contradict, you whose favor, once secured, must be acknowledged by everyone who ever made me feel like I wasn’t important.”

⁵ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/film/tis-season-royal-christmas-movies>

And then there is Mary, the mother of the holy one, the son of God. Mary was indeed the chosen one. And yet rather than lording over others that she was chosen (no pun intended), Mary lifts up her praises to God – this is God’s doing not her own. And that for me the heart of the narrative of Advent. The heart of the why we lit the candle of love of this week. Because out of God’s love, God chose to dwell with us – with all of us - in our very humanness. To give a home to all.

Hervey ends her article by saying, “In the incarnation, God offers me nothing but that which is offered to everyone. By taking comfort in a narrative so diametrically opposed to this one (the one where only I am chosen), we perhaps betray an ambivalence, a preference for the remote possibility of finding our way to the top of the world over a reality that upends the hierarchical foundations of the universe itself.”⁶

Mary sings a song praise, rejoicing that not only God looked upon her with favor, in her lowliness as a servant, but that God has looked upon all the others whose may be forgotten as well. Can we too sing Mary’s song, lighting the candle of love for those in our lives and those who are strangers to all find a home with God? Can we too sing that song, lighting a candle of love for all the fragments of our lives to find a home with God? The sides we don’t like to share with others, the sides we are afraid will seep out into the public and be subject to the judgement of others, the sides that don’t meet society’s expectations which too often become our own expectations. What would it look like if this Advent we prepare to meet Christ, in all our own vulnerability rather than in our successes? Could we dare do that?

Author and former hospital chaplain J. Dana Trent shares that “Advent is our invitation to strip away the facade and reveal what really matters. Christ is not concerned with performing a “recital” of apparent success. Rather, Jesus rips the drywall off society’s apathy, revealing brokenness in need of urgent tikkun olam (repair).”⁷

What a powerful metaphor – ripping off the drywall of society’s apathy – that is surely what Mary is singing praise for. And I believe it is a powerful metaphor for each one of us individually. Ripping off our own drywall and going to Christ in our brokenness for repair, for redemption, for healing, for grace. For Christ came to bring a home for all. May it be so.

Join me in prayer....

⁶ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/film/tis-season-royal-christmas-movies>

⁷ https://faithandleadership.com/showing-our-true-selves-advent?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Showing%20up%20as%20our%20true%20selves%20this%20Advent&utm_campaign=fl_newsletter