

Scripture:

Isaiah 61:1-11

Luke 1:46-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

20th century American author Betty MacDonald ---- famous for the characters Ma and Pa Kettle from her book the Egg and I --- also wrote the Piggle Wiggle stories for children.

And in those stories Mrs. Piggle Wiggle lives in an upside down house.

And children --- being children --- love to visit her house --- a house where floors were overhead and ceilings were down below --- and everything was upside down.

Mrs. Piggle had a piano that dangled from the floor --- or ceiling as it was --- -- and in order to play it --- one had to swing from a trapeze.

And of course because the chairs and couches hung upside down ---- it was extremely difficult to sit in them comfortably and in a relaxed state --- gravity overruled comfort.

Of course in this upside down house everything had to be done with a considerable amount of care and planning.

Nothing was ever quite where you expected it to be --- and nothing could be done in the usual normal way.

It was a house full of surprises ----- especially for those who were careless.

And if we stop to think about it for a minute ----- the world that Mary sings about in Luke's gospel today is a bit like the upside down house of Mrs. Piggle Wiggle.

Things are a bit upside down ---- a virgin giving birth.

And surprises await all who are careless --- this little boy --- born in a manger on the outskirts of town --- what we will he ever amount to.

In the verses that precede our gospel reading today Mary learns about the baby that she is going to have.

And of course this all comes as quite a shock.

She's going to have a baby.

Her a virgin --- how can this be.

And not only is she ---- a virgin --- going to have a baby --- but she is told --- -- "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." --- verses 32 and 33 of Luke 1.

Talk about a reversal of fortunes.

Talk about upside down and full of surprises.

Talk about an eye opener.

Mary wakes up that morning --- not married --- not pregnant ---- a young teen age virgin girl in a small town ---- and goes to bed that night ---- with the understanding that she will give birth to the Son of the Most High ----- the Saviour of the world.

To say her life changed that day is an understatement.

And yet somehow --- in a very short time span Mary is able to receive --- process ----- and here is the key for today ---- joyfully celebrate this news.

Her world is turned upside down --- indeed the whole world and not just her personal little world ----- is about to be turned upside down --- and she has the presence of mind to praise --- glorify --- and magnify God.

And magnify God.

Some translations indicate she glorifies the Lord --- others say ----- magnify.

We heard glorify from our pew bible --- the NIV ----- but I prefer magnify --
- as used in a number of other versions.

Yes she glorified God --- but she also went beyond this ----- magnifying ----
intensifying ----- causing to make even bigger --- the glory and praise she
had for God.

Mary's world is turned upside down --- and rather than being full of fear ---
or confusion --- or uncertainty --- all of which would have been perfectly
understandable under the circumstances ----- Mary is filled with Joy.

What's about to happen is nothing short of a miracle --- indeed not only is it
miraculous but as some have suggested it's also revolutionary.

Indeed the great American Methodist theologian Stanley Jones said that
Mary's Magnificat ----- our passage from Luke's gospel today ---- "is the
most revolutionary document in the world."

The Magnificat ----- Mary's joyous song of praise ----- according to Stanley
Jones ----- "is the most revolutionary document in the world."

I'm not sure I'd go that far ---- but --- then again ---- I just might.

Like the house of Mrs. Piggie Wiggle ---- like Mary's life on hearing the
news of the baby boy she is going to birth ----- this great song of joy and
celebration ----- turns everything upside down.

Perhaps it is revolutionary.

If we take it seriously ---- and look at it carefully --- it is kind of
revolutionary.

And ---- according to people like Will Barclay --- it's revolutionary on at
least 3 levels.

Morally --- socially --- and then economically.

Morally.

Verse 51 includes ---- “he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.”

“he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.”

Christianity --- is --- or at least ought to be the death of pride.

Something happens inside of us when we come to Christ.

When we come to Christ --- among other things ----- our selfish pride slips away as Christ looks deep into our souls transforming us.

The great American playwright O Henry ---- tells the story of how a young boy living in a small village grows up and moves away to the city and falls in with a bad crowd --- eventually taking on some of their poor and criminal habits.

And he tells of how one day the boy --- who had become a pretty good pick pocket ----- snatches an old lady's purse and is --- at least initially ----- -- quite proud of himself as he examines its contents.

But before long --- that same day as he walked down the street ---- he recognizes the young girl he had sat beside in the village schoolhouse that he was always so fond of.

And in that instant as he traveled back to the innocence of his childhood in the tiny village school --- he saw himself for who exactly he had become ---- a common criminal --- a low life pick pocketing thief.

Mary's joyous song of praise ----- reminds us that the Christ child ----- the boy who is to come ---- enables us to see ourselves for who we really are --- initiating a kind of moral revolution within our hearts.

Mary is humbled by God's plan and is filled with such great joy for what God is doing ----- including what God is doing in and through people just like her.

Christ enables us to see in ways that we can never see without Him ---- and Mary is thankful for this --- and opens our eyes up to this reality.

Verse 52 from Luke's gospel today -----

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

Here we have the social revolution in Christ.

Rulers come down from their places of honour and prestige and the humble -
-- so called common --- everyday people ---- are lifted up as equally
important as the rich and powerful.

In Christ all people are worthy of the same treatment.

Treatment once only reserved for so called VIP's is now for all.

Dignity --- respect ----- and most importantly salvation is for all regardless
of class --- status ----- wealth --- and so on ---- segregation is a thing of the
past thanks to Christ.

Because of Christ we can no longer just look at person and classify them as
this or that kind or type of person.

And Mary of all people knew and appreciated this.

In some people's eyes she would have been a disgrace ---- a young teen aged
girl --- pregnant and not yet married --- disgraceful.

And disgraceful not just to herself ----- but to her fiancée ----- to her whole
family --- to her whole village even.

But of course that wasn't the case ----- the revolution --- and then some ----
that is Jesus Christ --- paints a far different picture.

Mary --- faithful servant --- chosen one of God --- favoured one --- as Luke
says in verse 28 of chapter 1.

Mary ---- one blessed by the Holy Spirit ---- faithful servant of God ----
thanks to God's great rescue plan ----- thanks to Jesus Christ and the upside
downing reality of His saving love.

So -----

Moral revolution ---- humility ---- loss of pride and selfishness ----- verse 51 ---- and of course the gospel of Jesus Christ as a whole.

Social revolution ----- the powerful brought down ---- the weak lifted up ---- verse 52 ----- and of course the gospel as a whole --- the first shall be last and the last first.

And now economic revolution ----- verse 53.

“He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent away the rich empty.”

A non-Christian society is one where it's everyone for themselves --- and people aim at acquiring as much stuff as they can possibly get their hands on ---- and wallets around.

On the other hand --- a Christian society is one where everybody has at least the basics ----- it's one where all are provided for.

A Christian society is one where things are shared ---- and --- things are given away.

It's a society where sacrifices are made by some for others.

It inspires an economic revolution --- get stuff --- only to give away stuff ---- to share it with those who may not otherwise have it.

Food ---- for example --- gifts for example.

To make it real for us --- it's our bi weekly community outreach program and Christmas hampers.

To make it real for us it's our sponsorship of Syrian refugees through our Presbytery.

Revolution ---- Christ is coming.

Yes there is loveliness in Mary's great song of praise ---- her Magnificat --- as it is often referred to.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

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

He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Anyway you look at it ---- it's a beautiful hymn of praise.

So much so that people like ----- Monteverdi --- Vivaldi ---- Bach and Rachmaninoff ---- have all set beautiful music along side these wonderful words.

Beautiful hymn of praise for sure.

But it's also a powerful manifesto for revolution if taken seriously.

And perhaps you're asking yourself ---- OK. ----- but what exactly does this have to do with Advent?

Outside of the obvious fact that it comes to Mary's heart to sing this great Psalm of praise after she learns of God's great rescue plan that is Jesus Christ coming in human form out of her tummy.

The answer is ----- everything.

This has everything to do with Advent.

And it has everything to do with Advent precisely because Advent is a time all about preparing the way of the Lord.

Advent is a time to ponder --- and anticipate ---- and wait with longing and desire the soon to come Christ child.

And Mary pulls into focus for us a huge part of what exactly the arrival of Jesus brings with it ----- specifically revolution --- and rescue.

Moral --- social ----- economic --- revolution ----- and then some ----- as our Old Testament passage also points to today.

My soul magnifies the Lord ---- is Mary's one line ----- immediate response to the miraculous rescue plan that God has set in motion beginning with her --- and the child she is going to bring into the world.

Part of what we are called to do in Advent is magnify the Lord too.

Make the soon to arrive --- miraculous saving and revolutionary presence of Jesus Christ ----- larger than it is often made to be this time of year because of the secular drive of consumerism and self satisfying gratification of needs and wants.

As Christians we are called to do something akin to what Mary did ----- and glorify and magnify God.

Instead of only ever focusing on things like ---- "Have I got all the gifts I need?" ----- "Is the Christmas or Boxing Day menu perfect?" ---- "Are the decorations just so --- and do they all go together perfectly?"

Instead of this ----- what about -----

Magnify ----- o magnify the Lord.

Glorify ---- o glorify the Lord.

If God in Christ is our focus ---- the gifts will all work themselves out ----- the menus will be just fine ---- and the decorations will meet the mark --- and all will be well --- all will be just fine ---- not to worry ---- trust me ----- trust God.

Mary's great love song of praise and magnification of God's goodness is an invitation to approach Christmas with a slower more contemplative pace.

Mary's great love song of praise and magnification of God's goodness is an invitation to set our eyes on the right and true and faithful things of God.

Yes she chooses beautiful words ---- but they are also shocking and radical words too.

Christmas --- the arrival of Christ as a little baby is beautiful ---- but it is also quite shocking and radical if we think about all that it meant and still means for the world.

Christ is coming --- it's a beautiful thing ---- as Mary captures quite well.

Christ is coming ----- it's a powerful ---- revolutionary ---- shocking thing --- -- turning things upside down ----- as Mary also captures quite well.

This Advent may our souls magnify the Lord ---- as Mary's soul magnified the Lord.

This Advent may we see the beauty in the coming of Christ.

And this Advent may we also see a hint of the miraculous --- revolutionary shocking --- turning the world upside down ---- nature of the coming of Jesus Christ as well.

Because anything short of this is a watered down saccharine sentimental misrepresentation of the most powerful Divine action that is the Christ event.

This Advent ----- may our souls magnify the Lord.

Rejoicing and giving thanks for Him.

And at the same time as we rejoice and give thanks ----- may we also remember that it's all pretty radical too ----- and that because of Him --- nothing would ever be the same again.

Amen.