



Bursting into song is something that can happen when you are overcome with joy. Spoken words at times are simply not sufficient to express the deepness of our feelings. Think of Maria on the mountains in Austria at the beginning of *Sound of Music*: “The hills are alive with the sound of music...” Or perhaps yours is a quieter humming expressing peace and contentment with life or the project you have in front of you.

It shouldn't surprise us to hear the *Magnificat* sung at Evening Prayer. Evening Prayer marks the end of our work day. It is a time to stop our labor and begin to wind down into a time of rest. It is a time of gentleness, peace and also a time when we are reminded that God is in control. Our lives are in God's hands.

In the verses prior to our Gospel reading today, Mary has been visited by the Angel Gabriel who announces to her, a young unmarried woman, that she has been favored by God and will bear a son whose name will be Jesus. Puzzling message to a poor girl living in Palestine. Mary asks Angel Gabriel: “How can this be?” and the Angel tells her the Holy Spirit will come upon her and thus the child she will birth will be holy. Special. Set apart. Way beyond anything that Mary had ever known or imagined. No one in her village could have helped her understand what she had been told.

Perhaps that is why the Angel told Mary that Mary's cousin Elizabeth, long believed to be barren, had also conceived and was in the sixth month of her pregnancy. If Elizabeth could be pregnant after so many barren years, then perhaps what the Angel was telling Mary could also come to pass. For nothing will be impossible with God.

Don't you imagine there was a bit of a pause as Mary took what Angel Gabriel said to her before Mary answered? Wait a minute, just a minute, while I take some time to think about this! Mary might have responded. What will this mean to my engagement to Joseph? she might have wondered. Since the penalty for adultery or fornication was stoning to death, a little bit of anxiety would not have been unwarranted. Why me? could have been another fear running through her mind. Can I say no to an Angel of God? We don't know any of this for the very next sentence after Angel Gabriel reminds her that nothing is impossible with God is Mary's response: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

And Mary goes running off to visit Elizabeth. Perhaps to find out if what the Angel Gabriel had told her was true. Perhaps to ask Elizabeth how to deal with an unexpected pregnancy. Perhaps

Micah 5: 2-5; Canticle 15 (Song of Mary); Hebrews 10: 5-10; Luke 1: 39-55

for some assurance about how to respond to critics. Certainly there had to be some critics. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph planned to dismiss Mary quietly because she was pregnant and Joseph knew the child she carried was not his. Angels to the rescue again! Joseph believed the Angels who visited him and took Mary to wife.

But back to Mary and Elizabeth. In the middle of the telling of their visit, Elizabeth says to Mary: “And blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” Great is her faithfulness might be what we would say or sing.

Mary responds with the *Magnificat*. A song of praise acknowledging the source of her gladness: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor upon the lowliness of his servant.” Mary knows that God is the source of what is right about her world. It is God who has called her out of obscurity into a position of prestige. The one who was chosen to bear a son that we call Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one of God.

Mary’s song echoes that of Hannah, mother of the great prophet Samuel. In 1 Samuel Chapter 2, Hannah is leaving her child Samuel with the priest Eli. Hannah had been barren for many years and had desperately prayed year after year at the temple for a child, promising that if she did bear a child, she would dedicate a son to the temple. Hannah’s song begins with “My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exulted in my God.” Much like Mary, Hannah knows that God has favored her. God granted her wish for a child. Hannah, even as her heart must have been breaking to honor her promise to God to dedicate the child to the temple, breaks into song recognizing and glorifying the God which made her dream come true.

There are other instances in our Bible where the people sing to God, praising a God who is faithful. A God who asks much and delivers much. A God who raises up leaders in times of need. With God, nothing is impossible. With God, the unexpected can bring enlightenment and even deeper faith and trust in God as our creator.

The following story caught my ear and offers some insight into what we read today.

A young mother was out walking with her two boys when one of them said to her: “Mom, it’s great to be a mammal!”¹ Somewhat startled, she started to ask him why, when the other young son, scoffed and said, “No, it’s better to be a reptile!”

In only the way young children can be, the two boys started an argument with voices growing louder and louder as each tried to make their point and win.

Finally, the young mother was able to calm them down and ask her son, “Why do you think it is good to be a mammal?”

“Well” he said, “most mothers who aren’t mammals leave their offspring after the eggs crack. You’re on your own. As a mammal, I have you to look after me until I grow up and can take care of myself.”

Laurie Uttich is that mother and wrote an essay for “*This I Believe*” about her interaction with her sons over whether it is great to be a mammal and why.

¹ **Adapted from** “This I Believe”, December 21, 2012 (thisibelieve.org/essay/92240).

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Ms. Uttich goes on in her essay to speak about packs. What she believes in includes being part of a pack. We gather together at times like Christmas or Easter or funerals or weddings to share our lives with others. We gain strength from each other. Our joy is multiplied because we are together. Our pastoral ministries- the Lay Eucharistic Visitors and others- connect those who are not able to be physically present with us. Those who cannot be physically present are not forgotten but rather remembered with each telephone call, each visit, and each card remembering a birthday or an anniversary or a “get well, we miss you”.

Ms. Uttich says, “I believe those acts- those people in our packs who help us pick up the pieces- are the answered prayer, the miracle. And because of that, I believe my son, Zack is right: It’s cool to be a mammal.”

God is like that mother. God cares for us and will not leave us alone to wander aimlessly through life. God keeps nudging us to listen for the message that God loves us, will we or won’t we. Now we can turn our backs on God and refuse to love God back. We can refuse the hand that reaches out to us. We can sit grumpily in our corner, sulking because life is hard.

Or, we can be like Hannah, like Elizabeth and like Mary that believe that nothing is impossible with God. Yes, it may take us a while to process the news or to accept a helping hand or to believe that with God all things are possible.

And we can be like Sarah who laughed upon hearing that she, in her old age, would bear a child. God can take our laughter. God understands our doubt and our fear and trembling when we are asked to go out on a limb for the Gospel: the good news that God loves us, each and every one of us. And maybe we too, when we accept that love, will break out into song. And this I believe: It’s cool to be a child of God, loved as only God can love us. **Amen.**