

“There’s Something About Mary”
The Fourth Sunday of Advent, St. Francis Church
The Rev. Richard M. Simpson, December 18, 2011

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For a while, Hathy and I were really into this television show called “Madmen,” set in the very early 1960s and very well done. Whether or not you’ve seen the show (or remember living through those days) perhaps you’ve had the experience of watching “Leave It To Beaver” and thought, as I sometimes have, “Really: those were the *good* old days?” For whom exactly? Ward Cleaver? Gender roles were pretty rigid, to say the least, and from this vantage point it can feel kind of embarrassing. And in the greater scheme of things, it really wasn’t that long ago. It turns out the “good old days” had some really bad shadow sides, especially if you happened to be female, or black, or gay. In that socio-

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Miriam’s Song—the *Magnificat*—is about what is possible for all human beings, female and male, young and old—with God’s help. *Her soul magnifies the Lord*. Think about what that means. I think it means something like, with God we can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. I think it means that when we do a little thing in the name of Christ it ripples out to change the world, magnified to the nth degree! It turns out that there is a way older tradition that Miriam draws on for strength as she sings this new song to the Lord, which is really a riff on an old song: Hannah’s Song. (That song can be found in I Samuel 2:1-10—sung at the birth of Samuel, who was a gift from God, as every child is a gift from God.)

Mary pre-figures Pentecost: the day when Holy Spirit breaks down all walls that divide. For the Holy Spirit there is never “them” and “us” - only us beloved children of God. Mary models for us what it might mean to let the Holy Spirit blow through our lives and make us new in spite of the dominant culture’s expectations. She knew, as her forebear Hannah knew, that God cares about justice and cares especially for the poor. She knew that the deck is stacked and that in this world kids attending inner-city schools or growing up in the third world do not have the same opportunities that a kid going to a place like Wachusett has. God loves us all, but God wants the playing field to be more even, and so somebody has to take the side of the underdog. That is what the liberation theologians mean when they speak of God’s preferential option for the poor and I think Mary is doing liberation theology in the *Magnificat*.

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There is nothing passive or submissive about Mary. And while she may not have a starring role in the Bible—her role is crucial in the deeper, wider, tradition. Roman Catholics may well say too much about her, but Protestants have not yet said nearly enough. Mary says “yes” to God and the world is changed. She is Christ-bearer, which is precisely the ministry that you and I are called to: to make room in ourselves for Christ to be born; to take on our flesh.

The life of faith is not without its questions, struggles, uncertainties and fears. *But with God, all things are possible.* God comes to us, as to Mary, not because we are perfect, but because we are willing to open our lives to the radical transformation that the Spirit brings. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas we look to Mary as one who shows us what is possible, even now. May Christ be made manifest—and even magnified—through us, for the sake of this world.

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