

## THE SONGS OF ADVENT: I "THE MAGNIFICAT"

*Luke 1:46a, Isaiah 61: 1*

In a time of general disillusionment, there are those today who think that the light of God has flickered, failed, gone out, that there is no longer any one great luminous idea to guide mankind, no clear shining, no holy light to dispel our darkness. That today the life of the world must be lived out under artificial lights, strobing, shifting, often sinister. God is seen as one author put it, "a corpse" hung in the sky, twisting, slowing in the wind and the world viewed as a brassy, brawling bistro, "the human zoo," signifying the same old "nothing" that it has always signified. So we drink our Christmas liquor, smoke our "whatever", and meditate on the "post-Christian era" that has swiftly turned into the "post-human" one where hijackers cut off the thumbs of their hostages and the world is a place of terror --right?

No! Wrong. Even ridiculous. This "bistro-view" of life, the "zoo-view", the "sewer-scene" (call it what you will) has always been an option. It has been around since Cain killed Abel. It is nothing new. So take this view if you want to see history from the *cloaca maximus*. So down the drain with it, all the way, to the bitter sludge, the dregs. It's up to you.

But there is another point of view and another direction: shining still in the "Gospel According to Mary":

*Magnificat Anima Mea Dominum*

My soul doth magnify the Lord"

or better

"Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord."

(Luke 1:46a)

That is how St. Luke's sources heard Mary quoting Hannah's song, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary whose Hebrew name comes from (*Hebrew word*) meaning "to be bitter, to be sad". And God knows the woman had every right to be that Christmas, after all. She could have preached a cynical Gospel. She belonged to a captive people and a servant class. Do you want to guess why there was "no room" in the inn? Because they were "undesirables". Rights were few. Work was hard, taxation heavy, food was scarce. To the great world outside her own house "Mara", "Mary" didn't exist. She was a non-entity, an invisibility, an unknown, in a country that was nothing but a back alley-way for Imperial Rome. So she was bitter, was she? And preached a bitter, unhappy, sad gospel, did she? A drunken song of the down and out, the under dogs -- right?

No, wrong again. It was a Godspell of the humble poor -- that is true. That, I am convinced, is why the early church seized upon and quoted her gospel, for there were so many humble, so many poor. That is why they loved Mary, elevated and adored her -- not out of foolish clerical (or for that matter, Freudian) reasons -- but because in her humility and poverty she was one with the earth's poor, and in her faith in the God of history, she lifted them and made life look up and sing. It is no wonder that by the time of the medieval church, she was their charismatic heroine, their leader, for she stood for hope, based on a sturdy faith. For men and women of little or no stubborn faith -- Christmas may be strangely -- a hopeless season -- the mortality rate goes up -- the suicide rate goes up -- Christmas may be a neurotic's field day -- (Mara -- also means "obstinate" and that she was)

So, that gospel of Mary -- hear it again. It has helped and healed generations of those who were without hope.

Luke records it like this -- "Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord, rejoice, rejoice, my spirit, in God my Savior."

Now then -- you tell me where do you suppose Jesus the man got his faith in the God of history? From his mother's gospel? Partly, I'm sure. Where do you think came his call for honest goodness? From his mother's gospel? Partly, no doubt. Where his tenderness toward the plain people? Where his concern for the sinful, the hungry, the poor and humble of the earth? From the proclamation of his mother's strong convictions?

He saw himself as Suffering Servant to the world, did he not? As fulfilling an old dream, as establishing a new hope, a new order for men and women of good will. Did a part of that come from her? It would seem so.

In the Nazareth synagogue that Sabbath day he opened his ministry by reading Isaiah. You recall -- he said, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Isaiah 1:1)

**It was almost as though his mother's gospel were being preached again and as long as it continues to be proclaimed, again and again, God is not dead -- he is alive in the kind and generous hearts of honest and humble men and women.**