

Sermon – Luke 1:46-55
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Grace Lutheran Church
Mary, Mother of Our Lord – Year B
15 August 2021

“Full Sails”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It shouldn't surprise me anymore, but it does. I have a high school classmate who loves Christmas. So much so that his favorite thing to watch is, apparently, the *Best of Andy Williams Christmas*. This is something he does not only at Christmas, or near Christmas, but all the year through. I know this because he posts on social media while watching Andy belt out all the Christmas hits. I'm always surprised to learn that my friend is watching the *Best of Andy Williams Christmas* in the middle of the summer. There may be a best time to watch this show, but *that* best time is not *this* time. It's out of order, incongruent. Then again, maybe my friend is on to something. Here we are this morning, in the middle of August, listening to Mary sing a carol older than any of Andy's. Her Magnificat catches us by surprise this morning, interrupting what would otherwise be five weeks in a row spent in John 6, listening to and learning from Jesus, the Bread of Life. Today happens to be the Feast of Mary, Mother of Our Lord, or, as some of our fellow Christians refer to the day, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To be sure, we sing the Magnificat throughout the year at Evening Prayer, but it nevertheless evokes Christmas. And what is *that* doing in the middle of August?
2. Perhaps Mary's song is just what we need in this season. Surely the words of Isaiah ring true today: “the shame of God's people was double, and dishonor

was proclaimed as their lot.” In our sin and suffering, we are as broken as God’s people were long ago. Driving home from vacation on Friday – and yes, we’re home for good now – it seemed as if the world’s problems, already immense, had been magnified. The recent United Nations report on climate change reveals that we are running out of time to take steps to mitigate catastrophic climate change, change for which humans are unequivocally responsible, according to the report. Meanwhile, Afghanistan spirals out of control this week as the Taliban made gains in anticipation of our departure from the war-torn region. We were returning to a home, and a community, devastated by violence. Our community mourns the death of Chicago police officer Ella French, shot during a routine traffic stop, killed while simply doing her job of protecting people. Our community mourns the death of fifteen-year-old Melissa Rendon, assaulted, abused, and abandoned to death. Where is our hope when creation itself groans under the weight of our sin, when the lives of young women are taken far too soon?

3. Our hope is sung this morning upon the lips of another young woman, a daughter of the people of God to whom Isaiah spoke long before. While Isaiah’s words today begin with shame and dishonor, the prophet quickly pivots to promise: “they shall possess a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs.” Finally, in the fullness of time, God fulfills this vow. God comes to Mary, young and lowly, little to be noticed by the powers of the day. So has God always entered the world. Her lowliness is not worthlessness; she is just the person for this holy calling, just the woman to become the Mother of God. Filled with the Spirit, the very Word of Life taking on flesh within her Womb, she sings. The divine fecundity cannot be contained. She *sings*, giving praise and glory to the mighty God who has come down to her level to level the playing field, casting down mountains and filling in valleys. God has done, will do, great things. God will show mercy, but also strength; power enough to cast down the powerful. God will show abundance; fullness enough to feed the hungry, so full that there is no room left for human pride or hoarded

riches. God has done, is doing, will do these things for us, even in the face of our ongoing sin that spawns cultures of violence and destruction. Mary knows such evil and suffering, but God knows Mary. Known, chosen by God, Mary sings. She magnifies her God, the Lord of heaven and earth who is also her baby boy. As Amy Lindeman Allen writes, the “importance of Mary comes not in what she has done.” No, Mary teaches us instead that our true purpose as those who bear Christ in this world is to point to what God is doing through her son, Jesus.

4. Earlier this week, while still on vacation in Door County, we went to visit friends who took our family out on their sailboat. Not knowing a tack from a jibe, I left the sailing to those who knew what they were doing and sat on the deck with my sons. We watched as the sails, expertly handled, sprang to life, filling with wind that was already present, moving, now pulling us forward as spray crashed over the bow. The sail, of course, didn't create the wind. The wind was moving, blowing howsoever it chose. On its own, the sail was lifeless. But unfurled in the breeze, it blossomed with purpose. The sail, you could say, was a magnifier, making visible the work of the wind. This, I think, is what Mary does. It is God who is at work, Mary who magnifies. The Lord who chooses, Mary who says yes. The Christ who grows within her, Mary who gives good care. Following the horrific death of her son, which she watched with a mother's breaking heart, Mary is among those who wait for the wind, the outpoured, onrushing Spirit, that would fill her sails again, charting a new course for creation. Mary's vocation as the Mother of Our Lord is unique, but she is our teacher nonetheless. For we, too, have been filled by Christ who lives in us. We, too, daily stick our finger into the air, seeking to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit that our lives would be given purpose, meaning, direction. We, too, know that we could never choose God on our own. But when called, chosen, we, like Mary, say yes. We, like Mary, magnify. We unfurl our souls to catch the Spirit.

5. We do so as those who know that the salvation birthed into this world is one that works through death. We join Mary's song as those who stand at the foot of the cross, reminded of this world's sin and convicted of our own. We do so as those who stare clear-eyed into the suffering around us, who know that we are past the point of being able to help or save ourselves. But we do not despair. We do not give in. We die with Christ and, wonder of wonders, we are reborn as children and heirs of God and agents of grace. You never know where or when the wind will blow. But it will, for our God is the God who keeps promises, often in the most surprising ways, as Mary could certainly attest. The pastor and author Walt Wangerin writes, "This is what grace does. It comes as a surprise; it lingers in the rare atmosphere of love, since love itself is breathed by it and love by it is made manifest. This expression of love is 'ecstasy' in the Greek meaning of the word: to 'stand outside' the ordinary." Pastor Wangerin died last week, having spent a lifetime reminding us that even rags become radiant in the hands of the Christ. We give thanks for the ways he added to the church's song in his writing and teaching.

6. Mary's song continues today throughout the church, this vessel called to catch the wind of the Spirit and magnify God's work in the world. It is true that the problems of this world and in our souls compound upon themselves, magnifying suffering and despair. But we, church, we know the song. It is the song of God's victory over death in the midst of death, the song of the triumph of life and love, the song sung first over the waters of creation and then given voice by this teenage mother who believed what any sensible person would have dismissed as nonsense. It is the song that was seemingly silenced on Calvary's cross, but Mary's boy is the Word of Life, and he would not stay silent long. In him you live, witnesses to the truth and magnifiers of the good news that this world so desperately needs. The lowly will be lifted, the hungry will be filled, the dead will be raised, and peace will burst forth forever. God *will* do this. As the spirit catches you, fills you, today: Sing. For Christ is born of Mary. Perhaps it's surprising to be reminded of this in the

middle of the summer, but God is nothing if not surprising. Just ask Mary.
Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your
minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.