

Today we are going to turn to a story about Mary. We don't get a whole lot of information about Mary in the Bible. Last week we read from the gospel of Mark and we learned that the birth of Jesus is not mentioned at all in that gospel.

In Matthew's gospel Mary is mentioned in the story of the birth of Jesus but the focus is on Joseph. In the gospel of John, Mary is never called by name. We have to turn to the gospel of Luke if we want any real information about Mary.

Recently I was contacted by someone who was studying in a Catholic seminary and they were doing a research paper on Mary. They wanted a protestant's interpretation on whether Mary was a biblical character that brought division between modern Catholics and Protestants.

I told this seminary student that Protestants don't spend a lot of time thinking about Mary. We affirm that she is the mother of Jesus. We also affirm in our Apostle's Creed that she was a virgin when Jesus was conceived but we Protestants do have debates about what the word translated "virgin" actually means.

"It's said that more European cathedrals were dedicated in honor of Mary than anyone else, including Jesus. But many of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century church reformers thought that too much had been made of Mary. And so, the Reformers, sadly, smashed her images, whitewashed her face from the church walls, and denounced prayer that honored or addressed her. No more "Hail Mary's" for Protestants unless we score a touchdown."

The gospel of Luke begins with the stories of two births. Luke tells us that he is writing this book to Theophilus. I throw that in for those that attended the church retreat in Montreat as that was one of the questions we had to answer from our retreat leader.

We then read about the birth of John the Baptist to a very old Elizabeth and Zechariah. And then we read about another angelic appearance but this time to a young girl named Mary. This angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is favored by God and that she too will become pregnant and give birth to a child she is to name Jesus.

Mary is told by the angel about the pregnancy of her cousin Elizabeth. Feeling very much alone by this news that has been given to her, Mary races to the nearby town to see her relative Elizabeth. It's good to have a companion when you enter an uncertain future.

Mary arrives and then Luke quotes her offering up a song. This is the song that we call the Magnificat. "Magnificat" is the Latin translation of the word "magnifies" that begins this song. Let us hear these words as a guide today of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

### **Read Luke 1:46-56**

In our culture we hear some people proclaim that we need to put the Christ back into Christmas. Usually when that is said they are referring to cups at Starbucks or greetings at Target.

But if we really want to put Christ into Christmas then Luke invites us to listen to what Mary says and her vision of what the world should be like. And it's a whole lot deeper than cups or greetings.

Today we have heard some very powerful and important words from Mary. I cannot help but compare her to the brave women today who are speaking up against sexual and workplace harassment in our culture.

Maybe part of the reason that protestant reformers felt that Mary was given too much prominence is because our protestant ancestors were fearful of the change that could occur through the voice and actions of a smart and courageous young woman.

If women today need a role model of courage and sacrifice, then Mary may be one that we in the church should hold up and make sure we tell her story and sing her song. Mary's words are courageous and challenging. Mary's words turn our cultural norms upside down.

Just listen to what Mary says. Mary sings that the Lord has looked with favor at the lowliness of his servant. Mary sings that the Lord has scattered the proud and brought down the powerful from their thrones. Mary sings that the Lord has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

So, if we take Mary and her words seriously then putting Christ into Christmas means some radical acts. We put Christ into Christmas by lifting up the lowly. We put Christ into Christmas by feeding the hungry. We put Christ into Christmas by lifting up the poor and challenging the power of the rich.

Putting Christ into Christmas means radical transformation. I came across this story that I think gives a good witness to what radical transformation looks like.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njXZUH5hv0w>

Let us be the ones who truly put Christ into Christmas by showing the radical and inclusive love of Christ. By lifting up the lowly. By feeding the hungry. By challenging the power of the rich.

When we do those courageous actions, we are really putting Christ into Christmas. AMEN.

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-Baggott, Casey, [http://day1.org/4401-learning\\_to\\_focus](http://day1.org/4401-learning_to_focus)

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