

ADVENT WEEK FOUR

December 23, 2019

Mary's Son(g) of Protest and Hope

Luke 1:46-55

(God) has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. Luke 1:52-53

How is God at work in the world, if at all? Mary's song of protest and hope aligns her freshly-minted pregnancy with deeply ingrained understandings of divine activity from the biblical traditions. She protests a world structured by imperial power and marked by hierarchy, patriarchy, wealth-disparity, and privilege. She names this world as contrary to divine purposes and in need of transformation. She yearns for God to scatter the proud, bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, feed the hungry.

This protest is her hope that, as the Psalmist says, "God will arise" with merciful power to act faithfully again in ways consistent with claims about past divine activity. She recalls the divine promise to Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth, not just the privileged and powerful. Her language evokes Moses' song that celebrates deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It echoes Hannah's vision of a similar world marked by transformative justice, revamped societal structures, and practices that ensure resources for all. The weak are strengthened; the poor become rich; the hungry are fed; the needy are supplied.

All of that seems very hopeful, yet two factors rain on the parade. Millennia after Hannah and Mary articulate such protesting and hopeful visions, their words resonate so much with our own protests and hopes. Their (ancient) worlds are very reminiscent of ours. What has/is God (been) doing in the world and where?

And what sort of hope does Mary's son(g) offer? What happens to the scattered proud, the brought-down powerful, the dismissed rich? Is this vision of the transformation of societal structures and practices punitive or benign, death-bringing or life-giving, vindictive or merciful, revengeful or redemptive? Does it simply imitate and reinscribe imperial structures but with a divine emperor, or does it truly offer a new world with good life for all?

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