

Adam lay ybounden  
    Bounden in a bond;  
Four thousand winter  
    Thought he not too long

And all was for an apple  
    An apple that he took  
As clerkes finden  
    Written in their book

These words date back to an English poem from around 1400. They sound a little strange because they were written in Middle English, some time before the English language had taken the form it has today. Most likely these words were part of a song performed by minstrels.

They relay the account of Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve eat of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in the Garden of Eden. Medieval Theology believed that they would have remained “in bonds” (along with all people who died in “original sin”) until the crucifixion of Jesus.

We begin here because we encounter another song today. Mary's Song. The Magnificat. This is the first of four songs we hear in the opening chapters of Luke. We heard one on the first Sunday of Advent - the Prophecy of Zechariah. We'll hear another on Christmas Eve when the angels appear to the shepherds. And still another when we hear of the baby Jesus being presented at the Temple.

But this song is the first of them and perhaps also the best known: Mary's song of praise to God. Here, Mary shows us what praise sounds like - our souls literally *magnifying* the Lord. But her song contains much as well. She gives thanks (*he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant*). She sings of what God has done (*He has shown strength with his arm, scattered the proud, brought down the powerful, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry, and helped his servant Israel*). And she puts all this in the context of the story of God's relationship with her people (*He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever*).

As well, major themes of Luke's gospel are introduced in this song - God's favor and of the "lowly," for instance. But in broad strokes, Mary's song is focused on the fulfillment of God's promises to God's people beginning with Abraham. It speaks right out of the ancient expectation of her Jewish people that God would keep these ancient promises and repair the damage to creation brought by Adam and Eve - the damage in which her and all people from the beginning remain bound. The Magnificat is a song of restoration of the order of creation by God through the reversal of what constitutes power, where it lives in the world, and what it is truly for. This reversal is magnified by the singer of this song - a 13 year-old girl.

It is a radical thing Mary is saying, and it's made more so by her probable age and her social location in that society. We believe she was so young because of what we know about local marriage customs at the time. But as a female child of that age, Mary was likely well aware of the lowliness of her station in the social life of Judea.

Luke emphasizes Mary's "lowliness" right from the outset of our reading: We hear that Mary "went with haste" to Elizabeth. These words echo other local customs at the time in which a pregnant single woman (even one who was engaged) could be stoned to death. What's more is that in this visit to Elizabeth and the omission of any explanation for it, Luke is quietly implying some kind of family connection between Elizabeth and Mary. Remember Elizabeth's husband was a priest at the Temple. Luke implying the family connection marks Mary as from a priestly family. An unwed pregnant woman from a priestly family would not have been stoned. "She would have been burned." (LSB p1697 margin note).

Mary is young and vulnerable to begin with. Her pregnancy puts her in danger, making this visit to Elizabeth (brave or foolish). This deepens the sound of her song in our ears then, for the Magnificat is not about the danger she is in; it is about the faithfulness of God who keeps God's promise to the world through the life of a young girl - through the lifting up of the powerless whom all generations hereafter will call blessed.

Radically upsetting/upside-downing the social order of her time and place is one thing. But notice that she is speaking of what God has DONE, has accomplished already. The words 'will' and 'shall' on this list of God's actions are conspicuously absent. None of this divine action is waited-for or expected any longer - it is here, it is done, it is past. God's deliverance from our bonds has happened, is happening NOW! In this song, Mary is stating the presence, the NOWness, of what has been long awaited by her people, bringing it into the present. This is good news indeed! Is it hard at all to imagine these words tumbling out of her with a melody?

This sort of tumbling seems to actually characterize our gospel reading. John the Baptist, who's well on the way inside Elizabeth, leaps at the sound of Mary's greeting. At that sound, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, and words begin pouring out of her.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And blessed am I that the mother of my Lord comes to me. And blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord!

Now, you might think you hear this from me every other week (and you probably do) but I think it bears repeating. The sound of the word  **blessing**, so similar to the sound of the French word  **blesser** (meaning to *wound* or *injure*), forms a connection in my ear that I just can't seem to shake. But doesn't it make some sense of all this tumbling? A better word for it here might very well be  **pouring**. Elizabeth and Mary, in recognizing and naming the blessings of God, they can't seem to help but pour forth praise and thanksgiving. That "recognizing" for Mary begins cascading into song.

## Recognizing.

Each of the four songs in these first chapters of Luke, “recognition” of God turns into speech, description, and revelation of God’s action. In these four passages, that recognition opens into song.

- Zechariah’s skepticism at Gabriel’s news about a coming son named John, turns into silence, then **pours forth** in song at its fulfilment - a song in which Zechariah recognizes and names God’s faithfulness, mercy and remembrance of his holy covenant.
- The shepherds, recognizing the truth of Gabriel’s message, witness the **pouring forth** of “Glory to God in the highest heaven.” I imagine Mary sitting in the stable with Jesus in her arms, listening to them as they **poured forth**, making known “what had been told them” by the Angels.
- And at the Temple, eight days after his birth, when Jesus is presented: Simeon who, guided by the Spirit, takes Jesus in his arms and **pours forth** his thanks to God - “Let now your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people...”

It’s this (blessing recognition) that opens, perhaps even painfully, the mouths and hearts, souls and melodies that **pour forth**, magnifying God and singing God’s salvation. And what could the world need more of on this Fourth Sunday of Advent than the opening and pouring forth of what these words say?

Where do you see the ancient bonds of Adam and Eve not yet loosened, in your life or the life of others?

What is the work of God you struggle to recognize?

Where might you be recognizing God's deliverance from these bonds?

What is that recognition blessing in you, opening for you?

How is it pouring forth from you?

Or is it?

If not, what's stopping it?

Looking around at the world this week, even around Red Lodge, what has opened in these days before Christmas is easily stopped. The need in this town for low-income housing is staggering. The need in this town for emergency housing is overwhelming, especially this time of year. The signs of mental illness and emotional strain are everywhere these days, and sources of support are tapped, if not bled dry. The **lowliness** many feel is confirmed at every turn in the world we live in and the truth of God breaking in is seen only slant - out of the corner of our eyes - if it's seen at all.

But breaking-in this truth of God is. It's coming. It's here. In the corners and unseen places (in surprising places) that truth is breaking in, breaking open, pouring forth. In the ignored parts of life - in stables and fields, in untraditional families and in broken homes, in the hospital beds of the sick and dying - eyes are widening in recognition of God's coming, God's breaking in and God's breaking down of all that is held bonded and bound.

May this recognition soon dawn on us, with Simeon, Zechariah, the Shepherds and Mary herself, in the work God has done and comes to do, that we may pour forth our own praise and thanksgiving | and sing, along with Adam and Eve and all those waiting for God's restoration,

Blessed be the time  
That apple taken was!  
Therefore we may singen  
*Deo gratias!*

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

1:38 "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Confidence, inevitability but hope.

Mary went with haste... danger of being stoned to death. Priestly family she would have been burned.

O control, but she sets out...

Relation to Elizabeth... Luke: Priestly line...? 13

Blessed are you! Blessed the fruit! Greeting. Blessed is she! Fulfillment

My soul magnifies the Lord - literally (blesses?)

All generations will call me blessed

51-55? Reversal remembered mercy/Abraham

**Blessed, opened, poured out...**

Song reveals key themes in Luke (ancient promises)

Mercy - Elohim (Greek - Theos) here God acting to bring justice

Justice - YHWH (Greek - Kurios) here Lord God acting toward creation

"Faithful Jews had been waiting for God to keep ancient promises and repair the damaged creation."

Micah remembers God's promise (amidst hopelessness 5/1)

Bethlehem - David | Ephrathah - fertile (hungry will be fed)

Ruler from "little clan of Judah"

**whose origin is from ancient days...**

Labor... brought forth

That we might stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord

He shall be great... the one of peace...

Give ear, stir up your might, save us

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we might be saved (Fulfillment)

How long? the bread of tears, drink in full measure