

Sermon Draft

St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord, August 15, 2021

Text: Luke 1:39–55

In Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain, Mary is a revered figure. For many families that are broken, without fathers and mothers, Mary is their only source of comfort and hope. It's difficult to do mission work among these people without a high view of Mary as the mother of our Lord.

Such reverence for Mary, however, has led to beliefs about her that are unbiblical. So, we should be grateful that in our Church calendar, August 15 offers us an opportunity to reflect on what Scripture says about Mary, and, in particular, what Luke the evangelist says about her, especially in the song she sings in the presence of her cousin Elizabeth.

The Song of Mary, her Magnificat is like an aria in opera; the action almost stops so that we may savor the moment more deeply. The dramatic relocation of the presence of God from the temple to the womb of the Virgin Mary has taken place and the physical coming together of the mothers of the two final salvation figures is marked by a quiet hymn that sums up all that must be said about Mary on this, her feast as the mother of our Lord.

Mary could be called the first Christian, for she was the first human being to respond in faith to the announcement of the birth of the Messiah. When the angel Gabriel announces to her that she will conceive in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and bear the Christ Child, she responds in humble faith: ***“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”*** (Luke 1:38).

This announcement was the Good News we longed to hear. Gabriel told Mary an invasion was about to take place. Jesus Christ, the Creator, was about to break into his creation to make all things new. God’s holy Son was about to enter this cosmos in the womb of a humble virgin from Nazareth.

A shift was taking place in the locale of God’s holy presence. God would continue to be present with his people in the temple, in the Most Holy Place, and in the Word read and preached in the temple and synagogue, but now God was also going to be present in Mary’s womb. Mary is the new temple, not because of who she is, but because of what she bears in her womb Jesus, the Holy One of God. This news was too good to be true.

This shift in the locale of God's presence from the temple in Jerusalem to the body of Jesus is one of the great themes of Luke and the New Testament. And it is a great theme for us as we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and to his death and resurrection every Sunday at this table, our Most Holy Place. At this table, the pillar of cloud overshadows us as Jesus feeds us the holy food of his body broken, his blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins, food to sustain us on our earthly pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Upon hearing the news of Jesus' conception in her womb, Mary traveled into the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was ready to give birth to John the Baptist.

Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth shows us that Mary's womb is now the locale for God's presence. This remarkable fact is demonstrated by an uncanny parallel between Mary's journey into the hill country and the movement of the ark of the covenant to the same locale on its way to Jerusalem. Both the ark and Mary are greeted with shouts of joy; both are sources of joy for the households into which they enter. Both the ark and Mary stay in the hill country for three months.

As a temporary and portable vessel housing the presence of the true God, Mary fulfills the purpose of the ark of the covenant.

When Mary enters Elizabeth's house, John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb, a sign already now that Jesus the Creator is affecting the creation by his presence. John's leap foreshadows all the miracles of Jesus as all creation shudders at his presence.

Mary's presence is the dawn of the light in the darkness of sin and death, for the child in her womb is the Creator come to his creation to make all things new. The unborn child in Mary's womb will take upon himself all sickness and demon possession and sin and death as he journeys to Jerusalem in his final pilgrimage to the cross.

There in the darkness of Good Friday, all creation will shake and groan as he brings about the light of a new creation through his suffering and death. When he cries, "***It is finished,***" he proclaims that the new creation that began with his conception by the Holy Spirit and was announced by John when he leaped in Elizabeth's womb has now come to an end.

After a Sabbath rest in the tomb, Jesus rises on the third day, bringing all of creation with him, declaring for all to hear that in three days he has made all things new!

Elizabeth is so overcome by the presence of Mary and the child in her womb that she exclaims to Mary with great joy: ***“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”*** (Luke 1:42). At this moment, Elizabeth is the first to worship the Christ Child. Jesus in the womb of Mary is proclaimed by Elizabeth to be Christ in his Church.

As the first Christian, Mary is struck with a desire to sing a hymn of praise, for she believes that despite the lowliness of her condition these things will happen, ***“for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant”*** (v 48). God looks with favor on those in physical distress, and every act of his mercy to individuals like Mary is a foretaste of God’s restoration of Israel and the whole world through the Messiah. The Magnificat describes Mary’s status as servant of the Lord as she submits to the Lord’s Word. She sings a hymn for us who in Christ are all characterized by humility. God has chosen Mary to bear his Son precisely because of the lowliness of her condition!

Mary's hymn is about the "Great Reversal"—how Jesus is breaking what is whole and making whole what is broken. Mary describes a world different from the normal expectations of human beings, where things are reversed, where the meek and humble, the poor and oppressed are blessed, where the rich and powerful are "*sent away empty*" (v 53).

It's all about mercy, God's mercy for the generations of those who fear him. Mercy is the essence of Jesus' ministry as the merciful and compassionate Messiah and not as a God of vengeance. He does not punish his enemies for their sins against him and others, but he places himself under the Father's wrath, and he is punished as their substitute. This is why he shows mercy on the fallen creation by releasing it from its bondage on a bloody cross. Jesus sets the captives free by releasing the demon-possessed, healing the sick, forgiving sinners, and raising the dead.

Mary gives specifics on how this mercy expresses itself in the lives of the people of God and explains how God's principle of the "Great Reversal" works itself out.

In God's kingdom, everything is the opposite of what you would expect: the first are last and the last first, the humble exalted and the exalted humbled.

Every one of us, no matter what our station in life, no matter how rich or poor we might be, is part of this broken humanity that needs to be made whole by the Creator who first made us in his image. God not only calls us to repent of our brokenness but in his call to confess our sins, he forgives us and shows us what kind of God he is.

Jesus is the ultimate reversal of God as the Creator come to his creation as creature in order to die for that creation. Jesus, the humble child in the womb of this humble maidservant, shows God's hospitality to the world by coming to those who expect it least and bringing them salvation.

Mary as a woman embodied this mercy. Her Magnificat shows that God in Christ has broken what as whole and made whole what was broken. Her magnificent song reminds us that every song we now sing is a hymn that is inspired by the humble presence among us of the one who created us, the one who redeemed us, and the one who continually re-creates us by his Spirit through simple water and word, simple bread and wine.

Mary's song is our song because we magnify Christ, our Lord, who dwells in us and we in him. Christ's humility is ours *now*, and therefore his glory will be ours when we join him and all the saints in heaven. With Mary, we will ever sing:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. . . .

He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (vs
46–49).

Amen