

This story of the matron of this house, St. Elizabeth, appears only in Luke. She shows up in the Gospel story pregnant with John the Baptizer when Mary came to stay with Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah. When she saw Mary, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she cried out, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Those of you who have been coming to Evening Prayer surely recognize this phrase from the prayer we say at the end of the service except during Easter.

Mary responded with the worship song that we call the Magnificat: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...” If you noticed a similarity to the reading from 1 Samuel, you are not mistaken. Hannah’s song is clearly the inspiration for Mary. Hannah had accepted that she was headed into a life without children and then unexpectedly became pregnant with a boy, Samuel, who would become one of the most significant figures in the history of the people of Israel.

Now, the combination of Mary singing a version of Hannah’s song after the prompt by her cousin Elizabeth might lead us to imagine that think this entire evening is about three miraculously pregnant Jewish women. And, of course, on the surface that’s true.

And all three of these incredible women are expressing gratitude, much in the spirit of our psalm. And that’s wonderful, truly. But we are on a surprisingly slippery slope here if we stop short – if we present these readings as a story only about God blessing women with children, unusual as these woman and children are.

Because all three of these women are singing powerful prophecies. All three are singing gratitude, trusting in promises beyond their own individual experiences. All three are singing powerful reminders about changing destinies because of how God intends for the world to be. They are singing hope-filled resistance against the darkness.

The young Jewish Mary is singing forward a prophetic theme from her Jewish upbringing and history. Hannah’s earlier song set the scene for a major

prophetic theme of the Book of Samuel; the willingness of YHWH to intrude, intervene and invert. Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptizer; and Mary, the mother of God – all are "handmaids" of God, willing servants who were uniquely dedicated to God.

Hearing these readings in the last week of Easter allows us to relax our focus the nativity of Jesus. Tonight, maybe we can really turn our eyes to the larger celebration of God's loving grace pouring out for all creation in these readings. In gratitude for the hope and the promise of God's inclusive realm, like Hannah, maybe just for tonight, we can sing: "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God."

Like Mary, maybe we can sing: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary sang in gratitude for her own changing circumstances, but also for so much more. "Her song," Mother Barbara Brown Taylor once wrote, "is for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – for Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel – for every son and daughter of Israel who thought God had forgotten the promise to be with them forever, to love them forever, to give them fresh and endless life."

The medieval mystic, Meister Eckhart, once wrote: "We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the Divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself? And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to Him in my time and my culture. This then," Eckhart concluded, "this then is the fullness of time: when the Son of God is begotten in us."

Mary was so confident of God's promised presence that she sang about it ahead of time, before she had any idea how things would turn out. She sang her willingness to trust that the God who had chosen her would be part of whatever came next. And the angels sing with her.

What may be puzzling is that God has also chosen you and looked with favor on you, even if you are in the dark about what may come next. Why wait to sing a reminder to yourself and to the people around you about how God

intends for creation to be? Why wait to sing your resistance against the darkness?

If you are unsure or steady, come to this table and let yourself be filled with the presence of the Risen and Ascended Christ. The Mighty One is doing great things for you, and holy is God's Name.

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Works consulted:

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *Home by Another Way*. London: SPCK, 2011.