



“Here I am’, Said She”

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Scripture (NRSV):

Luke 1:26-45

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”^[a]²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”^[b] ³⁵ The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my

womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Sermon:

I am gonna throw a term out there to all of you, that you may or may not be familiar with...”the hermeneutics of suspicion”.

(Dictionary.com) defines hermeneutics as: the science of interpretation, especially of the Scriptures.

And the hermeneutics of suspicion: Paul Ricoeur has said that all **hermeneutics** involves **suspicion**; that is, the text presents us with a challenge to believe that *the true meaning of the text emerges only through interpretation*.

And feminist theologians have this to say: In the case of Christian **feminist theology**, the primary application of a feminist **hermeneutics of suspicion** has been focused on the Bible. The strategy is to interpret a biblical text and its Christian receptions, ***mindful that both have been largely shaped by male perspectives without attention to those of women.***

In other words, you can look at a bible story and say: who wrote this, whose voice and perspective is being presented, who is this for, who is this in support of?

I’m telling you, it is an interesting exercise in studying the bible! Because it begs you to ask, Who is not speaking, who is not heard? Whose perspective is being left out?

Who is being drawn as “the bad guy”, and who is represented as the good one?

If you refuse to read Scripture literally, and I refuse to do so...then these questions must rise up in you.

And it is faith, coupled with questions and study, that gives me patience with Scripture! Because I am perfectly aware that some of the voices missing from great swathes of our sacred texts, are the voices of women.

But not in Luke. Not today. No way.

If you can...look at Mary, (and look at Elizabeth) with fresh eyes. (I know I am indebted to the visionary speech of Harriett Tubman, "Ain't I a Woman", for some of my ideas about Mary)

Try to let go of the myriad Christmas card images of a girl in blue and white, looking spotless and serene, with an otherworldly holiness glowing about her. Maybe she was aglow, maybe.

But this text begins with Mary confused by, and then arguing with, the angelic messenger. She is having a conversation, asking her questions, making her points, seeking clarification. She is not vapid or passive. She has a voice!

And it is after her questions, then there is this; **her resounding affirmation of her participation** in God's amazing work.

"Here I am", she says.

The prophet Isaiah said it, too.

Through the ages, many prophets and apostles have said it, too.

Mary is standing as the greatest YES in the long line of the witness of prophets and apostles of God who said YES.

Without Mary, there would be no Son of the Most High, who would reign forever on the throne of his ancestor David.

In the gospels that tell us the stories of Jesus, this story is crucial for some of us!

Now we see: Jesus' Mom was a mighty witness, a faith-filled visionary and prophet of God.

And please, don't ever say in my presence, that Mary was just "the vessel" of God.

The God I honor with my life and work, in my preaching and in my teaching, never imposes, never coerces, never takes over another person or uses them as if they were a tool, a piece of meat, an automaton.

There is no abuse in the relationship between Mary and her God.

God asks, Mary agrees and participates.

She is not simply a passive thing.

She is a free agent, participating in the mighty transformative work of God renewing and restoring all things. When the angel Gabriel promises Mary that she will be “overshadowed by the Most High” it is the same word used when Jesus is transfigured on the mountain, chapters later. She will shine like the sun, she will be transfigured with the glory of God, just as her son is later in the gospel.

And lest I get angry here over the thousands of years of trying to make Mary seem strange and unreal, as the “virgin mother” can seem impossibly out of touch to real mothers and real women...

I want to reaffirm, first and foremost, that Mary says YES to God, and to being a ***co-creator AS A MOTHER***. This is not something that men can do. It is part of the evolution and continuation of our species. It is no small thing to be a mother.

Motherhood is important! Pregnancy is hard work! Birth is exhausting, and risky. It is a mighty work to bring life into the world.

And then, to sustain and nurture a small human being takes years and years of dedication and hard work. Teaching the fullness of our values, our culture, our norms, as well as our dearest hopes and our visions...this is all hard work.

Mary said yes. She did so without any man. Without the presence or domination of patriarchy in any of it. Her virgin status may seem strange to us, if we are literal minded and baffled by science.

But Mary’s freedom is in no way infringed upon by men, since no man is involved.

Mary and her God meet and commune and create. Not Mary and a man.

Mary’s YES is entirely her own.

Elizabeth also said yes. (Age notwithstanding!)

They didn't submit passively, or unwillingly.

As God has always worked, and always works, there is a creative and dynamic, exhilarating and terrifying experience of communion.

These women are full of hope, and energy.

Participating in creation is hopeful, is joyful, is exciting. You cry out, you sing, you shout. Elizabeth does, full of hope and possibility. She is the first to recognize that what is promised will come to pass, in Mary. With Mary's YES, with her hope and her determination.

Last week I spoke to you and said:

"Beauty is still everywhere. As change is everywhere.

As **God's eternal surprising power and presence** is always here, there and everywhere. In the past, in the present, in the future which we cannot know.

Look, listen, stay awake. **Look for beauty everywhere.**

Look for God's changing power in unlikely, in unexpected places. Look, listen and rejoice in God's power to change everything."

Through this text in the gospel of Luke we are shown, once again, the surprising power and presence of God manifested in relationship with these women.

These are prophetic women, visionary women. You can be, too. They are agents of change and hope, and you can be as well.

God's eternal power and presence is not simply on the page, but in the lives of all people who are willing to be changed, and through their lives, let the world be changed forever.

Changed when any of us say YES to co-creating with God.

YES. YES. YES.

Halleluia. Amen.