



Giving Birth to a Song

December 19, 2021: Holy Eucharist Rite II for the Seventh Sunday of Advent

The Reverend Tammy Hobbs Miracky

Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA

Good morning, Christ Church. Despite what it says in your bulletin, I am not the Rev. Nick Morris-Kliment. I am the Rev. Tammy Hobbs Miracky, and it is a pleasure to be here with you this morning, even if under unexpected circumstances. Most Sundays would find me on the altar or in the pulpit at All Saints Parish in Brookline, where I serve as the Minister for Children, Youth, and Families. This week, though, I am pleased to be here with all of you.

And though I wasn't originally scheduled to preach this week, I am happy to have a chance to work with today's texts – to my mind, today offers some of the most beautiful and surprising material in the gospels.

Last week, the seminarian serving at All Saints led a class with our middle school students using these texts:

- The angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary – that God wanted Mary to bear God's son – a baby who would be “the Son of the Most High,” a baby who would grow into a man whose “kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:28-33). So they read about the annunciation.
- And they read about Mary's surprisingly courageous response – in effect, a teenager willing to say, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me as God wills.” (Luke 1:38). A teenager agreeing to become pregnant and carry a child outside of her wedding contract, in a time when such a choice could bring the harshest of penalties, even death.
- They walked through Mary's visit with her cousin Elizabeth, as the soon-to-be-born John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb, recognizing the divinity that Mary carried within her.
- And they talked about the song Mary sang in response to Elizabeth's greeting, the Magnificat that we recited together this morning.

So, this group of young teens walked through these beautiful texts. And they noticed some things. They noticed:

- That Mary was hardly older than they are. And they talked about how impossible it would have been for her to make the choice to become the mother of Jesus. Impossible. And yet she did. They thought that was courageous...and really scary.
- They noticed – something I've never given much thought to before – it had sort of become wallpaper for me, as they say, something you overlook because it has become so familiar – they noticed that when Mary was finished singing her song, we're told that she remained with Elizabeth for three months. That seemed a very long visit to your cousin in their minds. Then one of them counted up the months and concluded that maybe Mary stayed with Elizabeth those three months until Elizabeth gave birth to John. The math works out.
- Then they noticed something that seemed very strange to them – something that didn't fit with their understanding of typical human behavior, or with how a narrative typically develops. Isn't it strange, they asked, that upon hearing Elizabeth's greeting, Mary just broke out in song. She just starts singing. And goes on for quite some time.



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Pretty astute, these kids. There's another thing these middle school students might not have had the breadth of scriptural knowledge to notice. They didn't know to notice how very rare this interaction is in the gospels: a prolonged, intimate view into a relationship between women. It doesn't happen that often in the gospels.

- We see Mary and Martha of Bethany, the two sisters who offer such hospitality to Jesus.
- We see a group of women who accompany Jesus in the crowd as he makes his way toward the cross
- We see a group of women who return to tend to his body after his death.

But it's a fairly limited window into the character of these women, their relationships with each other, how central they must have been in Jesus' life and ministry.

So let's linger for a moment, as these middle schoolers did, on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth. I am influenced in my response to this text by Jan Richardson, a Methodist minister and an author and artist.

So, Mary and Elizabeth.

We have two women, both of whom have received an annunciation of a miraculous pregnancy. Mary is young, as-yet-unmarried, and faces at the very least becoming an outcast and at the worst, she faces great danger because of her pregnancy. Elizabeth may have been the first person who knew of Mary's news. She could have responded in any number of ways – she could have shamed Mary, or shunned her; she could have been fearful on Mary's behalf. Instead, she recognized the hand of God at work and in the words of Richardson, “her heart open[ed] wide to her cousin, completely empty of judgment.”¹ How unexpected is that? Elizabeth is confronted by her teenage niece, unmarried and pregnant, 2000 years ago in the Palestinian countryside, and her reaction...is to bless Mary: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42).

And in response to the gift of a blessing, as the middle school students noted, Mary broke out in song. With Elizabeth's affirmation, Mary found her voice, expressing the words of the tradition she carried within her.

Mary's is not an easy song: “God has cast down the mighty from their thrones” and “lifted up the lowly.” God “has scattered the proud in their conceit.” God has “filled the hungry with good things” and “sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:46-55). I don't know about you, but I often wonder if I might find myself on the wrong side of that balance. No, this is not an easy song.

¹ Jan Richardson, *Illuminated 2021: An Online Journey into the Heart of Christmas*, Week 3: Carrying the Song, Reflection 1.



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But Mary knows that God, the source of this life within her, is a God of reversals...a God of restoration. A God who desires healing and wholeness.

And in Mary's case, this most unexpected song, this response that calls the attention of young people today...I wonder if her song would have even been possible without *Elizabeth's* reversal of expectations. Without her warmth, without the safety and security she offered, without her blessing?

So, as we, along with Mary and Elizabeth, wait for the coming of that baby, perhaps we can ask ourselves: Is there someone in our lives who is giving voice to a song? Someone to whom we can offer safety or blessing? What song is God calling us to "make the space" for, even when it may be challenging? What song is rising up in us?² **Amen.**

² Ibid.