

Someone asked me recently what the Lutherans thought of Mary. This person was raised Catholic and of course, one of the central prayers in that faith centers on Mary and asking her to intervene with grace. Mary is a really big deal in the Catholic faith, and not as often spoken about or revered in the Lutheran tradition. I personally do not agree with this quieting of Mary and her legacy because Mary is truly one of the most incredibly strong and faithful people we meet in the course of scriptures. And Martin Luther felt similarly, praising Mary for her great faith, a model for us all to note, who radically said “yes” to God when pretty much everything and everyone else in her time would not have thought her acceptance of God’s call to mother Jesus Christ was a good idea. I pray that today and each day we can embrace Mary and her great faith, and remember the strength it takes to truly follow the calling God gives to each of us.

We are hearing and celebrating and worshipping with the words of the Magnificat today because this is the feast day to celebrate Mary, the mother of our Lord. The Magnificat is Mary’s song of praise to God, and in Latin it means “magnifies”. This is a reference to the beginning of the song “My soul magnifies the Lord” in addition to magnifying God’s power and God’s goodness, grace, and faithfulness to all generations. It’s such a gift to remember these powerful words and the powerful faith of Mary, her yes to God, even outside the usual Advent season when we normally hear and use these words.

And maybe it seems odd or perhaps a little early (or late, if I missed Christmas in July), remembering this journey of Mary now, but her faith and anticipation and trust in God speak powerfully to our current moment. In this season of starting back up in school, and many of us returning to work in new and different ways, the changing nature of this season of pandemic can leave us in a state of anticipation, much like we remember in Advent. Much like Mary felt in her pregnancy journey, anticipating the coming of Christ both in a uniquely, powerfully, physical way in her body, as well as a spiritual way, being the bearer of the Good News, the Savior promised and hoped and prayed and longed for by generations of faithful people before her.

And yet in the midst of this anticipation, Mary chooses praise for God and to trust and uplift God's holiness and power and might in our world. Mary's Magnificat are the powerful words of praise and faithfulness and gratitude for God while Mary is pregnant with Jesus. Mary's faith is absolutely incredible, strong and steady amidst what would have been a very scary and perhaps intimidating prospect, quite literally birthing and mothering the Son of God, God made human, Jesus Christ, the long-foretold and hoped-for Messiah, come to us out of great love and for us to save us. Not to mention, Mary was likely a teenager, around age 14 or 15 when she said this radical and powerful yes to the God of her ancestors and of her strong and mighty faith.

So as is a very healthy and helpful thing to do when we feel overwhelmed, Mary seeks out a beloved relative, Elizabeth, and goes to stay with her for a while while she gets her bearings and some support for her very real and intense situation. Elizabeth too is in the midst of a season of great faith and praise to God. She believed she was unable to have children, being married for a long time and rather higher in age. But God appeared to her husband with a message and made the impossible possible - she became pregnant with her son, who would later be known as John the Baptist. So Elizabeth is very familiar with God's intervention and being pregnant in very unlikely circumstances, which brings Mary comfort too. Elizabeth and Mary care for each other in empowering companionship, the sort of joy that comes from connecting with a family member who truly gets what you're going through in a unique way. Mary sings her song of praise while she is staying with Elizabeth, a witness not only to her incredible situation, but also to Elizabeth's, her beloved kinswoman. God truly does great things, even with the most unlikely of people, and these actions of God truly change the course of the world for the better, for generations and generations.

So Mary is with Elizabeth, witnessing miraculous things, and praising the God who makes the impossible possible, who brings the lowly up high and indeed is steadfast in love for God's people for generations and

generations. This is the God who chose Mary, the most unlikely of people to be the one to bear his Son into the world. Mary was a lowly girl, someone who was of course capable but likely not the one who many of us would expect to be the bearer of such importance. Some things don't change in this regard, not expecting certain people of certain identities or backgrounds to be the ones who bring us good news and life and love, and yet they are the ones bringing these promises of God, making them real and human and accessible in our lives.

And regardless of whose faith we are inspired by or who we hear this message from, God is the one whose choices are always right, always steadfast in love, always full of truth and life. God is the one whose strength and mercy comfort and empower generations of people, who brings life to us all. No false god of any generation could ever touch the love and life and strength and power and mercy and grace and greatness of the God who created us, the God who chooses us, the God who empowers the lowly and brings the mighty down from their thrones, the God who gives his Son for us, the God who is surely here with us even now, even here, even in the darkest and hardest and most unexpected and unfathomable places. God fills us with good things, sends the rich away empty, and fills us with the promises of life and hope and indeed is worthy of our deep and enduring faith and praise.

Let's take our cues from Mary, the girl who by her "yes", along with God's mercy and power and love, became the mother of God. Let's be empowered by the powerful words of Mary, who took on a great and intimidating calling, but still her powerful faith endures and her song of praise lays the foundation for thousands of generations of faithful people. These words from a lowly girl, her words, have the power to change the world, and have indeed led us all to a more powerful and just and faithful life. Let's strengthen our faith to be like Mary, knowing the things in our life that may seem impossible will also lead us to new and empowered life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Lean on God, trust in God's mercy, and truly this generation, along with all others, shall be blessed. Thanks be to God, Amen.