

Mary and Zechariah's Magnificats

Luke 1:46-55, 67-79 by Patty Friesen (Third Advent, Dec. 13/15)

Today, the third Sunday of Advent is Mary's Sunday and we have magnificats aplenty, magnificats galore, as enacted by Kathryn Janzen, our season's token pregnant Mary and George as Zechariah. These scriptures are full of drama, which is why we act them out during Advent and at the Christmas program. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "If we want to participate in this Advent and Christmas event, we must join in the action that is taking place for here the spectator is always an actor. We cannot remove ourselves from the action" (*God is in the Manger*).

We've been acting out Luke's story of Elizabeth and Mary with Robin Neudorf's engaging female statues that reside in her garden – itself a place of living art and contemplation. Joining us today is the gloriously pregnant Mary, the brightest of the three statues, standing proud with one hand on belly and one hand raised in praise. She's been waiting for her turn to come up front. She is a rare figure, especially in church. Renaissance artists refused to paint or sculpt a pregnant Mary which shows us how scandalous and how earthy this female form was in which Jesus came to us. We've sanitized the birth of Christ so much that we've forgotten how human and how earthy it all was. I've never been pregnant myself but people have asked if I was - which is awkward for everyone involved. Being fat is not the same thing as being pregnant!

We have spent these three weeks of Advent meditating on pregnant women as a symbol of what God is doing in our souls and in the world. While the coming of Christ is as intimate as the seeds within our own souls, it is as cosmic as the created universe that also waits for the redemption of Christ.

While meditating on a free-standing sculpture of the pregnant Mary, writer Wendy Wright was led to contemplate the image of the world very much like the photograph of our planet taken by the American astronauts several decades ago – that iconic clear view of the round green, brown and blue earth against the backdrop of the black universe. She says, “I began to see that within our earth, the womb of the world, Christ was also born. This precious planet, this earth is also the place of gestation. All matter is suffused and transfigured by the divine.” (Vigil, p. 54)

French scientist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin sensed this miracle of Christ in creation as well and communicated it in his Hymn of the Universe...I bless you, matter and you I acclaim: not as the pontiffs of science or the moralizing preachers depict you, as debased, disfigured – a mass of brute forces and base appetites – but as you reveal yourself to me today, in your totality and your true nature. You I acclaim as the inexhaustible potential for existence and transformation wherein substance germinates and grows. I acclaim you as the universal power, which brings together and unites, and in which they all converse on the way of the Spirit. I acclaim you as the divine milieu, charged with creative power, as the ocean stirred by the Spirit, as the clay molded and infused with life by the incarnate Word.

From the cosmos to the embryo, Madeline L’Engle says, “there is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the incarnation.” Vanderbilt University poet and mother Kate Daniels integrates her understanding of the incarnation with babies’ diapers in her poem titled Inscrutable.

Opening the diaper, each morning
Becomes the third day, when God
Created the earth, late
In the afternoon, mountains

And continents firmly in place,
The waterways swinging between,
He turned his attention to the lowlands, malodorous
And steamy, the swampy
Muck of undersides mutating
Already into something new,
Future home of the uncivilized
Creatures who will sleep in their own
Dung and arise unfazed, a dazzling
Smile ripping through the bars of the crib, sunlight breaking
Like tears on their slithering bodies and their unhaired heads.

Poet Brian Doyle also captures this sense of the divine in children in his poem

God.

By purest chance I was out in our street when the kindergarten
Bus mumbled past going slow and I looked up just as all seven
Kids on my side of the bus looked at me and I grinned and they
Lit up and all this crap about God being dead and where is God
And who owns God and who hears God better than whom is the
Most egregiously stupid crap imaginable because if you want to
See God and have God see you and have this mutual perception
Be completely untrammelled by blather and greed and comment,
Go stand in the street as the kindergarten bus murmurs past. I'm
Not kidding and this is not a metaphor. I am completely serious.
Everyone babbles about God but I saw God this morning just as
The bus slowed down for the stop on Maple Street. God was six
Girls and one boy with a bright green and purple stegosaurus hat.
Of course God would wear a brilliantly colored tall dinosaur hat!
If you were the Imagination that dreamed up everything that ever
Was in this blistering perfect terrible world, wouldn't you wear a
Hat celebrating some of the wildest most amazing developments?

Neither the familiarity of the Christmas story nor the season's festivities should
prevent us from realizing the scandal that God came into human history as a newborn.
By entering human history in this way, God showed us that unless we too become like
little children, the least of these, we will not enter the kingdom of God.

Kate Daniel's Prayer for My Children:

I regret nothing.

My cruelties, my betrayals
Of others I once thought
I loved. All the unlived
Years, the unwritten
Poems, the wasted nights
Spent weeping and drinking.
No, I regret nothing
Because what I've lived
Has led me here, to this room
With its marvelous riches,
Its simple wealth-
These three heads shining
Beneath the Japanese lamp, laboring
Over crayons and paper.
These three who love me exactly as I am, precisely
At the center of my ill-built being.
Who rear up eagerly when I enter,
And fall down weeping when I leave.
Whose eyes are my eyes.
Hair, my hair.
Whose bodies I cover
With kisses and blankets.
Whose first meal was my own body.
Whose last, please God, I will not live,
To serve, or share.

Amen.