

**Advent 4c
Luke 1:39-55
December 20, 2009**

Have you ever had a song get stuck in your head, and then you can't get it out? It just goes around and around and around in your brain like a hamster in a wheel, over and over and over again. And it's usually something really catchy, but it's also usually something kind of icky, and sticky ... the kind of song you really don't WANT in your head, but there it is.

In fact, I bet I can stick a song in your head right now. How about a nice, irritating Christmas song to go with the season? "Grandma got run over by a reindeer ..." or the Chipmunks, maybe? "Christmas, Christmas time is near, time for toys and time for cheer ..." No, no, no! Forget I even started with those songs. There is another song that you ought to have locked and loaded in your brain by now.

It is Mary's song, her magnificent *Magnificat*. This is the song that should be lodged between your ears. After all, we've said it, sung it and heard it three times in the last two Sundays. We said it last week as we welcomed little Iselin Scott. We sung it just now between the Old and New Testament readings. And you heard it one more time as part of the gospel reading. And so I wonder: is Mary's song stuck in your head like glue, going over and over and over again until you just can't get it out?

It's not stuck there? I wonder why. Maybe if it had a catchier tune. "My soul proclaims the greatness of God's goodness/he has looked with favor on little me..." or "He has filled the hungry ... with good things, with lots of things/he has sent the rich away ... empty, so empty ..."

Well, maybe it's not the tune. Maybe it's just we've heard the Magnificat before, or read it before or sung it before and it's just so familiar to us now that we don't even notice it.

Maybe if the Magnificat could be sung like a fight song. Maybe if it had the Spartan marching band playing the tune, and people all clapped along and punched the air with their fists. Maybe then it would stick in our heads. Maybe then we could hear the truly radical message of Mary's song. Maybe then we could catch a vision of the great reversal she proclaims, the great reversal that God has always promised, the great reversal that is inaugurated with the birth of her son, the very life of God coming into the world – a God who favors the poor, the lost, the marginalized, the weak and the powerless.

It happens in an instant it seems, as Mary arrives at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, her relatives. Imagine these two women, one a young and vibrant teen, the other a middle-aged matriarch, reaching out and embracing. And suddenly, Elizabeth's baby, who will become John the Baptist, leaps in the womb for joy. And Elizabeth holds her belly and shouts for joy. And Mary realizes that God's promises are coming true at last, and she sings for joy.

She sings because the great reversal is already happening. "He HAS scattered the proud in their conceit," Mary sings. "He HAS cast down the mighty from their thrones. He HAS lifted up the lowly. He HAS filled the hungry with good things. He HAS sent the rich away empty." The great reversal is at hand. God is making good on God's promises, right then and there, through the baby growing in Mary's belly. Jesus is going to be born, grow up and then take care of business, God's business. The business of bringing in the crazy-headed, upside-down Kingdom of God.

And what a Kingdom it is. It doesn't follow our rules. It doesn't work the way our world works. The gestating Kingdom of God runs on a different set of values. Values like ... Big guys, out. Little guys in. Fat cats out. Hungry ones, in. Lofty, out. Lowly, in. Grownups, out. Children, in. Somebodies, out. Nobodies, in. Strong, out. Weak, in. Rich, out. Poor, in. Powerful, out. Powerless, in.

It's the same Kingdom song the prophets have always sung, holding out that vision of the world the way God believes it could be. When Mary sings her *Magnificat*, she sings along with Miriam, Moses's sister, who stood on the banks of the Red Sea with all the women who had been delivered out of slavery under Pharaoh and sang, "Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously. The horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea."

When Mary sings her *Magnificat*, she sings along with Hannah, who delivered Samuel after years of childlessness and sang, "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor."

When Mary sings her *Magnificat*, she sings in a long tradition of Israel's prophets and psalmists, composers and lyricists who insisted that God would deliver God's people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and that when God delivered the people, it would be the smallest, the weakest, and the most down-trodden who would be raised to heights of glory.

Except that when Mary sings her *Magnificat*, she sings at the hinge of history. The child in her womb is no less than God-with-us, Immanuel, the one who will bring the Kingdom to life, the one who will conquer all the forces of darkness, the one born to heal the world. Mary sings with the power and the knowledge and the joy that the child she will bear will grow into the man who will change everything. When Mary sings it's because God's promises are about to come true at last.

And yet, you might say to me at this point, "But Kit, where *is* the kingdom? Children still go hungry. There are still wars and famines. Little people are still oppressed. Has anything changed, really, since the prophets promised, since Mary sang her song? Maybe we don't want this old song stuck in our head because it's just going to make us sad. So much is still so wrong with the world we live in."

And I would agree with you. Yes, the world is still sadly lost, and dark, and dangerous for too many of the most vulnerable human beings in it. But what I think is different, what I think has changed since the advent of our Lord, since his birth in poverty, since his proclamation of God's upside-down kingdom, and since his execution on an imperial cross is this ... the Kingdom has come.

It came the day God rolled away that stone and Jesus walked out of that tomb. It came the day the Holy Spirit descended upon us and made US – each of us, all of us – the living Body of Christ. *We* are now the kingdom-bringers, the table-turners, the great reversers. It is our calling, our joy, and our delight to sing and work and struggle and pray and share with Mary in her sacred work of bringing Christ to birth in this broken world.

When we sing Magnificat, when it gets stuck in our brains like super glue and laid on our lips like ChapStick, we sing along with Miriam and Hannah and all the prophets. When we sing Magnificat, we sing along with Mary, the mother of our Lord.

And when we let the song sing US, it begins to take on its own life. It begins to become reality. So when we sing Magnificat, we sing along with others. We sing with those who have made this song their own. We sing along with every person, with every woman especially, who has ever dreamed a better world for her children and started to sing it into being.

We sing along with the women of South Africa, who in 1956, when the apartheid system began to crack down upon their families, sang this Freedom Song. “Now that you have touched the women, you have struck a rock. You have dislodged a boulder. You will be crushed.” It took forty years, but they sang the South Africa they knew God had intended.

We sing with Fanny Lou Hamer, the great civil rights leader, who rallied the resistance with potent spirituals. “Go tell it on the mountain,” Fanny Lou Hamer sang, “over the hills and everywhere. Go tell it on the mountain to LET MY PEOPLE GO.” It took marches, and lunch-counter sit-ins, and facing down intimidation, violence, and even the threat of death, but she sang the America she knew God had intended.

We sing with Mercedes Sosa, the Argentine activist and chanteuse, who was arrested on stage in 1976 by the governing junta, along with everyone at the concert. She sang, “I was killed a thousand times, I disappeared a thousand times, and I have risen from the dead. Here I am, out of the ruins of the dictatorship left behind. We are still singing.” Long after the juntas and all their terror had vanished, Sosa was still singing about love and peace and the amazing way God answers every prayer.

Like all those women, from Miriam, to Mary, to Mercedes, we too must take our part in singing, in bringing God’s great upside-down kingdom to life. Otherwise Jesus will just remain a baby in the manger, a figure in the nativity scene, the beloved object of a few exquisite carols.

But we can choose to sing. To sing our own Magnificats like Mary, and like Mary, to also be Christ-bearers, to also be God-bearers. We too can bring Christ into life. We can bring Christ into OUR lives. Most of all, we can bring Christ into the lives of those for whom that Magnificat was meant ... the hungry, the lowly, and the lost.