

Mary brings her whole story (Luke 1:46b-55)

If anyone is expecting a lullaby, they better think again.

by [Montague Williams](#)

December 9, 2022

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

In the Gospel of Luke we encounter the Magnificat, Mary's celebration song about her pregnancy. If anyone is expecting a lullaby, they better think again.

Mary expresses a raw thankfulness for what the arrival of Jesus means for the liberation of oppressed peoples, and she uses language that reflects triumph over the powerful through protest and resistance. She includes vivid imagery and jaw-dropping linguistic effects in each line.

It makes sense that this song appears in the lectionary as an alternative to a psalm, because like a psalm it carries the weight of generations long before and after the singer. And along with having significance for the broader community of faith, Mary's song has a personal tone, as she celebrates that God has given her a significant role in the fulfillment of promises to Abraham's descendants.

When considering how to engage this passage in preaching and worship, I suggest giving attention to the way Mary embraces God's invitation for her to bring her whole story to the life God is calling her to live. Here are three related directions to consider.

Mary's holistic praise. Some translations begin the song with Mary claiming that her celebration comes from her "soul" and "spirit." These terms might suggest to us a neglect for bodily experience, but that is not what they mean here, nor throughout

the New Testament.

I appreciate the way the Common English Bible translates the opening lines: “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.” The depths of who we are includes our deepest joys and concerns, influential memories, connections to communities, and ideas that shape us even if we don’t know how to explain them. To rejoice from one’s depths is to bring all of oneself into the moment.

Mary’s embrace of her story. Throughout her song, Mary speaks of the way God pays attention to and liberates “the lowly.” She initially focuses on her own situation. When she sings that God has looked with favor upon her lowliness, this could also be translated as “humiliation.”

Is she talking about her socio-economic status? She lives in Nazareth, a small town that is looked down upon in the region. Is she referring to what people will think about her pregnancy when she returns home from Elizabeth’s house? Mary is from an area where homes are so close to each other that it would be near impossible to keep her pregnancy a secret.

In either case, Mary celebrates the freedom to be unashamed of where she is from, who she is a part of, and what her experience is. Moreover, she is happy for all generations to know her story.

Mary’s embrace of her community. The majority of Mary’s song refers to the lowliness of Israel—the people that make up her community of faith—and how God has mightily removed the powerful from their thrones to liberate and lift up this oppressed people of God. It is important to notice that Mary does not receive the invitation to be the mother of the Christ as an isolated calling or a path for escape. As blessed as she is, she is not trying to exalt herself up above her community. Rather, she recognizes, names, and embraces her community the whole way.