

## “A Song of Hope”

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Luke 1:46b-55 = The Beginning is Coming

**E**ver been to an old-time Gospel hymn sing?

One of the tricks of the trade is for the song leader, especially on a song with many verses, to break it up by having various portions of the congregation sing different verses. Between verses the leader would shout out, “Let the children sing this verse.” Then adults ~ then the left side ~ then the right side ~ sides in terms of sanctuary geography, not political leanings!



Another verse: “Everybody sing!” The next verse: “All the men!” And finally: “Let the women sing!”



That is where we find ourselves today. In our spiritual preparation, our pilgrimage through Advent, this last Sunday before Christmas, we turn to the women’s voices. “And now the women sing!”

Plenty of precedents: the song of Hannah, when she was overjoyed that God had answered her prayers for a child; the song of Mariam at the Red Sea; when Sarah laughed to hear of her own miraculous pregnancy. Now the song of Mary when she met Elizabeth and they rejoiced together at their impending miraculous births;. Yes indeed, “And now the women sing!”

**S**o we’re almost to Christmas ~ the last Sunday of Advent. Advent brings into focus many things ~ our hectic, busy lives, our impatience, the tension between preparedness and serenity. Most of all, Advent is about exploring what it means to wait, to wait for God.



Mary is our paradigm of waiting, preparedness, serenity and most of all patience ~ the miraculous pregnancy ~ the long months of gestation ~ her faith and obedience. Waiting. Waiting. Patience. Patience.

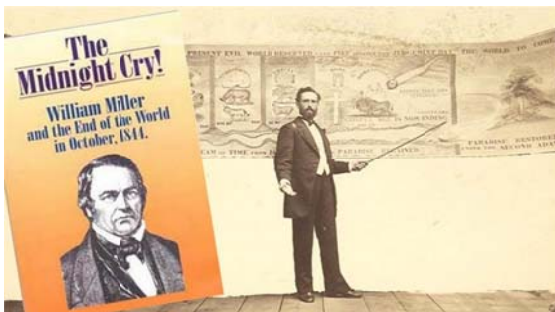
Mary's glorious song, the *Magnificat* comes at precisely the point in our waiting for Christmas when we can hardly stand it any longer. We cannot sit still or relax because "there are no more shopping days" until Christmas. But *Mary's Song* tells us powerfully and pointedly that patience is paying off. In *Mary's Song* we get a foretaste of all that is to come ~ a premonition of God's future. God has a plan and that plan is a person resting in Mary's womb.

Anyone disappointed that the Mayan Apocalypse failed to happen? Anyone disappointed the Y2K bug didn't bring on the breakdown of society as we know it? There have been prophetic movement after prophetic movement which have bet the farm that the Bible contains coded predictions of the exact time of the return of Jesus and the end-of-days ~ the Millerite movement of the 1800's, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hal Lindsey and hundreds of others.



The *Rapture Ready Index* is at an all-time high, meaning Jesus' return to punish all us evil-doers is imminent. (Yes, Virginia the Rapture Ready Index is a real website ~ you can look it up) However, by that *Index* Jesus should

have affected a sword-drawn return numerous times over the last years. What all these hundreds of so-called "Christian" movements have in common is that their predictions of a date for the end-of-times have all been 100% wrong. Not 99.99% wrong. Not 98% wrong. Completely and absolutely wrong. Every one of them.



But there is something else about which they have also been 100% wrong ~ the true message of Jesus. We have heard their interpretation of the Jesus missive over and over, turning it into a message of fear and vengeful wrath: "*Repent! The end is near!*" But the message of Jesus, the message of Mary, indeed the whole of Scripture is quite the opposite:

**"The Beginning is Near!"**

And what does that beginning mean? It all depends on where you sit. As Mary sings so dramatically:



**“God has put down the mighty from their seats,  
and has exalted the humble and meek;  
God has filled the hungry with good things,  
but the rich God has sent empty away.”**



This is not just a once and for all prophecy. These didn't just end in the first Century. This is the beginning. The principalities and powers today still know that God's reign means their rule is at an end. A few years ago at this point just before Christmas, China decided to crack down on the growing Christian community. The news story was entitled: *“Chinese leaders still*

*suspicious of religion, party document shows.”*

Dateline: Beijing:

“Chinese leaders issued an order ... quietly directing universities to root out foreigners suspected of plotting against the Communist Party by converting students to Christianity.... despite small signs of religious tolerance in recent decades, China's ruling officials retain strong suspicion of religion as ... a threat to the party's authoritarian rule.”<sup>1</sup>

Authoritarians have always had real problems with Christ's community. From First Century Roman emperors, thru the Middle Ages up thru the Soviet Union and China today, the pattern for authoritarian rulers is to suppress Christianity. Why? Because: Christians only recognize a much higher authority than human governance. Authoritarians try to usurp that authority. If they cannot usurp it then their desire is to destroy the community of God. God's network calls all human institutions into question.

God “bringing down the mighty from their seats” and “exalting the humble and meek” is not just something in the past, limited to Jesus' day. This is still happening today ~ God-signs in a broken and longing world. The powers still know that God's plan means their days are numbered. They know this and consequently they fear and try to suppress God's kingdom at every opportunity.

**I**t can be so confusing!! When Jesus was born, he fulfilled none of the traditional expectations for a royal heir at all. Yet he did fulfill everything the prophets had foreseen.



- A king born in a stable, not a palace.
- Along with his parents, soon to be refugees.
- A prophet, a moral leader, born out of wedlock.
- Born instead among the poorest of the poor in the most backward province of the most backwater nation of the day.
- Witnessed by powerless shepherds.

All according to God's plan.

None of the traditional expectations, but the signs are still there for those who have the eyes of faith to see. When this man-child baby Jesus grows up:

**“the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”**



The signs are there. God is doing something marvelous in keeping with God's character and promises throughout Scripture. God brings hope to the hopeless. Peace to the war-torn. Love to the loveless. Now joy to the joyless.

In Mary we get a foretaste of the coming kingdom. Know this for sure:

**“The Beginning is Near!”** The beginning of the realm of God is among us ~ in a newborn infant in a smelly, cold stable. The breaking of God into our world is happening. The event we have been longing for, straining for, waiting for ~ is now! Mary saw it coming, and sang!



## PRAYER AFTER SERMON

Great God, ruler of all creation, the entire universe is filled with your praise; you are doing a marvelous thing in Jesus, in keeping with your character and promises throughout scripture. Help us to wait with serene patience just a little longer for the announcement that the one to transform the cosmos has been born. And with Mary let us sing. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/chinese-leaders-still-suspicious-of-religion-party-document-shows/2012/12/18/706637f6-4856-11e2-ad54-580638ede391\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinese-leaders-still-suspicious-of-religion-party-document-shows/2012/12/18/706637f6-4856-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story.html)