

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Amen.

This morning, we take a break from our regular Lectionary readings to celebrate the Feast of Mary, mother of Jesus. When we remember the saints, it is not to admire some ethereal, superhuman perfection; it is to remind ourselves and find encouragement in what we have in common with them: our common humanity, our common struggle, our common call, and our common blessedness.

“The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them *
and delivers them from all their troubles.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted *
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.”

Those are two verses from Psalm 34 that we didn't read together this morning, but which I think have something to say about Mary, and about us.

Mary, when confronted with an angel, responded with the words of the many other prophets who went before her: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord”. Mary goes on in her response to that unsettling visit by a heavenly messenger with a song of praise and promise. Our song of praise for this morning’s service was a song of Judith; our reading from Isaiah was another song of hope, of assurance of God’s ready help. All of these prophets, Judith, Mary, and Isaiah sing about God’s presence in their lives. They have all, in some way, answered the call to bear witness to God’s grace toward God’s people; and that is our call, too.

The psalmists and prophets often speak of God’s ear being open to the cry of God’s children, particularly those children who are disadvantaged in the world. Those whose spirits are crushed, the widow, the orphan, the worker oppressed with poor wages, the stranger, the alien, the infirm - God draws near to all of these and all of us when we are brokenhearted, whether because of the inequity we see in the world around us, or the personal hurts and weariness we experience simply because we are mortal beings living in a broken world. When the suffering cannot cry out for themselves, we are called to take up the prophetic work of crying out for them. So Mary does not only sing of herself being blessed to bear God’s living Word into

the world, Mary sings of the inequity she sees in the world around her, and of God's promise to make right those wrongs.

God's mercy is for those who reverence God
from generation to generation.

God has shown the strength of God's might;

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

God has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;

God has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.

Mary's song cries out the plight of the lowly, the powerless, and the hungry; her song reminds them of the promise of God, of God's mercy, God's strength against adversity, God's overturning of the entitlement of the proud, God's thwarting the power of the self-seeking, God's emptying the hoards of the greedy. Mary sings of a God who is near, who listens, and who acts. But Mary also, by her response to the angel, reminds us that the God who acts, acts through us.

Mary was a witness to God's grace. Mary bore within her the living Word that would speak of peace and justice and love for all people. And God asks us to do the same. Our passage from Galatians tells us that God has sent the Spirit of Christ into our hearts, so that when we cry out, we cry the Word of love that is Christ incarnate, God's love made flesh. Mary literally bore God's love made flesh in the holy child, Jesus; all of us, the body of Christ, spiritually bear God's love made flesh as Christ's Spirit dwells in us.

With the Spirit of Christ in our hearts our ears, like God's, will become open to the cry of the brokenhearted. With the Spirit of Christ in our hearts, we act for righteousness and justice and we live lives governed by love and mercy. We reverence the God of blessing and promise; and we bear witness in praise of God's powerful presence in our lives.

Turn from evil and do good; *
seek peace and pursue it,"

Psalm 34 continues. Mary made a choice to bear witness to God's grace and God's action in the healing of the world and the saving of God's children. Mary did this in body, but also in spirit; we are called to do the

same, by living in such a way that God's presence comes near to the brokenhearted through us, and that God's justice and mercy are brought about as we strive for equity between the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the hungry, the proud and the lowly.

In many ways, unremarkable, startling, ordinary and extraordinary, God asks us to play our part in the work of the world's redemption. We are asked to choose, day by day, minute by minute whether we will bear into the world the Spirit of Christ and be witnesses to God's grace. It is work we cannot do of our own strength or of our own will. So we like Mary and the prophets before her can only respond, "Here I am," and let God's Spirit so fill us that God is constantly incarnate among us. May it be so. Amen.