

Mary Did You Know?

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December 22, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Advent
St. Michael's Episcopal Church
Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen

- Resolved: The popular Christmas song “Mary Did You Know?” is naïve, condescending and biblically ignorant.
 - Sorry. The experience judging that debate tournament at Jonathan’s school may have affected me more than I thought.
 - I promise not to stand up here and debate myself.
- But there’s definitely a debate out there about the song Mary Did You Know, even if we’re a little late to that party.
 - In case you’re not familiar with the song, here are a few of the lyrics:
 - Mary, did you know that your baby boy will one day walk on water?
 - Mary, did you know that your baby boy will save our sons and daughters?
 - Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new?
 - This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you.
- Clever turn of phrase, right? But is it any good?
 - Some of us here come from traditions with a very purist view of Mary. Perhaps even that she herself was born from a virgin, gave birth as a virgin, and died as a virgin.
 - (Of course, equating her virginity with purity is a whole separate problem that we don’t have time for. But hit me up at coffee hour if you want to talk about it.)
 - And others in this room may have concluded that Mary was not extra-special. Just faithful. (And that’s not nothing.)
 - And perhaps she didn’t bear Jesus as a virgin at all.
 - I have a position on all this myself, but again... no time!
- One position, about the lyrics of the song, that’s made the rounds on the internet, is that the song is disrespectful to Mary
 - There’s a snarky parody of the song out there, written as a rebuttal on Mary’s part, titled “Yes, I freakin’ knew.”

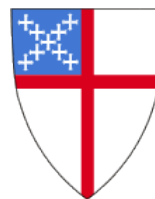
- Which assumes that the lyrics are patronizing and condescending.
- And Mary responds by saying, “Did I know? Well, remember how that angel came and told me that I was going to give birth to the Messiah? And remember how my cousin’ Elizabeth prophesied over me, while her own baby was dancing in her womb?”
- “So yeah, I freakin’ knew. I knew it first.”
- And if we need further evidence that Mary freakin’ knew...
 - We can look no further than the Magnificat—Mary’s prayer recorded in the first chapter of Luke, which we read this morning.
 - “From this day *all* generations will call me blessed.”
 - “He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy”
 - Not only is Mary aware that God is fulfilling the promise of to rescue Israel through her...
 - She knows her Scriptures. She is largely quoting the song of Hannah, in 1 Samuel, thanking God for the birth of her son Samuel.
- So yes, Mary knew a lot. But is that the point of the song?
 - I actually don’t think so.
 - I think the song is reflecting on everything that Jesus turned out to be.
 - And it’s a human sentiment we can all relate to if we think about it
 - Think back to the birth of one of your children, or to your wedding day, or to your first day in a new school or at a new job or the day you met your best friend...
 - Or even your first day at St. Michael’s...
 - Could you have imagined all that transpired from that point forward?
- This is why we watch retrospective videos at graduation parties and weddings and funerals and golden anniversaries.

- It's a moving experience to sit where you're sitting now, and think back to the beginning of something
- Looking at pictures of yourself and your loved ones, with no idea what was ahead of them.
- Sometimes we shake our heads think, "If only I'd known..."
- Maybe there's some regret mixed in. Maybe we ask ourselves if we still would have married that person, or took that job, or bought that house, or whatever, if we'd known the challenges that were ahead of us.
- Or maybe you just a sense of wonder.
- I have all those feelings at times. Looking at pictures of me in high school and thinking, Ryan did you know?
- Yes, Mary knew a lot. But she didn't know everything.
 - If we're going to revere Mary for anything, I think we can agree that she should be revered for her Faith.
 - And Faith *depends* on uncertainty. On not-knowing.
 - If she knew every detail of the future, she wouldn't need faith.
 - But we see Mary's faith very clearly on display, in her response to the angel Gabriel. "May it be with me" and in her fervent declaration in the Magnificat, that God has "casted down the mighty, and lifted up the lowly."
- And to be honest, Jesus did turn out pretty differently than she could have predicted.
 - Like everyone else in her generation, Mary was hoping against all hope for the liberation of Israel from Roman occupation
 - And we see this reflected in her prayer as well.
 - So when Jesus grew up to be a person of peace and healing, advocating and modeling forgiveness, nonviolence and enemy-love...
 - Mary would have been just as surprised as her peers.
 - We even see an example of Mary struggling with Jesus' ultimate purpose in Matt 12, when she and her other sons try to extract him from his followers and take him home.

- She had to recognize, at some point, that she didn't know everything that Jesus would turn out to be
 - And that's where her Faith kicked in. It was her Faith that kept her hanging on. She didn't walk away, even when she struggled.
- Or maybe she didn't struggle. I really don't know for sure.
- The beautiful thing, to me, is that we don't have to agree about what Mary knew, or about the virgin birth, or about some song on the radio.
 - Hopefully, on this final Sunday of Advent,
 - We can agree about Mary's Faith
 - And we can take this moment to consider our own Faith
 - As we think back on all that's happened in 2024.
 - As we think back on the twists and turns our lives have taken
 - ...our adventures in parenting, or marriage, or relationships, or our adventures with jobs, or homes, or schools or churches.
- We can recognize that absolutely none of these things unfolded exactly as we thought they would
 - And that God never promised otherwise
 - God didn't prepare Mary for every detail of Jesus' life
 - Just like God hasn't prepared us for every detail of our own
 - But if there's one thing that God has clearly promised
 - It was to be with us through it all
- And maybe, if we let our Faith do the talking
 - We can look back on all those experiences in our lives
 - And see that we have never been alone
 - And if we've never been alone, maybe that means that we will never be alone.
- As we enter the Christmas season, and a new year, and all the new seasons that follow...
 - May we move forward with the Faith of Mary, and with her steadfast knowledge of just one thing: That we will not be moving forward alone.
 - Amen.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year C
RCL



Micah 5:2-5a
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)
Canticle 15 (or 3)
or Psalm 80:1-7

The Collect

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Old Testament

Micah 5:2-5a

You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;

and he shall be the one of peace.

The Response

Canticle 15 Page 91, BCP

The Song of Mary *Magnificat*

Luke 1:46-55

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed: *
the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel, *
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,

The promise he made to our fathers, *
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. *Amen.*

The Response

Psalm 80:1-7

Qui regis Israel

- 1 **H**ear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; *
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.
- 2 In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, *
stir up your strength and come to help us.
- 3 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.
- 4 O LORD God of hosts, *
how long will you be angered
despite the prayers of your people?
- 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears; *
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.
- 6 You have made us the derision of our neighbors, *
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.
- 7 Restore us, O God of hosts; *
show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

The New Testament

Hebrews 10:5-10

When Christ came into the world, he said,

"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;

in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me)."

When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Gospel

Luke 1:39-45(46-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

[And Mary said,

"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."]

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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