

**Luke 1:39-55**  
**December 23, '18**

**“PLAY IT AGAIN, MARY”**

**DURING ADVENT THIS YEAR, WE’RE LOOKING AT “*SECULAR CHRISTMAS, SONGS, BOOKS & MOVIES THAT SPEAK TO THE SOUL.*”**

**WE’VE LOOKED AT STEVIE WONDER’S “*SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS,*” “*RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER*” & CHARLES DICKENS’ “*A CHRISTMAS CAROL.*”**

**THIS MORNING, OUR CHOICE DOESN’T REALLY FALL NEATLY IN LINE WITH THE REST OF THE SERIES FOR AT LEAST A COUPLE OF REASONS.**

**FOR ONE THING, WE’VE ALREADY DONE A SONG & FOR ANOTHER, OUR CHOICE HARDLY QUALIFIES AS SECULAR!**

**WHEN THINKING ABOUT THESE THREE CATEGORIES, THOUGH, - CHRISTMAS BOOKS, MOVIES & SONGS – I THINK MOST OF US WOULD AGREE THAT IT’S THE SONG CATEGORY THAT BECOMES THE MOST DIFFICULT SIMPLY BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY FROM WHICH TO CHOOSE – BOTH SECULAR & SACRED.**

**I’M SURE, IF ASKED, YOU’D BE ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOUR FAVORITE CHRISTMAS SONG IS & YOU’D PROBABLY HAVE A FAVORITE IN BOTH CATEGORIES – SECULAR & SACRED.**

**I TOLD YOU THAT, FOR A LONG TIME, THE SECULAR SONG WE USED THREE WEEKS AGO – “*SOMEDAY AT CHRISTMAS*” – WAS MY FAVORITE NON-CHURCHY CHRISTMAS SONG – THAT IS, UNTIL I HEARD WILL MATTINGLY’S “*IT’S CHRISTMAS.*”**

**NOW, STEVIE WONDER HAS BEEN RELEGATED TO SECOND PLACE!**

**SO WHAT’S YOUR FAVORITE SECULAR CHRISTMAS SONG?**

**MAYBE IT’S AN OLD STANDARD – NAT KING COLE’S “*THE CHRISTMAS SONG*” – CHESTNUTS ROASTING ON AN OPEN FIRE.**

**OR PERHAPS ELVIS’S “*BLUE CHRISTMAS*” OR BING CROSBY’S “*WHITE CHRISTMAS.*”**

**MAYBE IT’S SOMETHING A BIT MORE CONTEMPORARY (AND I’M USING “CONTEMPORARY” VERY LOOSELY) – MARIAH CAREY’S “*ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS YOU*” OR JOHN LENNON’S “*HAPPY CHRISTMAS – WAR IS OVER.*”**

**YOU MAY REMEMBER THE BIZARRE, YET BEAUTIFUL DUET OF BING CROSBY & DAVID BOWIE – “*LITTLE DRUMMER BOY/PEACE ON EARTH.*”**

**ONE OF THE FASCINATING ASPECTS OF THAT SONG IS THE WAY IT CAME ABOUT.**

**BOWIE WAS SCHEDULED TO BE ON CROSBY'S CHRISTMAS SPECIAL BUT WHEN HE ARRIVED TO FILM IT, HE WAS TOLD HE WAS GOING TO BE SINGING "*THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY.*"**

**HE TOLD THE PRODUCERS THAT HE REALLY DIDN'T CARE FOR THE SONG & THEY WENT INTO A PANIC BECAUSE THEY WERE JUST HOURS FROM FILMING.**

**THE PRODUCERS QUICKLY GOT TOGETHER, RETIRED TO THE BASEMENT OF THE STUDIO & IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS, WROTE THE "*PEACE ON EARTH*" PART TO GO WITH "*THE LITTLE DRUMMER BOY.*"**

**THEY GAVE IT TO BOWIE & CROSBY, THE TWO OF THEM SANG IT THROUGH ONCE & THEN THEY PERFORMED IT ON THE SHOW.**

**THEY NEVER WOULD HAVE DREAMED THAT IT WOULD BECOME SUCH A CHRISTMAS CLASSIC.**

**THAT'S OFTEN PART OF THE APPEAL OF A CHRISTMAS SONG, THOUGH – THE STORY BEHIND IT OR THE SPECIAL & PERSONAL ROLE IT PLAYS IN YOUR OWN LIFE EXPERIENCE.**

**THAT'S OBVIOUSLY WHY I CAN SAY THAT WILL'S "*IT'S CHRISTMAS*" IS MY FAVORITE SECULAR CHRISTMAS SONG.**

**FOR ME, THAT'S ALSO TRUE WITH MY FAVORITE CHRISTMAS HYMN.**

**IT'S ALWAYS BEEN "*O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM.*"**

**PART OF THE APPEAL, I SUPPOSE, IS BECAUSE IT WAS WRITTEN BY THE GREAT 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PREACHER PHILLIPS BROOKS AFTER HE HAD EXPERIENCED CHRISTMAS IN THE HOLY LAND.**

**BUT AN EVEN STRONGER APPEAL FOR ME IS FAR MORE PERSONAL.**

**MY VERY EARLIEST MEMORY OF CHRISTMAS IS BEING PART OF AN EVENING CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PROGRAM AT THE ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH IN ST. CLAIR SHORES, MICHIGAN.**

**I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN MORE THAN 4 OR 5 YEARS OLD.**

**EACH CLASS WOULD TAKE ITS TURN IN THE CHANCEL RECITING SOMETHING WE HAD LEARNED.**

**I REMEMBER MY CLASS – BEING THE YOUNGEST – WENT FIRST.**

**WE SAT IN THE FRONT PEW & THEN WALKED OUT – SINGLE FILE – TO RECITE OUR LINES.**

**WE THEN RETURNED TO OUR PEW IN THE FRONT – AND THAT'S THE LAST THING I REMEMBER.**

**THAT IS, UNTIL THE SOUNDS OF THE CHURCH ORGAN & THE VOICES OF THE CONGREGATION AWAKENED ME AS THEY WERE SINGING “*O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM.*”**

**I WASN'T LYING ON THE PEW, THOUGH, IN MY SLEEP.**

**I AWOKE & FOUND MYSELF CRADLED IN THE ARMS OF MY SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER.**

**I WAS MOMENTARILY STARTLED BUT THEN WAS OVERWHELMED WITH A SENSE OF COMFORT & SECURITY.**

**HERE WAS SOMEONE WHO WASN'T PART OF MY FAMILY, BUT WHO ENFOLDED ME IN HER ARMS & ALLOWED ME TO SIMPLY SLEEP IN PEACE.**

**I CAN NEVER HEAR THAT HYMN WITHOUT THINKING OF THAT EXPERIENCE & WITHOUT FEELING THAT SAME SENSE OF COMFORT, SECURITY & PEACE.**

**THERE IS ANOTHER SONG OF CHRISTMAS, THOUGH, THAT MOVES ME EVEN MORE AND, LIKE THE OTHERS MENTIONED, IT MOVES ME BECAUSE OF THE STORY BEHIND IT & ALL THAT IT REPRESENTS.**

**IT'S NOT A SONG WE SING DURING THE SEASON.**

**IN FACT, IT'S NOT A SONG WE SING AT ANY TIME.**

**IT IS, THOUGH, A SONG THAT – I BELIEVE – IS THE CONSUMMATE CHRISTMAS SONG.**

**IT'S THE SONG THAT MARY SINGS IN LUKE'S GOSPEL WHEN SHE RECEIVES THE NEWS THAT SHE WILL BEAR A SON – A SON WHO WILL BE THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD.**

***“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.”***

***IN MARY’S SONG THAT WE KNOW AS “THE MAGNIFICAT”  
BECAUSE OF THE LATIN TRANSLATION OF ITS OPENING WORD, SHE  
TELLS OF HER SAVIOR WHO HAS "LOOKED WITH FAVOR ON THE  
LOWLINESS OF HIS SERVANT."***

***LOWLINESS.***

**THE GREEK BEHIND OUR ENGLISH WORD IS NOT TALKING  
SIMPLY ABOUT HUMILITY, BUT ABOUT POVERTY.**

**MARY IS POOR -- DIRT POOR.**

**SHE IS POOR AND PREGNANT AND UNMARRIED.**

**SHE IS IN A MESS.**

**BUT SHE SINGS! WHY?**

**BECAUSE LUKE KNOWS -- FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF THE  
END -- THAT THIS LOWLY ONE, THIS WRETCHED ONE, THIS YOUNG  
TEENAGE GIRL, GOD RAISES UP.**

**MARY, DESPISED AND REJECTED, IS FAVORED BY GOD AND WILL  
BRING THE MESSIAH TO THE WORLD.**

**AND SO SHE SINGS.**

**WHAT'S MORE - MARY SINGS NOT JUST A SOLO ABOUT HER OWN  
DESTINY, BUT A FREEDOM SONG ON BEHALF OF ALL THE FAITHFUL  
POOR IN THE LAND.**

**SHE SINGS A SONG OF FREEDOM FOR ALL WHO, IN THEIR  
POVERTY AND THEIR WRETCHEDNESS, STILL BELIEVE THAT GOD  
WILL MAKE A WAY WHERE THERE IS NO WAY.**

**LIKE JOHN THE BAPTIST, MARY PROPHESES DELIVERANCE.**

**SHE PROPHESES ABOUT A WAY THAT IS COMING IN THE  
WILDERNESS OF INJUSTICE.**

**SHE SINGS OF A GOD WHO "HAS SCATTERED THE PROUD IN THE THOUGHTS OF THEIR HEARTS"; WHO "HAS BROUGHT DOWN THE POWERFUL FROM THEIR THRONES, AND LIFTED UP THE LOWLY"; WHO "HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND SENT THE RICH AWAY EMPTY."**

**SHE EXULTS IN THE GOD OF ABRAHAM;**

**SHE EXALTS THE GOD OF JESUS CHRIST.**

**HERE AT THE BEGINNING, MARY REJOICES IN GOD'S DESTINY -- FOR HER, AND FOR A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN.**

**MARY JUST KEEPS SINGING, RANGING HIGH ON HER SCALES OF PRAISE, SOARING IN HER EXPECTANT AND REVOLUTIONARY LYRICS, BECAUSE GOD HAS REACHED SO UNEXPECTEDLY DOWN TO WHERE THE LEAST AND THE LOWLY STILL STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.**

**CAN MARY'S GOD TRULY BE *OUR* LORD AND *OUR* GOD -- THE GOD WHO OVERTURNS THE WAY THE WORLD WORKS, WHO ELECTS THE LEAST AND THE LAST TO BRING IN THE KINGDOM, WHOSE JUDGMENT IN EVERY SENSE WILL SAVE THE POOR, THE WRONGED AND THE OPPRESSED?**

**CAN THE GOD WHO IS GOING TO KNOCK THE POWERFUL OFF THEIR THRONES, REALLY BE OUR GOD?**

**CAN WE REALLY PRAISE THIS GOD -- MARY'S GOD?**



**IT'S AWFULLY HARD TO BELIEVE THE PROCLAMATIONS OF MARY, ISN'T IT?**

**MARY'S SONG IS FAR MORE POINTED THAN OUR CHRISTMAS CAROLS - SO POINTED THAT IT MAKES YOU SQUIRM IN YOUR PEW.**

**IT'S SO VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE SONGS WE ORDINARILY SING AT CHRISTMAS – ESPECIALLY IN THE PICTURE OF MARY THAT IT PRESENTS.**

***"SILENT NIGHT!" DESCRIBES HER AS "YON VIRGIN."***

***"LO, HOW A ROSE E'ER BLOOMING" CALLS HER "THE VIRGIN MOTHER KIND."***

***"ONCE IN ROYAL DAVID'S CITY" TELLS US "MARY WAS THAT MOTHER MILD."***

***"IN THE BLEAK MIDWINTER" HAS MARY "IN HER MAIDEN BLISS" WORSHIPPING JESUS "WITH A KISS."***

**AND *"GENTLE MARY LAID HER CHILD"* REVEALS IN THE VERY TITLE THE ASSESSMENT OF MARY'S DEMEANOR: GENTLE.**

**IT'S NO WONDER THEN, WHEN WE ENVISION MARY, WE PICTURE MEEK, MILD, GENTLE, YOUNG AND VULNERABLE.**

**ARTISTS THROUGH THE AGES DEPICT MARY AS EITHER THE MAIDEN TERRIFIED BY THE ANGEL AT THE ANNUNCIATION OR THE NEW MOTHER CRADLING HER BABY IN BLISS.**

**BUT THE SONG OF MARY HERSELF REVEALS A QUITE DIFFERENT PICTURE.**

**THIS IS A RADICAL PROTEST SONG - THE KIND OF SONG THAT THE ENSLAVED ISRAELITES MIGHT HAVE SUNG IN EGYPT.**

**IT'S THE KIND OF SONG YOU MIGHT HAVE HEARD ON THE LIPS OF THE EXILED JEWS IN BABYLON.**

**THIS IS THE KIND OF SONG THAT HAS BEEN SUNG BY COUNTLESS PEOPLE OF FAITH THROUGH THE AGES IN RESISTANCE, IN DEFIANCE OF EMPIRES, TERRORISTS & INVADERS.**

**MARTIN LUTHER SAID THAT MARY'S SONG**  
***"COMFORTS THE LOWLY & TERRIFIES THE RICH."***

**E. STANLEY JONES, THE GREAT MISSIONARY OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, SAID THE MAGNIFICAT IS *"THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY DOCUMENT IN THE WORLD."***

**THE BRITISH THEOLOGIAN WILLIAM BARCLAY CALLS IT *"A BOMBSHELL THAT TAKES THE WORLD & TURNS IT UPSIDE DOWN."***

**AND LISTEN TO WHAT DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, THE GERMAN THEOLOGIAN MARTYRED BY THE NAZIS IN A PRISON CAMP IN 1945, SAID ABOUT IT - *"IT IS THE MOST PASSIONATE, MOST VEHEMENT, ONE MIGHT ALMOST SAY, MOST REVOLUTIONARY ADVENT***

***HYMN EVER SUNG...NONE OF THE SWEET, SUGARY, OR CHILDISH TONES THAT WE FIND SO OFTEN IN OUR CHRISTMAS HYMNS, BUT A HARD, STRONG, UNCOMPROMISING SONG OF BRINGING DOWN RULERS FROM THEIR THRONES AND HUMBLING LORDS OF THIS WORLD, OF GOD'S POWER AND OF THE POWERLESSNESS OF MEN."***

**PERHAPS MARY'S SONG IS A SIGN THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO VISITED NAZARETH SO LONG AGO ISN'T YET FINISHED WITH US.**

**MARY'S MAGNIFICAT IS THE CONSUMMATE CHRISTMAS SONG BECAUSE IT TELLS US THAT EVERY SONG OF THE FUTURE APART FROM HERS IS SIMPLY OFF KEY.**

**EVERY FUTURE PROJECTED APART FROM THE ONE OF WHICH MARY SINGS IS NO FUTURE AT ALL.**

**BUT IF MARY'S SONG IS THE CONSUMMATE CHRISTMAS SONG, THEN IT ASSURES US THERE IS HOPE.**

**AND THIS IS THE POINT OF ADVENT -- INDEED, THIS IS THE TURNING POINT -- NOT ONLY FOR MARY, BUT FOR ALL OF US.**

**SO HERE'S WHAT WE MIGHT SAY TO THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD, THAT REVOLUTIONARY TEENAGE GIRL.**

***"PLAY IT AGAIN, MARY.***

***SING TO US OF YOUR GOD.***

***SING ON, UNTIL YOUR SONG AT LAST BECOMES OURS.***

***SING, UNTIL ALL THE WORLD HEARS YOU AND MAKES YOUR  
LYRICS ITS OWN.***

***SING UNTIL WE GET IT.***

***SING UNTIL WE FINALLY UNDERSTAND HOW THE COMING OF  
YOUR SON TURNS THE WHOLE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.***

***SING UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT IT MEANS AT CHRISTMAS TO  
PROCLAIM ‘THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS ARE MET IN  
THEE TONIGHT.’” AMEN.***

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