

TO MAGNIFY THE LORD ADVENT 4, YEAR A

*“My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God,
my Savior!” (Luke 1:47)*

How do you like that? Mary sings even before the baby is born. God chooses her, of all people, a poor, rural, unwed, lower-class teenager, to be the bearer of the divine Son. She, in turn, does not run in disgrace or fear. She is oblivious to the condemnation that unwed mothers face. Instead, she defies social expectations. She magnifies God. That means she amplifies God, makes God's reality bigger, more evident to a society much like ours, a society that has given up on divine intervention.

It is easy to miss the irony here. Mary is going to have a baby and he will be no ordinary baby. He will be a blessing to her because he is God's own. True enough. Yet, we know the trials she will endure: rejection, exile, a motherhood of worries for her rebellious son and then...the cross. But in spite of this inevitable trajectory, Mary's soul magnifies God. Is she naïve or is something else going on here?

Mary sings on: *“God has looked with favor on the lowliness of this servant...God has lifted up the lowly...God has shown strength with God's arm and has scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts...God has brought the powerful down from their thrones and uplifted the humble of heart...God has filled the hungry with good*

things and sent the rich away empty.”

Bread for the World reports that today one in four American children, 9 million children, live in poverty, double the childhood poverty rate of any other industrialized nation. The most recent census bureau figures tell us 38 million American citizens live in poverty. The cars line up, stretching out of our parking lot on food pantry days.

This is the challenge of Advent in a post-modern world, to proclaim God's powerful works on behalf of the poor and oppressed when there is little evidence that the lowly are, in fact, lifted up.

Compassionate people like us pray for miracles as we witness the growing numbers of homeless people trying to survive on the streets of our

country. We are appalled when we read that the government is seeking to cut social supports for them and make life even more difficult for today's unwed mothers. Refugees, like Jesus and his family, are not welcome here. This Advent does not feel like a time for singing.

Where is any evidence of hope this Advent? Mary's song stands in stark contrast to bleak social realities, hers and ours. We are led to ask, "How could she possibly sing?"

Please notice, Mary's hope is not a future hope. She sings in the present tense. The reign of God is now. Believe and act in this sure knowledge that the world will not, does not, hold us in its grip.

Mary sings her liberation song denouncing the domination systems set against her and her

people. Mary proclaims that God's way alone is true. She is not naïve or simple, she is free. Radically free.

God's way is not madness; it is the way of our world that is mad. Mad, crazed, profane and idolatrous.

If we can believe Mary's song, if we believe that the birth of her child "Immanuel" truly means that God is in our midst today, we too can resist the temptation to scapegoat, demonize, gaslight, blame and despair, acts so prevalent in our culture.

We desperately need to hear Mary's song and allow our yearning souls to join hers in magnifying, in amplifying, God's promise, permitting our very lives to be transformed so that we might manifest God's presence through our own witness in this mad world. To hope, to rejoice, to sing God's

song of justice and love, not for some distant future but for today. To magnify the Lord is to resist. So, like Mary, sing out. Amen.