

Advent Reconciliation

(sung) - I left my heart in San Francisco.....

Whose song is that? (Tony Bennett!)

Let's try another:

Somewhere over the rainbow.....

Whose song is that? (Judy Garland.)

I'll have a blue Christmas... (Elvis!)

Ever since I started listening to records, I've heard people say, "Oh, that's HIS song," or "That's HER song." They are songs so identified with a particular singer that you can't hear them without thinking of that person.

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In this passage from Luke's Gospel, we discover that the Blessed Virgin Mary has 'her song' too. It's a song that tells us who she is, and it tells us about the love that gives meaning to her life.

Mary sings her song in tonight's Gospel: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior." It's Mary's song – the *Magnificat*.

This is one of the crucial songs in Luke's story of the birth of Christ.

Now, Mary is *not* singing when this Gospel scene begins. She's travelling. She has set out in haste, to visit her relative Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel had just interrupted Mary's daily routine with a miraculous message.

God had chosen her – HER – to become the mother of the messiah. God did not force this on Mary – God made the invitation, and then God waited.

In her freedom and faith, Mary said 'yes' to God's plan – even though so much of it was still hidden in mystery. She says 'yes' to the Christ that will take flesh within her.

And after Mary says *yes*, she hastens to the hill country to tell Elizabeth what had happened. Elizabeth was older, and childless – but God heard her prayers, and she would soon give birth to John the Baptist.

These two faithful women, these free women, meet.

And they cannot contain themselves! They start to proclaim how good God is.

Notice, especially, what Mary does. The first words out of her mouth are a song of thanksgiving to God:

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”

Mary’s sings a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. It is not a prayer of *asking* or *requesting*. Not a prayer seeking strength for what lies ahead. It’s not a prayer in which she say’s “I’m sorry for a mistake I’ve made.” She opens her mouth and starts singing “thank you!”

I think that’s remarkable, because Mary is facing a not-so-easy future. She is engaged to Joseph, but they’re not living as husband and wife yet. Her pregnancy is, frankly, going to raise some eyebrows, and put her under the microscope. The book of Leviticus says that a woman who gets pregnant before living with her husband could be stoned to death for immorality.

There will be those who whisper in the narrow streets of Nazareth – “there is Mary. The sinful one. She got herself into a mess.”

Yet here she is, facing potential moral judgment, and she cannot help but sing her song of praise. “God is good! My soul proclaims it!”

As Mary sings her song, she describes all that God is accomplishing by sending his son into the world.

Tonight, I want to focus on one line - Actually, *half* a line, of Mary’s song.

Because Mary sings: “God’s mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.”

When the Bible speaks of “fearing” God, it’s not saying that we need to be afraid of God. We don’t have to cower in the corner and hide.

When the Bible tells us to ‘fear the Lord,’ the Bible is asking us to have a sense of awe, wonder, and respect when we realize who God is and what God has done for us.

Fear of the Lord is like the gut-level experience we have when we stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon or stare up at the stars and say to ourselves “Woe. Awesome.”

Fear of the Lord comes when we realize that God is God, and we are not. Fear of the Lord comes when I realize, it is best to let God be in charge.

Mary sings: “God’s mercy is from age to age on those who fear him.” In other words, we simply need to slow down, take a moment, and ponder the presence of God in our life. We need to humbly admit that we are not perfect. We sometimes stray and go our own way. Sometimes we tell God we don’t need him to be in charge of our lives. But if I pause in this Advent moment to be that honest, then God’s mercy – which is eternal – will be unleashed in me and you, On December 4, at the corner of Gayton and Gaskins.

We will sing many carols and songs in these Advent weeks. Tonight, the Mother of Jesus invites us to join in a song which changes lives. “God’s mercy is from age to age” – and God’s mercy is incarnate *this* night, in *this* sacrament.

God’s great desire for you tonight is that you step forward without fear, and receive forgiveness with joy. God wants you to experience mercy.

And that is something about which we should sing!

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