

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C, Gospel

WHAT MADE THE VIRGIN MARY THE BVM

Luke 1:39-55 (including the "Magnificat")

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Analysis by Marcus Felde

39In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

46And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

47and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

50His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

51He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

53he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
54He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”



Author's Note: Why do generations call Mary blessed? Elizabeth spelled it out: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

The Song of Mary expresses the differences it makes to be blessed. Its contrasts sound a bit like a two-column Crossings text analysis. On the left hand is the sad triage of faithlessness, lovelessness, and hopelessness. On the other, the trio of faith, hope, and love. God is pleased to deal kindly and generously with a Jane Doe or John Doe who believes there will

be a fulfillment of the Lord's promises (life and salvation). On the other, those who neither hear nor heed the love of God get what they are asking for: life writ small, away from God, and short.

This Crossings-style text study analyzes 1) the God-Mary transaction as though Mary (hypothetically) had not believed that there would be a fulfillment of what the Lord had spoken to her; and then 2) the actual God-Mary relationship.

DIAGNOSIS: Mary, Mary (Quite Contrary) (a hypothetical)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Disaster

Absent Mary's faith that the Lord's promise would be fulfilled, we have a case study in familial disaster. Mary is pregnant but should not be. Her life is over before it is begun. Everything was going fine, a husband was in the wings, she could have had a nice life, great kids, but none of that will happen now.

(I imagine many homes—not to mention nations—are torn asunder when things don't turn out right, i.e., when we don't get life the way we want it. Tag: "lovelessness.")

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Doom and Gloom

Sure, there had been an angel and a bizarre message and all, but that (to an unbelieving miss) only made it worse. Getting her hopes up and all, until she came to her senses and realized that she must trust her eyes over her ears. She must have been fantasizing. Yes, that's it. If it sounds too good to be true, it must be false.

(Scripture teaches and argues that the root crisis is our failing to hear, listen to, or believe the God who is always calling us and stretching out his arms to us. Tag:

“faithlessness.”)

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Disappearance

No generations would call her blessed. No generations would call her anything, had she not believed there would be a fulfillment of what the Lord had spoken. The oblivion of death would only have been a final installment of that day her life blew up, when something went terribly wrong.

(All our disappearing, all the declining and desuetude in the world, are aspects of the ruination built into sinful life. Tag: “Hopelessness.”)

Interlude: Love and hope evaporate when faith is amiss. But God has made it his mission (in Christ Jesus his Son) to restore to us the joy of our salvation by re-instilling faith, love, and hope through his Holy Spirit.

PROGNOSIS: RE: Mary All Ears

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God Calling



Remember what God promised Mary. Not merely that she would get pregnant. Not merely that she would have a sterling cover story. Not merely that her life would be memorable. The Lord did not just promise pregnancy or fame or significance. God promised to save her people! God promised to continue to be faithfully the merciful and mighty God who had promised to be faithful to Abraham. God promised mercy. And assigned Mary a role in this, as the mother of Jesus: Jesus, who would reign over the house of David, and whose kingdom would have no end. But not without being opposed—an opposition that would pierce not only Jesus, but Mary's soul too (Luke 2:34-35).

(Tag: "Hope.")

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Mary All Ears

Mary believed. This is the key sentence in this whole long pericope, and it should shape our interpretation. Mary believed, and it counted (see Galatians 3:6) as righteousness, or blessedness. Mary was not just humble. That would be easy. But by the Spirit of God she actually heard the preposterous promise and thought it was so true that she went and told her cousin Elizabeth! "The Lord has remembered his people" was music from Mary's lips to Elizabeth's ears.

(Tag: "Faith.")

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): And He Has Raised Me Up

All the wonderful raising-up actions of the Magnificat came true in Mary as she knew herself "remembered by God." Not "forgotten by God," but "remembered." Mary gave herself with joy (singing, of course!) to her vocation in God, for the sake of the world. Mary loved us! So that she gave herself, and her son Jesus, into the work God is doing to save the world.

(Tag: "Love.")

Author's Postscript: Faith, hope, and love subside holding hands with each other in this sad world. Ersatz temporary gospels offer knock-off versions of one or the other, but nothing true. The hope we have in Christ sets us up to grow new organs, so that—through faith—we can be as blessed as Mary ever was. (Call me Blessed! And You!) Not because we have been clever or strong or look good, but because God is love. That promise is to us and to all.