

2024 12 22 – *Starry Nights: Star Dust*

Scripture: **Luke 1:39-55** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

A young woman from Nazareth in Galilee, probably about 14 or 15 years of age, has just been told by the angel Gabriel that she is about to conceive a child.

Mary, as she is called, is engaged to a man named Joseph. But, as she told the angel, she has “never been with a man.” She is a virgin. The angel told her that her baby will be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. That her son will be called “The Holy One of God.”

We don't know whether Mary shared this news with anyone else. We don't know if she told her parents, her fiancée or maybe a trusted friend. It's very possible she kept everything to herself. All we know is that within a few days, Mary left Nazareth and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah. She was going to visit her older cousin, Elizabeth who was already six months pregnant.

Today's scripture reading describes the moment when Mary arrives at Elizabeth's home. The baby that Elizabeth is carrying leaps in her womb and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately she knows that young Mary is carrying their long-awaited Messiah and Elizabeth calls her cousin Blessed.

The rest of today's reading is actually the lyrics to a hymn. According to the story, Mary starts speaking in poetic verse praising God for this incredible gift.

Honestly, I find it hard to believe that the words that were read this morning actually came from Mary in that particular moment. It's more likely they were the

lyrics of a hymn sung by Jesus' followers or the creation of the author of the Gospel of Luke. But I like to think that these words do reflect Mary's understanding of her place in the world: "For you have looked with favor upon your lowly servant, and from this day forward all generations will call me blessed." I like to think that Mary believed, even in those earliest days of her pregnancy, that she and her baby were blessed. That despite being pregnant out of wedlock, despite worrying about what her fiancé or her community might think or do, Mary knew her baby was special.

Of course, I believe that all babies are special. That all babies deserve to be loved and cared for by doting parents. That all children have the right to grow up in a safe and healthy home and community. That all youth should be allowed to grow and thrive and to reach their own potential, whatever it may be.

But the reality is that we live in a world where children are growing up as orphans because of war, violence and disease. We live in a world where children are living in refugee camps or starving to death because of climate disasters. We live in a world where a 9-year old girl was killed at a German Christmas market, where gun shots were fired at a Toronto Jewish girls' school and where thousands of children have been killed in Gaza in the last year.

By contrast, Mary lived in a time of peace, but it was a peace created and sustained by violence. She lived in a time when the Roman Empire had taken over the lands previously held by the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. She lived in a time when Roman soldiers were everywhere. She lived in a time when

her relatives and neighbours were losing their land and livelihoods due to unfair taxes and unscrupulous loan sharks, where the rich were getting richer and the poor, poorer.

So I like to believe that Mary was not only a loving and compassionate mother, but that she had a love for her community and her country. I like to believe that she had a yearning for justice for all; that she really would have prayed to God saying:

You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones;
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things
while you have sent the rich away empty.

I like to imagine that Mary was the one who instilled that same sense of justice in her son, Jesus. That she really believed that through her son God was going to do amazing things; that through Jesus the world would be turned upside-down.

In our Advent Study this week we talked about love, the kind of love that Mary shared: “A love that is intimate and tender, like a parent’s love for a child, but also fierce and just, lifting up the lowly and bringing the powerful down to size.” This is also an excellent description for Sacred Love, the love that we experience through the Holy Mystery. Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and our theme

is Love. It is good to remember that love can manifest itself in many different ways. It's good to remember that sometimes we need to be angry or fierce in order to be just. *Starry Nights: An Advent Devotional* <https://www.saltproject.org/advent-store>

In our first hymn today we sang the words, “earthly passions turn to dust and ashes in its heat consuming.” We were singing about the power of God’s love, how it is able to heal those parts of our lives and our world that are hurting. But I struggled with this line because it seemed to imply that there was something wrong with “earthly passions,” that they needed to be turned to ash. I agree that passions like lust, greed, gluttony and jealousy can lead us into trouble, but earthly passions like anger, frustration and a desire for justice can also give us the motivation and the courage we need to make a difference in the world.

Jesus was human. He was the son of Mary. In fact that is the reason for Christmas, the celebration of Jesus’ birth as a human being. Jesus knew what it was to have “earthly passions.” There are even stories in the gospels of times that he showed anger, sorrow and even frustration. Being “of the earth” is not a bad thing. In fact, all of God’s creation, on earth and beyond, is made up of exactly the same components. Earthly, or not, we are all made of the dust of stars.

Our Advent Study booklet describes it this way:

Stars explode at the end of their lives, sending their stuff out into space, forming large clouds of dust from which new stars form...Over time, this cycle of stars forming, exploding, and forming again has created all the

elements around and within us. Every atom of oxygen in our lungs, calcium in our bones, carbon in our biceps, iron in our blood was created inside a star long ago, before Earth, before the Sun.

Starry Nights: An Advent Devotional <https://www.saltproject.org/advent-store>

We are indeed star dust, our earthly bodies are made up of the stuff formed from the death of stars. And so is all the rest of God's creation. We are therefore, called to care for our own bodies and all the other bodies that are a part of our world and our universe. We are called to love ourselves, our neighbours and all of creation. We are called to love every child and every creature born on this earth. That is what it means to love God, to love the Holy Mystery, to love the Cosmic Christ.

We are called to love with an intimate and caring love, like Mary's love for her unborn child and we are called to love with a fierce and just love, like Mary's love for her world. May we all have the courage to speak and to act with the love of Mary, with the love of Jesus, with the love of the Holy Mystery.

May it be so. Amen.