

## SINGING ANYWAY

Sunday, December 20, 2009  
Micah 5: 2-5a, Luke 1:39-45, The Magnificat (Luke 46-52)

Hope Church  
Rev. Wendy Miller Olapade

*With thanks to Sylvia C. Guinn-Ammons, a Presbyterian pastor who was inspired during her 1981 experience in Matanzas, Cuba by the power of liberation theology—and the importance of the Magnificat in Third World theology.  
Her experience of the revolutionary cadence with which it was read engendered these questions.*

Mary, why are you singing? Child, you should be weeping. You're pregnant, betrothed to an honorable young man who knows this is not of his doing. Why aren't you sobbing on your knees, crying inconsolably?

Such a child yourself. Perhaps you sing because you are so young, but even children know when they have broken the *law*. You've seen how people treat those who break social mores: raised eyebrows, turned heads, chuckles whispered behind cupped hands. You will be shunned at best, stoned at worst. Have you noticed how the nice girls aren't quite so friendly anymore?

Poor one, have you any idea where all of this will lead you? Away from home for your confinement, next door to an inn of rowdy strangers, in a crude shelter for your first birthing.

Poor one, little do you know about that not so merry chase your boy child will lead you on as he goes about his father's business. Beginning at the temple in Jerusalem, it will end at Golgotha.

Perhaps it is best you do not know the future. Sing on, little innocent.

But child, have you any idea what the words mean? How radical your lyrics? What makes you think a woman-child would be noticed by the mighty Yahweh, let alone magnified! Be careful who hears you. This could be blasphemy!

Naive and childish boasting is one thing, little maid, but singing revolutionary lyrics in Roman territory is quite another. Your song moves from flirting with sacrilege into a whole new arena of politically incorrect and inflammatory statements. You have entered a land where few maidens dare to tread, the land of politics and economics.

You sing of God's strength scattering the proud. (Mary, the proud don't like to be scattered, haven't you heard).

You sing that God has put the mighty down from their thrones. (This might be good news to the powerless, but not to the mighty. How long do you think rulers will let you sing songs like this?)

The hungry have been filled with good things?, and the rich have been sent away empty?. (The rich don't like to be empty, Mary. They won't sing along!)

Perhaps you should stop singing, child. Should this song capture the imagination of the poor ones, they will turn the world upside down.

Mary, for your sake and the child's, keep a lower profile. Think a minute, is this the kind of mother you want to be--a troublemaker, setting this example? Will you rock your baby to sleep with lullabies like this and make him radical too? What if he remembers and teaches others, and it catches on, and on and on, so that two thousand years later the melody lingers and we must ask ourselves:

People of God's family, why are we singing today? What is there within the human heart that brings forth song when the news of this present world contradicts good tidings and cannot

begin to define the meaning of great joy? And yet the song goes on. Why will it not be silenced?

Perhaps it is the power of expectation, having something to dream in the darkness. Birth is like that. And this is a song of birth, of a miracle incapable of rational description, a song staccatoed by the kick of tiny feet, a song filled with hope for a child yet unseen.

Young girl, how desperately we need your song! We need your song in hospital rooms and state rooms, in our kitchens and in our churches, on our city streets and in our suburbs, your song, reminding us of God's timeless refrain:

God is vital, active in our lives... in today and tomorrow.

God is fresh as birth... with potential as promising as a babe.

God loves justice, blesses the merciful, and feeds the hungry. Even our hunger.

God comes to us.... unreasonable, unpredictable, unbelievable.

And God comes to us in the day and in the night, in the summer, spring and fall, in the midst of ordinary time and in the middle of tax season; God comes to the poor ones, and the rich ones, the hungry and well fed--making promises yet to be fulfilled.

God comes to us in Jesus, and Jesus gives God a face.

This is the song. God is with us, then and now and yet to be. And because God is with us, there is love and there is something to look forward to, something unseen, something called hope!

Friends, there are children diseased and dying who paint rainbows and sing without reason. Or is the reason hope?

There are old folks who clean house and plant gardens between bombings in the war zones of our world. They have no reason to sing. Or could it be hope?

There are hungry ones who repair to their larders and find only two loaves of bread remain, yet they sell one and buy white hyacinths to feed their souls. They sing with half filled stomachs. Is this hope?

The world looks at dying and war and poverty and homelessness and hunger, and cries, "There is no hope! There *is* no song!"

But Mary sings --- pointing to rainbows and gardens and hyacinths. And the song of Mary echoes beyond disease and bombs and empty stomachs.

So, little Mary, sing! You're expecting. And we too shall sing of the unborn dreams kicking within us waiting to be born. "It isn't yet ... it is yet to be."

For Mary sings of Jesus before his birth.

But there is no question in her mind, he will be born.

Mary sings of God's justice before righteousness reigns throughout the world,  
but there is no question it will come to be.

In spite of the fact that the rich are still rich, the poor are still poor, and the hungry are still starving, justice is sung as a melody complete, already fulfilled.

God has already shown strength, scattered the proud, put down the mighty, exalted the lowly, filled the hungry. This has happened and yet ... it hasn't happened yet.

This is and yet ... it is yet to be.

Can it be the promises of prophecy grow as real and as hidden as the fetus gestating toward the fullness of time: Not yet, but yet to be? Not yet realized, but real? Not yet delivered, but pregnant?

We, the Advent People, are waiting, seeing the real world, but singing anyway. Singing with the blind, whose eyes are yet to be opened, because we know God believes in vision.

We, the Advent People, are waiting, hearing the real world, but singing anyway on behalf of the deaf, whose ears are yet to be unstopped, because we know God will be heard.

We, the Advent People, are waiting, dancing a stumbling sort of gait along winter sidewalks and honking our way down busy streets, because we know someday the lame will leap into the circle with our Lord, and the whole world will join the dance.

And somehow, in this sad and muted world, we are called to speak, no, we are called to sing on behalf of those who are dumbfounded.

We are to sing because we believe God wills us to harmonize with the angels those old familiar tidings of great joy. So sing, Mary. Go ahead, sing. Lead us in your song. Amen.

Resources: Rev. Beth Maynard, sermon from 1999.