

Advent 2 (MP-1) (2018)

*Sing of Mary, pure and lowly,
Virgin mother undefiled,
Sing of God's own Son most holy,
Who became her little child.*

So, begins Hymn 117 in the Episcopal Hymnal.

This morning I want, in fact, to do what this hymn directs: to sing a song of Mary.

In churches reformed in the 16 century -- for us, the Anglican Church -- Mary does not get the press she receives in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

But that does not make her unimportant or dispensable. She remains an absolute necessity.

No Mary. No Son of God in flesh made. No bridge joining heaven and earth. No salvation of the world. No hope and help for the individual struggling from some addition or sin.

For this reason, I want this morning to sing a song of Mary, the God bearer, **Theotokos**, as she is called in the Greek church tradition.

In particular, I want to speak to you on the subject of **Mary and the Word of God**

. . . 'Word of God' here having a double meaning, as I will go on to show.

We turn first to Mary and the Written Word, the Bible.

Today, after all, is Bible Sunday, a day on which we give thanks to God for His written revelation and for all the blessings that have come about as a result of having an open Bible since at least the time of the Reformation of the 16th century.

But, what about Mary and the Bible? Did she in fact know the Written Word of God? Of course, it goes without saying that for Mary that Word would have been the Hebrew scriptures, our Old Testament.

Back to our question? Did Mary know the Bible? I want to suggest that not only did she know it, she knew it well.

A friend of mine is of Sicilian descent and has family members who are devout Roman Catholics. The older ones, she says, are very reluctant to read the Bible.

“Why should I read the Bible? The priest tells me everything I need to know,” they say.

This generation, you see, grew up at time when the Bible was something of a closed book in the Roman Catholic Church. Thankfully much of that reluctance has gone away. Roman Catholics are now encouraged to read the Bible, as I understand it.

Returning to Mary. Clearly, for Mary the Bible was an open book, not a closed one.

How do I know? What are the clues? The first comes from her response to Gabriel’s message, the message which said she was to be the mother of the Messiah.

It is obvious she knew what Gabriel was talking about. The hope given in scripture of a coming King out of David’s line was her hope.

I would want to argue further that her knowledge of scripture enabled her to say yes to God’s call quickly and decisively. How so?

Well, in this way: God’s faithfulness in the past as detailed in the Bible served as a powerful incentive to trust Him in the present. She could therefore say: **“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.”**

The same thing is true in our lives. The better we know the scriptures, the better we know the character of God, and thus the better able we are to put ourselves confidently in His hands. To entrust our very souls and bodies to Him.

We have found one clue that Mary knew her Bible. Is there another in today’s reading?

I believe there is. It is the song that came pouring out of Mary's mouth while she was at her cousin Elisabeth's house.

I am, of course, referring to the *Magnificat*, which gets its name from its opening words in Latin: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my saviour."

This song is saturated with scriptural allusions. One not steeped in the Bible could not possibly have come up with it. ///

One additional thought: Mary's Magnificat is an act of worship . . . worship which flows from a knowledge of the scriptures. She remembers God's promises, she sees that God is now fulfilling those promises, and she is moved to praise Him for His faithfulness, to worship Him.

That reminds me . . . Once a lady coming out of one of our services here at St. Luke said to me:

"Since I have started reading the Bible and going to Bible study, I get so much more out of your sermons and worship."

Well, I think that is often the case. Familiarity with God's Word encourages and enriches our worship of God.

It was true in Mary's life, and I think if we put it to the test, we shall find it to be so in our own lives.

Before I close, I want say one additional thing about Mary and the 'Word of God'. This time I am using "Word of God" in a different context.

The "Word" I am thinking of now is the **Word Incarnate**. "Word of the Father now in flesh appearing," we sing in one of our Christmas carols.

Mary, I want to suggest, was not only a reader of God's Word, she was a **bearer of God's Word**. She brought this Word – the Incarnate Word -- to the world. In her case, literally.

You and I, I want to suggest, have a similar task. We too are called to bring the light and hope that comes from the Incarnate Word to the world, beginning with those who live in the shadow of this church.

Do you know anyone who is suffering at this time? Or who has lost hope?

Do you know anyone who needs a Saviour, at any level?

Do you know anyone who is alone and unloved at this time? ///

If so, your task, my task, is to be a bearer of the Word Made Flesh. To bring His light, His love, His message of hope to this person and everyone with whom we come in contact.

May Mary's response to God's call be our response: "**Be it unto me according to thy word.**" Or, more simply: "**Here I am. Use me.**" ///

This morning I sing a song of Mary.