



## 16 August 2020 Reflections: Mary the Virgin

by The Revd Philip Cochrane

I have been thinking a lot about structural injustices – where the systems at play in society create winners and losers. In this time of COVID-19, we have witnessed the exceptionally wealthy become vastly wealthier during a pandemic. In addition, we have seen staggering images and stories of racism, prejudice and injustice.

Then, on Saturday (August 15), we celebrate Mary the Virgin. A lot of the readings for the day focus on what is achieved through the birth of Christ under the law, but there is one reading, which is fascinating to me when viewed through the lens of all we are seeing in the world right now. It is Mary's Song, often referred to as The Magnificat.

Please take time to read this meditatively. You might like to take a section at a time and meditate on it through the practice of lectio divina.

### **The Song of Mary**

*Luke 1.46–55*

***My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; \****

***for he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.***

***From this day all generations will call me blessed: \****

***the Almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.***

***He has mercy on those who fear him \*  
in every generation.***

***He has shown the strength of his arm, \*  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.***

***He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, \*  
and has lifted up the lowly.***

***He has filled the hungry with good things, \*  
and the rich he has sent away empty.***

***He has come to the help of his servant Israel, \*  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
the promise he made to our fathers, \*  
to Abraham and his children for ever.***

I think there is real merit in praying this prayer regularly as part of a daily pattern to structure our days, particularly now. Like any repeated habit it will shape you – you may well find that at times you are confronted and reoriented but that is good, God is reshaping you.

When we consider this stunning song from Mary's heart, how is it that this young girl from Nazareth is able to say yes to God's invitation when prophets, priests, and kings did not? It reminds me of 1 Corinthians 1:27:

***27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;***

Of course the hanging question, back then and now is that the rich do not seem to be sent away empty, the hungry are still just that....hungry. However, I think Mary is declaring something decisive happened with the conception in her womb – the Creator God becoming part of the created, in weakness as a baby in Mary, in order to redeem it. This is pointed to by the reference in her song to Israel and the covenant, the chosen people to bring healing and blessing to all the nations of the world.

So, in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the decisive action was done. As we remember the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Victory in Japan, we can only ponder the impact of the nuclear bomb and what we are to make of that. Jesus did not use violence to overthrow the violent and oppressive Roman Empire, though many of his followers wished he had.

There is a very honourable tradition of non-violence to achieve justice for the oppressed. Two people died this year who refused to adopt the strategies of coercive power to achieve civil rights. Congressman John Lewis, the last of the 'Big Six' Civil Rights Leaders in the USA and John Hume, a giant of a politician in his time, from Northern Ireland who was pivotal in ending 'the Troubles'. It is clear there is more to be done and it falls to us to come alongside the marginalised and take our stand with them – we will have to figure that out in this COVID-19 world. In our city of Vancouver, racism, socio-economic injustice and indigenous injustice is persistent – there is work to be done.

So, as Christians, we are **GATHERED** – in person, virtually, etc and hopefully **TRANSFORMED** to be more Christ-like and **SENT** – as a movement of **LOVE** to be agents of reconciliation in our homes, neighbourhoods, cultures and in the nations. [I also think there is a bias towards the marginalized and those oppressed by the systems I mentioned earlier.]

As we celebrate Mary and what God has done through her and is doing, perhaps we can use Mary's Song to examine ourselves and discover and root out ways we have aligned ourselves with false systems and idols? Perhaps our perspectives will change and a sense of wonder and hope rekindled in these trying times.

I finish with a poem by Nicola Slee, from *The Book of Mary*

**I uttered myself  
I claimed my voice  
I was not afraid to question**

**I held my ground  
I made my yes  
looking straight into the angel's eyes**  
*(any slave girl could have been beaten or raped for less)*

**There was no mastery here  
Nothing was taken from me  
Everything was given**

**Here i am:  
See me**

**Listen**