

One of my favorite memories of a Christmas pageant was when my husband, Joey, and I were serving as field education students at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Durham, North Carolina, back in the mid-1990s. We were staging the children to reenact the nativity for the upcoming Sunday service. Joey asked the seemingly innocuous question, "Who wants to be Mary?" Every little girl raised her hand, so my husband, in his naivete, said, "Okay," and on Sunday, there stood several Marys, several God-bearers.

Our passage today comes from Luke's gospel, and it's known as Mary's Magnificat, this advent song titled Magnificat, so named in Latin thousands of years ago, because the first word of the song is magnify or glorify or enlarg. That resonates with me.

My 60-year-old eyes seem to need more magnifying or enlarging of late. In order to see clearly, I require an instrument of magnifying or enlarging. For Mary, her instrument to enlarge was the visit by the divine and the confirmation by her cousin Elizabeth. Mary is able to see clearly the way God works.

Mary's song describes the way God organized and structures and dreams for the world. It goes like this. God's mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear God. God has done a mighty deed with God's arm. God has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts. God has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. God has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. Mary sings of surprising reversals from what our world values, shifting everything we try to organize or secure so that it magnifies God's justice for all of God's people.

Ted Schroeder writes, William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, warned the missionaries in India never to read the Magnificat in public. Christians were already suspect in that country and they were cautioned about reading such verses that were inflammatory. The caste system was so ingrained in Hindu society that this gospel truth would certainly cause a social revolution, for the lowest caste would seize upon it as liberating them from servitude. This is still true today.

The message of the Magnificat is the message of Galatians. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Mary's Magnificat has been seen as dangerous by people in power. Her words have the potential to start a revolution, and yet, many Protestants have minimized the role of Mary and Mary's song.

Now, the Revised Common Lectionary includes the Magnificat as the alternative psalm for the third Sunday of Advent. But I still don't find many preachers focusing on Mary other than a silent figure in a nativity scene. Followers of Jesus, what if we took seriously this song of Mary?

Do we believe that her song is what God was doing in the present for Mary and what Jesus came to do forevermore, including now? Jesus comes to scatter the bluffing braggarts, knock



tyrants off their high horses, pull victims out of the mud, feeding the starving poor at a banquet, and leaving the callous rich out in the cold.

As Eugene Peterson translates, when Mary's son arrives, we see who God is. We have an opportunity to reflect and change this Christmas season. If God has magnified for us to see that we are the braggarts or tyrants or the callous rich, then we have an opportunity to empty ourselves as Jesus emptied himself to a life of humility and service. And for those who are victims needing to be pulled out of the mud, or if you're starving and long to be included at the banquet, you are included.

Christ has come. Christ is come. Christ will come again, and we all have an opportunity to be Mary, a God bearer in this world, but make sure we don't misrepresent Mary as a silent figure in a nativity scene. Mary's Magnificat magnifies God's work of justice in the world and bears witness to who God is in Jesus.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.