

No Telling What Will Happen Next

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Text Luke 1:46-55

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Mary's Song of Praise

46 And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

50 His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

56 And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

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If you are like me, you are starting to realize that Christmas will be here before we know it. Four weeks just doesn't seem like enough time to prepare, does it? This Sunday we will consider Mary, who had nine months to get ready—not that it made such an interruption to her life plans any easier! After an encouraging visit with her cousin Elizabeth, Mary composes a song full of beauty, hope, and challenge. Her words remind of Psalm 22 because she speaks of the hungry being filled and of future generations celebrating the blessing that comes from God through her womb. But there is also a stark challenge to the corrupt powers of this world, and those who want to keep the status quo at the expense of the poor, the powerless, and the left out. In Advent we remember that Jesus came into the world to shake things up and set things right. What do you sense God is shaking up in you? What do you yearn for him to set right? Where does his justice need to be most clearly seen in the East Bay in 2011? We are invited to celebrate with Mary, and we are challenged to submit to the interruptions God brings about. If we will then we too can be part of God's life transforming work in the world.

To the guy in jail, playing cards: "The charges have been dropped. You can go." "In a sec, let me finish this hand." To the patient in need of an organ donation: "A heart has been found for you." "Can we schedule the surgery later. It's Shark week on the Discovery Channel."

When the Deliverer comes, he will interrupt our lives. How will we respond to the interruption?

Mary shows us one of two ways to respond to God's interruption of our lives. If we work from the proposition that my life is mine, then we do a risk assessment and try to determine return on investment. What will this cost me? Will it be worth it? But Mary understands her life as belonging to God, so when the angel describes God's plan to make her the mother of the Messiah, Mary simply says, "Let it be with me according to your word."

Through Mary, the Deliverer will come into the world. The question is, how will receive him? As the One we have waited for in quiet desperation to whom we will gladly submit, or as an inconvenient interruption.

Jesus did not just come into the world through Mary to deliver the likes of us from our sin. By his Spirit he intends to work in world through us to bring about his kingdom, in which the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly are lifted up; the hungry are filled and the rich sent away empty.

When this deliverer comes, there are no more "little people" too insignificant to matter. There are no needs beneath God's concern or consideration. For we who live in wealth in North America, Mary's psalm should give us pause: Where are we in this Psalm?

This prophetic, truth-telling word does not just transform individual lives, but families, neighborhoods, and nations. God has helped Israel not just for Israel's sake, but for the sake of all humanity. And not just in present tense, but to future generations. Mary looks

back to the promises kept to Abraham, and looks forward to generation after generation calling her blessed and being the recipients of the blessing.

When we understand what is promised here, embrace the interruption not because of what the Deliverer will do for us, but through us, to the seventh generation.

On the one hand [Mary] was just a girl, an immature and frightened girl who had the good sense to believe what an angel told her in what seemed like a dream. On the other hand, she was the mother of the Son of God, with faith enough to move mountains, to sing about the victories of her son as if he were already at the right hand of his father instead of a dollop of cells in her womb.... When we allow God to be born in us, there is no telling, no telling at all, what will come out.

--Barbara Brown Taylor, Mixed Blessings

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