

So, the angel tells Mary, “*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*”

*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.*

*He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

That all sounds very regal.

He will sit on a *throne*, he will *reign* over the house and there will be no end to his *kingdom*.

Gabriel sounds like he’s describing the next king of the world or ruler of the universe, someone who will live in a huge palace and have servants and butlers.

These words are essentially all that the angel tells Mary, besides the fact that her cousin Elizabeth is going to have a child.

So what I want to know is what happened to Mary between the time the angel greeted her, and the time she sang her famous song of praise at Elizabeth’s house.

There were at least a few days in between the angel’s visit and Mary’s visit with her cousin.

What happened?

Did she somehow get more information about the baby that she was carrying?

Did Gabriel visit her again and give her more information, but that part of the story was just left out of the scriptures?

Something had to have happened because Mary doesn't say she's going to have a king who will sit on a throne!

Quite the opposite.

She says that in choosing her, God has scattered the proud, smashed the thrones of the powerful, and lifted up the lowly.

God has fed the hungry till they're full and sent the rich away with nothing.

This is how God has helped Israel, this is how God has made good on God's promises to Abraham's descendants.

The baby in her womb, the Messiah, he's going to do these things as well, side with those who are poor, powerless, outcast and abused.

How in the world does Mary get to that conclusion when the angel told her that her son would reign over a kingdom?

Mary must have learned something that we aren't privy to.

She was Jewish, so maybe she was taught that the messiah would preference the poor and powerless.

As a poor, young woman herself, maybe she knew this savior would live for her and people like her.

We don't know.

But what we do know is that she was a brave and smart 14 year old.

She just found out she was pregnant, and already she knew this child would turn the world upside down, make the first last, and the last first.

Just having a normal baby is scary enough, the responsibilities and the risks, but to have a baby that you know will challenge the powers that be, I wouldn't have been surprised if Mary wanted to say 'no, not me, thanks anyways.'

I don't want the pressure.

The spotlight.

The responsibility.

The risk and the fear.

Pick someone else.

But Mary chose to say yes, to assume the mantle, to make the sacrifice.

History hung on her response, and she said yes.

Now, Mary's song of power and justice wasn't just revolutionary back then.

Her liberation litany has been controversial throughout Christian history, all over the world.

The Magnificat was banned from being sung or read in India under British rule.

And in the 1980's, its public recitation was banned in Guatemala.

In Argentina, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, women whose children all disappeared during the Dirty War (1976-1983), these women placed the Magnificat's words on posters throughout the capital plaza.

After they did this, the military dictatorship of Argentina outlawed any public display of Mary's song.

When something is banned, that's the signal that we should be paying attention to it because that means it has power.

Rulers don't ban things for no reason, they ban them because they have the ability to influence people in a way that they don't want.

This text still has the power to inspire us today, if we allow it to.

We can domesticate it, spiritualize it, keep it's true message just far away enough so that it's blurry, so that we don't have to take it too seriously.

We can read it as "evacuation theology," as they say... that we are supposed to wait and hope, and pray and God will come through and get us out of any trouble we face.

God will help us escape trials and tribulations. Or.

We can get up close and personal with this ancient song, reclaim it as our own, and allow it to inspire our lives as Christians.

In the past, if someone were to ask me what kind of Christian I am, I might have dance around the question.

I might have cautiously evaded it, saying, well, I'm not *that* kind of Christian.

But next time I'll say I am a magnificat Christian.

'Magnificat' means magnifies, in Latin, and so Mary's song, in which she says that her soul magnifies the lord, is known as the magnificat.

I am a magnificat Christian because Mary's work, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, scattering the proud, filling the hungry, that's also our work.

We are called to undo unjust power structures which keep people from the polls, which keep them in prison, which deny them medical care and education and stable housing and fair wages.

While the moral arc bends towards justice, it requires hands and feet and moral imaginations to do the refracting.

As Meister Eckhard said 600 years ago:

*"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?"*

I am a magnificent Christian because we must remember that we are never alone in these struggles.

We have a sister who, long ago and far away, took a step in courage and in faithfulness, and it turned out to be something far more revolutionary than I bet she could have ever dreamed.

It turned out to be a love that lifts up the lowly and tears down the mighty, and we need to be in solidarity with her.

Now, Jesus gets most of the credit for aligning himself with the poor, I mean in his first sermon in the Gospel of Luke, he said,

‘The Spirit of the Lord... has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...’ (Luke 4: 18)

And of course there are the beatitudes, blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, those who are meek and those who hunger for thirst and righteousness.

But there was someone before Jesus who had to teach him those things.

Someone had to teach him to throw the mighty from their thrones and lift up the lowly and vulnerable.

Someone had to teach him what that means.

Jesus gets the credit for the sacrifice he made, for living these counter-cultural values, even up to the point where they cost him his life.

Jesus gets the credit for being courageous and risky, but before him, there was someone else, who fearlessly said, “yes” when it would have been so much easier to say, “No way, Gabriel, find another empty womb.”

Jesus didn’t become who he was in isolation, he got it from his mom.

Somehow she knew, even before he was born, what God was doing, and how she was supposed to raise her son.

We must remember to give her some of the credit, because she knew, and she still said ‘yes.’

I’ll leave you with this poem written by: Alla Renée Bozarth, called “Before Jesus was His Mother.”

*Before Jesus  
Was his mother.*

*Before supper  
In the upper room,  
Breakfast in the barn.*

*Before the Passover Feast,  
A feeding trough.  
And here, the altar  
Of earth, fair linens*

*Of hay and seed.*

*Before his cry,  
Her cry.  
Before his sweat  
Of blood,  
Her bleeding  
And tears.  
Before his offering,  
Hers.*

*Before the breaking  
Of bread and death,  
The breaking of her  
Body in birth.*

*Before the offering  
Of the cup  
The offering of her breast.*

*Before his blood,  
Her blood  
And by her blood and body alone,  
His body and blood  
And whole human being.*

*The wise ones knelt  
To hear the woman's word  
In wonder.*

*Holding up her sacred child,  
Her God in the form of a babe,  
She said, "Receive and let  
Your hearts be healed*



*And your lives filled  
With love, for  
This is my body.  
This is my blood.”*

Amen.

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