

A baptismal meditation by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Advent IV, December 23, 2012, dedicated to Rosemary, Summer and Sarah who take such great care of our church's babies, infants and toddlers, to the memory of Christopher Mondiek and Edward Waller, to Aubrey June Schmitt on her baptismal day, and always to the glory of God!

“Live the Song of Mary in Your Life”

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55

***(Part IV of V in the series “Christ is
Coming!”)***

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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The song of Mary is our first and oldest Advent hymn. It is also the most passionate, honest, direct, vehement and revolutionary Advent hymn ever written and ever sung. No hymnal carries Mary's words with revolutionary tunes, although there is still time to match them if someone is courageous enough to put powerful music to revolutionary words! I recommend starting with ***Les Miserables*** for musical measures of power in sound.

Here we find no gentle, sweet, dreamy Mary that we hear about in Christmas carols through the ages. Here there is no glowing, sugary, demure Mary that we see in paintings through the ages. This 14-year-old country girl doesn't look like much, but watch out when she starts singing! Just like Loretta Lynn, the coal

miner's daughter, she moves mountains with her song. All the tones, tunes and echoes of powerful and prophetic women in the Hebrew Scriptures – Deborah, Judith, Miriam, and Esther – come out prophetically in the song of Mary.

In Mary, we see and hear the passionate, powerful, proud, enthusiastic, uncompromising Mother of God. In her words of magnification of God and God's glory, we see exactly why God chose this woman to bear, birth, and raise-up and teach Jesus. We see why Mary is the right choice to be the mom of God's beloved son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. God chose Mary because she was strong, able, open, and she was in love with God. God knew she would be in love with His son, too.

The God of whom Mary sings is a revolutionary God! Her God (our God) will knock rulers off their thrones. God will humble the proud, raise up the humble. God will fill the hunger of the needy and makes the rich who created hunger conditions regret their greedy decisions.

Let's listen more closely to God's three revolutions in Mary's song. First, **God scatters the proud from the plans of their hearts.** This is the *moral revolution*. If you and I are to follow Christ, we have to put to death the pride of our hearts. To follow Christ is death of pride. When you open your soul to Him, he removes the last vestige of pride in your heart. He enables you to see yourself as you really are. He opens your heart to see yourself as God sees you.

The second revolution is that God casts down the mighty and exalts the humble. This is the *social revolution*. God puts an end to the differentiation between rich and poor. We are no longer known by our titles or degrees. We are not known by the letters attached on either side of our baptismal names. Our resume is simple. We are all children of the living God. There are not common men and women and socially exalted ones. We are all one in Christ.

The third revolution is an **economic revolution**. **God fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty**. This is not happy news to those who like things just like they are. But, for those who have never had a chance before, these words ring true. They sing to the heart and soul of justice in God's realm ("three revolutions" are drawn from William Barclay's *Commentary on Luke*, 1:45-55).

Moral, social and economic revolution. You see why God chooses Mary. In Mary, God's instrument of mercy and justice, God enters the manger at Bethlehem with the intent of changing the world, not merely to create a romantic family portrait. If we want to participate in Advent, in Christmas or in life as Christians, we cannot be like spectators in the theatre or in this sanctuary. We have to be participants in the drama.

So what part will we play? Will we be pious shepherds, gift-bearing kings, or disciples of the one born in the manger – perhaps all three, meaning pious, gift-bearing, and disciplined - choosing to follow his way and his will for our lives?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us in a sermon delivered December 17, 1933, in London, England, that the manger **and the cross** are the two pivot points in the Christ story. He writes:

There are only two places where the powerful and great in the world lose their courage, tremble in the depth of their souls, and become truly afraid. These are the manger and the cross of Jesus Christ. No man of violence dares to approach the manger; even King Herod did not risk that. For it is here that the thrones tumble, the mighty fall, and the high and mighty ones are put down, because God is with the lowly. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christmas Sermons, editor and translator, Edwin Robertson, Zondervan Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005, pp. 102).

Remember, there are only two who were present at the manger and the cross. They are Mary and Jesus. No one else. In these two, God comes to us with world changing purpose.

What if we took Mary's words to heart? What if we believed the words of this humble working man's wife? What if we saw God and responded to God as the one bringing moral, social and economic revolution to the world – turning the world upside down (to use the Apostle Paul's words)?

As we come to the eve of Jesus' birth into this world, how would this world look to you if he were King of Kings and Lord of Lords? What would it sound like if we sung this song with Mary as she sings her revolutionary lullaby to Jesus in the dirt and straw of the cave of Bethlehem rather than placing her high up in the crèche where little children can't even see her, let alone feel her powerful presence?

What would Mary sing today when she looks at our world?

Come to the manger with Mary when she hears that women, children and men on our city and our streets have no place to call home, no meal for Christmas, no family, no friends. You know she would be here singing songs of hope with our sisters and brothers at Bethlehem on Broad Street.

Stand with Mary when she hears that health care for millions of the poorest Ohioans is within reach, but politics may block the path of accepting the support that Medicaid will bring. *What would Mary sing about that?* Stand with Mary when little innocent ones are gunned down and the response from gun lobby leaders is to add more guards and more guns in our schools. What would Mary sing about that?

There is a reason why Christian men and women of faith down through the ages have chosen Mary as their prayer partner and their model of faith. She is fearless, God-filled, protective, and loving. She believes in and worships a God who defends the defenseless; loves the loveless; brings grace to the un-graced; and humbles the proud. She believes in and worships a God who lifts the fallen and knocks down the proud and powerful. She believes in and worships the God who is her son's Father.

In the 12th century, St. Bernard's prayer *Memorare* was first penned and offered to Mary, our singing mother of Jesus. Bernard knew that no one who came to Mary was left unprotected. He knew that in Mary's song was direct and purposeful word to God on behalf of those who have no words, feel no access and only feel pain. So, Bernard offered us this prayer for all time. Prayer works. But, this prayer offered to Mary, is a prayer for all people, for all time.

St. Bernard wrote:

Remember, O most Gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired by thy confidence I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the word incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and comfort me. Amen.

Let us **live** the Song of the Mother of God in our lives and thus participate in changing of the world. Amen.

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