

“The Revolution According to Mary” Rev. Michele Ward
Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church Baltimore, MD
December 15, 2019 Advent III Luke 1:46b-55, James 5:7-10
What Can’t Wait Sermon Series

Background

People today have all sorts of names for me now: The Blessed Virgin, Star of the Sea, Queen of Heaven, The Virgin Mary, Cause of Our Joy, even Our Lady, but back then, when I sang my song for the first time, people just called me by my name, Myriam. That’s my actual name, by the way--when Luke wrote down my story, he shorted it to Maria, and it stuck.

When I sang my song, I was at my cousin Elizabeth’s house. An angel showed up in my bedroom and started telling me that I was going to have a baby with God somehow, and our baby would be the Messiah--the Anointed One who the prophets told my community would save the world. I could hardly believe that the angel was asking me, someone who had never been pregnant or raised a child, to take on such a responsibility. The angel also told me about another holy pregnancy--my cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, too, and no one thought this would ever happen because she was so old. Elizabeth was a lot further along than I was--six months pregnant, the angel said. And get this--the angel told me that nothing is impossible with God.

Although I was still afraid, I said yes. I trusted that somehow God was going to take care of me and my family.

Conflict

I agreed to have a baby with God and soon I was mysteriously pregnant. Now, as the baby was starting to grow, I got nervous. How was I going to explain this pregnancy to my parents and to my fiance, Joseph? I was engaged to this guy named Joseph, a carpenter from my hometown my parents had picked out for me to marry. He was a really good guy. We had never slept together so it would be pretty obvious the baby wasn’t his. I decided to go tell Joseph before he found out just by looking at me. He was shocked and told me he would decide what to do later. He needed time to think, which I understood. I had seen what happened to other women when they got pregnant without being married, and they were usually killed as criminals. I was afraid that Joseph or my parents would turn me in, which they had every right to do according to the law. I was praying that he would not do that, that he would change his mind and that our wedding could still happen.

Rising Action

I needed some time to think, too, so I went to visit my cousin Elizabeth. My cousin is much older than me. She is about 80 years old. Elizabeth and Zechariah, her husband, was so kind to me and made me feel welcome. Zechariah was also a priest. I figured the safest place for me to be at that moment was with a priest who could protect me, since the laws stating what should happen to me were written by priests in the first place. It took me about a week to travel from my hometown to Zechariah and Elizabeth's house, which gave me plenty of time to think. What will happen to me when I get there? Will Joseph come looking for me? Will they turn me in because I broke the law?

When I arrived at Elizabeth's house, I wasn't sure what to expect. It was strangely quiet. Usually, I could hear Zechariah loudly discussing something with Elizabeth, but instead everything was so still. I walked into their house, saying, "Elizabeth, it's me, your cousin, Maryam." Before I said anything else, Elizabeth knew--she knew God's promise for the coming Messiah would be fulfilled. Elizabeth told me she could feel her baby leaping for joy inside of her. The baby growing inside of her was John the Baptist--the prophet who would pave the way for my son, Jesus, and baptize him at the beginning of his ministry. Elizabeth told me that I was blessed because I believed what the angel told me.

Climax

Her response to me was so different than Joseph's response. He had been afraid, confused, and indecisive. He had told me he needed time to think. But Elizabeth--she believed me. She knew right away what it took to believe a miracle. She had one happening inside of her, too. She also knew what was at stake for me. As an unmarried, engaged teenager, marrying Joseph was one of the only ways my parents could make sure I had a future. Joseph was planning to call off the wedding quietly to avoid publicly shaming me and my family, but the end result would have been the same for me. It would have spared him the shame of marrying me, but it wouldn't have spared me the stigma of being an unwed mother or the potential for consequences. I felt such joy when Elizabeth told me I was blessed. Blessed! Blessed by this terrifying and wild responsibility, blessed by the news that the Messiah was growing inside of my body.

Resolution

I have heard that my song sounds dangerous to some people. I mean, I did sing about some radical events happening. My song tells of empires that crumble and aristocrats that kneel. My song tells of the disenfranchised stepping into what is theirs and the abandoned finding a place to belong. My song is radical. I sing it for Jesus and for John, for Elizabeth and for myself. And I sing it for people like you, too.

My song has become quite famous. People all over the world sing it every day during their prayers. My song is so radical that the governments of India, Guatemala, and Argentina have banned my song. The British banned my song from church during their occupation of India. In the 1980s, Guatemala's government banned my song because it was so subversive and stirring people to action. In Argentina, after the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo placed the words of my song on posters throughout the Buenos Aires plaza, the government banned any public display of my song. These mothers were demanding justice for their children just like I was demanding justice for my people. In all of these instances, governments were afraid of God's world because it threatened their power and their position.¹

My song declares what kind of world God shapes. My song is about the proud being scattered, the lowly being lifted up, the hungry being fed, the justice of God coming into its fullness. My song does not glorify the social system of oppression that my people are currently suffering under by the Romans. It does not talk about replacing their leaders with our own. The tools in my song are not weapons of destruction. The tools of my song are the people. The people rising up believing they have the power to do something about the oppression that they face. My song is about creating something entirely new. People say they want a revolution, but I don't know if they are willing to do what it takes. My song is about that, too.

What about you--are you willing to do what it takes? Are you bursting with joy as you rise up?

So I started to sing - "Revolution" by the Beatles.

¹ <https://enemylove.com/subversive-magnificat-mary-expected-messiah-to-be-like/>