

3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: LUKE 1:46B-55

"My soul magnifies
the Lord, and my
spirit rejoices in God
my Saviour..."

REFLECT:

Time seems to be flying past (for me anyway!); already we're coming up to the 3rd Sunday of advent and Christmas will soon be here. At our house the decorations are now mostly all up, we spent last weekend hanging swags and twinkly lights and decorating our old faithful, wonky tree.

This week I've picked the 'alternative' reading offered by the lectionary: Luke's account of Mary's song. So far in advent we've heard from the prophets Isaiah and John the Baptist, so this week it feels right to hear a female prophetic voice. Luke's account tells of the joyful meeting between Mary and her older cousin Elizabeth, each one pregnant with her firstborn child and each filled

with the Holy Spirit as they greet one another, rejoicing. Then, from Mary, comes this song of delight and hope.

I'm not too sure from where, in the Bible, we ever got the idea that Mary was a quiet, meek, passive character. She shows remarkable agency and courage. The words she speaks here are subversive, challenging, revolutionary.

In true prophetic tradition Mary speaks of God intervening to right injustice. She speaks of the powerful brought low and the humble lifted up, the hungry filled and the rich sent away empty. I can imagine her influence on the boy she raised, who went on to preach sermons on this very theme: blessings on the poor and woe to the rich, the last coming first and the first last.

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called Mary's song: "the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung. It is not the gentle, sweet, dreamy Mary that we so often see portrayed in pictures, but the passionate, powerful, proud, enthusiastic Mary, who speaks here."

Mary's words raise questions, too. She seems to speak in the present tense, as though this reversal of fortunes has already come to pass.

Perhaps for her, in that moment, it has. She, a Jewish peasant girl, has been chosen, honored, lifted up. She has been blessed, and filled. Her words recognise the universal significance of the child she carries. God has intervened: in time and history, in flesh and blood. This is good news!

CONNECT:

Bob Dylan has been in the news this week... I've long thought that the words of his song, *the times, they are a' changin'* had a flavour of the Magnificat (*For the loser now / will be later to win / for the times they are a' changin'*). Can you think of other songs or hymns that seem to speak a prophetic word?

PRAY:

- For justice for the poor, hungry and marginalised.
- For courage like Mary's to speak up with words of power and truth.
- For hope.
- That we, too, will be "God-bearers."

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.

