

My Soul magnifies the Lord

Responsive reading: Luke 1. 46b-55

Epistle: Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1. 39-45

Old Testament: Micha 5. 2-5 (Courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

5:2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

5:3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

5:4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;

5:5 and he shall be the one of peace.

I know - the title of the sermon has more to do with the Gospel than the scripture I just read. But the Micah text gives one the understanding of what is to come in Mary and Christ. The smallest of all the clans of Judah, seemingly insignificant, as small as a child, and seemingly valueless as a woman, will do amazing things, return the people to a unified Israel, feed the flock, be great to the ends of the earth, bring peace . . .

These words written in ancient scriptures of the Jewish faith can take your breath away with the meaning they have for Christians. These texts foretold the birth of Jesus in our tradition. We hear these words each Advent, yet sometimes we don't always feel the awe of what mystery and mystical power it truly has. The consistency of the faith - the vision of God and how it was shared over generations . . . brings us each year to the majesty of Christ's birth.

The Gospel reflects this "she who is in labor" from the Old Testament reading. It is "The Magnificat" - the very famous beautiful text attributed to Mary, the mother of Jesus. But this year her words haunt me, "my soul magnifies the Lord." She sees herself as lowly - and women most certainly were lowly. And yet this lowly woman was given the overwhelming honor of being the vessel of God - the first to know of God's great plans for the world. It must have been an amazing experience for her.

I know that during those moments when I feel that God has blessed me with a special experience, a feeling, a thought, a vision, it seems so overwhelming to me and I feel so grateful. And she had the awesome experience to host God. Her heart must have felt so full of emotions. Emotions that can only partially be defined. A Soul exploding, filling, overflowing, overwhelmed and almost unbearable . . . like being in love and then 20 times that! That is what magnifies in her soul.

Her hopes for her child, for herself, her husband, her family and friends, her clan, her race, her people, all people, all this in one heart, overflowing. Amazing

Then I wondered about my heart. What magnifies in my heart? Sometimes it seems too ugly to share . . . the shame, the pain, the worry, the insecurity, the rage, the judgments . . .

Then sometimes I am amazed at the love, the joy, the hope, the awe, the compassion, the determination . . .

It seems there is place in the heart for all those things. But there has to be a balance. The hope always has to be greater than the despair - joy has to overpower the anger - or something is seriously wrong, not with you, but the situation is wrong and needs to be dealt with, and God wants more than anything for things to be returned to balance, if not complete joy.

I heard a story from a guest preacher at seminary that stays with me. He had a young woman go home from church and commit suicide. And he was faced with the thought, "Did nothing in his service, his prayers, his sermon, the hymns – did nothing offer this woman hope? Where was the good news for her?" How had the hope been lost?

Her soul was not magnifying the Lord, it was magnifying hopelessness. And this season, our faith, begs for us to feel God inside of us, so that we will never give up hope. As a baby cries out for food, warmth and intimacy, God wants to be a part of our soul as well. God needs our hearts as we need God's hope.

In Germany there is a lovely song that has not made it over into our translations as far as I know – but I've been wrong about these things before. It is called "Maria durch ein Dornwald ging". And it tells of Maria going through a thorny woods which hadn't carried any leaves in 7 years, and the haunting refrain is, "Kyrie eleison" "Lord have mercy".

1. Maria durch ein Dornwald ging, Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison, Maria durch ein Dornwald ging, der hat in sieb'n Jahr'n kein Laub getragen. Jesus und Maria.	Ein kleines Kindlein ohne Schmerzen, das trug Maria unter ihrem Herzen. Jesus und Maria.	Kyrie eleison, als das Kindlein durch den Wald getragen, da hab'n die Dornen Rosen getragen. Jesus und Maria.
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2. Was trug Maria unter ihrem Herzen?	3. Da hab'n die Dornen Rosen getragen,
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The second verse asks what did Mary carry under her heart? A small child is what she carried, Jesus and Mary. I was so moved by that description, with the image of the beloved child being carried under the heart so close – almost as if the heart and the child are one. And the song ends with, as she and Jesus walked through these thorns, roses started blooming around them.

Christ is not just a messianic baby that was born over 2,000 years ago, to a virgin Jewish woman. Christ is a love that wants to be born in our souls time and time again. Jesus is to be magnified in our hearts and our souls, to bring us peace with all the craziness that this world brings us.

As we are going through the thorny woods of life we have the hope of a loving, powerful and a just God in our souls.