

Advent 4 B 2011

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Canticle 15 (Magnificat)
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

There are just a few things
We can say for certain
About the young woman named Mary
Whom we know mostly from Luke's gospel,
And some from John's,
And a little bit from the other two gospels.

There is just a little we can say for sure.

From today's gospel we know
She was a Palestinian Jew.
She was engaged,
But not yet married,
To a man named Joseph.
She had not,
in the words with which a Godly Play lesson
describes the annunciation,
“done anything that would make her be able to have a baby.”

These things the text can tell us.
And the text can show us one other thing.
She was a prophet.
Her radical proclamation,
In the Magnificat,
Of a world transformed
Into the image and likeness of God's justice,
Puts her in the company of Hosea,
Isaiah,
And all the fierce, wild company
Who dare to speak for God.

Gentle Mary, meek and mild?
Maybe she was.
But that is not the girl the text shows us.

Instead, she is a theologian,
Taking the words of God and pondering them,
Asking questions,
And then making difficult, life-changing choices

Based in what she hears from God.

That's the Mary we see today,
If we can see her.

Scripture shows us this Mary,
And she's very different
From the quiet girl in blue
We've often been shown.

She is not a tame virgin.
She cannot be contained either within our images
Or within the pages of scripture,
And for two thousand years
Since she brought forth her first born son,
And laid him in a manger,
And then wept at his grave,
And then caught fire
When the Holy Spirit
Descended on her again at Pentecost,
For two thousand years
She has appeared where she will,
In grottoes and splendid chapels
And random pieces of French toast.

Because, of course,
Ever since she burst onto the scene
With her courageous action,
With her magnificent yes,
Yes to life, yes to God –
Ever since then,
We have been projecting onto her
All our needs, our hopes,
And our fears.

We have told her to be gentle.
We have told her to be pure.
We have made her be quiet,
And told her what she did was good,
But suggested that after all,
The hard work was done by God.
We have made her too small.

And,
We have asked her to be perfect,
To listen to us whenever we call,

To comfort us in every sorrow.
We have asked her to reign in the heavens
And inhabit the earth.
We have recognized her as great and powerful.

From a girl who had the courage
To say yes to God's wild plan,
She has become the queen of heaven,
The refuge of sinners,
The mother of mercy.
She is robed in the stars of heaven
And crowned with the moon.

For some,
She is the only bright spot
In a world of darkness.
For others,
She is insignificant,
Even a joke.

Many faithful Christians
Live out their lives
And never think of her except at Christmas.
For others, she is the beginning and end of the day.

Perhaps she already has a place in your home.
Perhaps that place is ironic,
Or perhaps it is heartfelt.

And perhaps you never think of her,
Except on days like today.
Maybe you look at her here,
Serene, benevolent,
Commanding,
And you wonder,
What is she doing here?
Or maybe you wonder,
What is she saying to me,
Or asking of me?

What is she asking of you?
Is she inviting you,
If you never have,
To get to know her?
Is there a place in your life
Where Mary might find a home?

She is the star of the sea.
Have you ever found yourself lost,
In a chartless emptiness
Where everything tossed up and down,
And you thought you might drown?

Mary comes to those who lose their way,
And shines a light to guide them home.

She is the refuge of sinners.
Have you ever found yourself
Face to face
With a huge wrong that you have done,
That cannot be undone?
Have you found yourself facing that wrong,
Knowing that though forgiveness may lie in the future,
The present is bleak?

Mary hides those who cower at moments like this.
She shelters them under her cloak,
A cloak so vast that there is room for all of us –
Or at least those of us who are sinners.

You do not have to believe any of this.
But many do,
And find that their lives,
When touched by her,
Are made more sweet and whole.

She cradles the woman who weeps
As she watches over her suffering child.
She takes the hand of the man
Who struggles with depression.
She comes to the lonely child,
Bringing laughter and hope.

I know these things are true,
Because you, and others like you,
Have told me so.

And after I had heard enough of you
Tell your stories of her goodness,
My eyes were opened,
And I recognized her.

I remembered that she had been my friend
When I was a little girl.
My friend,
And, for reasons I could not understand,
My hero.

Nobody told me then
She was a prophet.
Nobody showed me she was a theologian.
I did not know
She could be the Queen of Heaven.
But she waited for me,
As she waits for us all.

But is this alright?
Is it safe to call her by her many names,
To call upon her in prayer,
To fall down before her
When she appears in glory?

This is, perhaps,
A time to trust,
And take a risk.

Just as God will never fault us
For being too generous,
So I believe that God will not fault us
For responding with awe
when we encounter in Mary
So much love, courage, and compassion.
God is waiting, it has been said,
For us to perform a single act
Of beauty and courage. *
When Mary performs that act,
she brings God into our very midst.

How could we not respond,
With love,
And then, perhaps,
With a courage of our own?

We need her now.
These times call for love,
And courage, and compassion.

Might this be the time

To take a risk like hers?

Look for her at work in the world.
See her standing among us,
Working wonders in our midst.
Take her into your heart,
If this is the time,s
And see what wonders
She might work in you.

* Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*