

Christ in the Womb

Luke 1:26-38, 46b-55

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Mary said,

*“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!
In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.
He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.
Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.
Holy is his name.
He shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.
He has shown strength with his arm.
He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.
He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
remembering his mercy,
just as he promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.” (Luke 1:46-55, CEB)*

[\[Photo of Ieshia Evans\]¹](#)

She’s not who they think she is.
And so she stands tall,
back straight,
arms crossed,
defiantly testifying to a different world
while facing the armor, weapons, and soldiers of the same state power
that killed another black body before her.
She has a six-year-old son.

She was told to move off the street.
She’s not moving.
She’s not talking.
She’s taking her stand,
poised, peaceful, and powerful,
blown by the wind,
her dress swaying in the breeze.

¹ Jonathan Bachman, “Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge,” *Reuters* (July 9, 2016), <https://widerimage.reuters.com/story/taking-a-stand-in-baton-rouge>.

Her name is Ieshia Evans,
and she was arrested and jailed soon after this photo was taken.

“Here I am, the Lord’s servant,” said Mary,
“may it be with me according to your word.”

“This is the work of God!
I am the Lord’s vessel!”
wrote Ieshia on Facebook, after her photo went viral.²

Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord!”
Ieshia wrote, “Glory to the Most High.”³

They’re not who people think they are.
They will not fit inside the boxes that have been custom-built especially for them.

God enters the world not in a spectacular display of shock and awe
but in the place that historically has been among the most vulnerable for any human life:
the womb of an unwed teenager.
A teenager, that is, living in occupied territory far from the center of power.
God enters into this world as a speck, a promise, a whisper,
in the womb of a young woman
singing freedom songs about the new creation within her.

What do you expect when you’re expecting?
What do you expect when you are expecting God to take up residence?

In the first century Ancient Near East, Rome made decisions and took actions
that benefited the upper-class aristocrats
while undermining the peasants’ means of survival.

The aristocrats’ political and economic control of grain distribution
produced marked social inequality.
Who got what and how much was closely related
to how much rent and taxes that the aristocrats demanded.
As peasants starved, the aristocrats stored grain
until they could sell it at a higher price.
They sometimes diverted the land that the peasants used for food
to generate cash crops to support their particular, refined tastes.
The result was that the people working Rome’s breadbasket,
the people who ploughed, planted and harvested
the crops distributed throughout the Roman Empire,
they didn’t have enough food locally.
When the situation was dire, peasants would leave their land
and either move to cities, hoping for government support,

² Alexandra, Kerry, “‘I Am a Vessel’: #BlackLivesMatter Muse,” *BBC News* (July 11, 2016),
www.bbc.com/news/36766799.

³ *Ibid.*

or move in with relatives tending sheep or cattle.
This isn't an ancient story.
This story is as familiar as corrupt politicians
and wealthy Canadian and American corporations international trade agreements,
reaching international trade agreements that wind up
dispossessing Mexican peasant farmers of their land
and forcing them to choose which hard life to live:
move to overrun cities or migrate to a country that will spend billions to keep them out.
Migration by poverty.⁴

And so, as Mary sings her lullaby of revolution
to the whole new world growing within her,
she was not speaking figuratively, metaphorically,
about some time in the future, when all will be well.
No, Mary was speaking politically, straightforwardly,
about the concrete economic issues she and her people faced
and what her liberating God was doing in the midst of them.
Growing inside of her was a world
in which she – a poor peasant girl but a servant of God --
is lifted up and given a great task to do,
a world in which the proud are scattered, and servants are invited,
a world in which rulers tumble from their golden thrones
and the humble are lifted up;
a world in which the hungry are filled with good things.
but the rich are sent away empty.

She's not who people think she is:
she's not Mary, meek and mild, safe and serene,
a prop for your nativity set,
to be seen and not heard.

No, she stands tall,
back straight,
arms crossed,
her body testifies to a different world
while the armor, weapons, and soldiers of the same state power
that enforces law and order on the backs of her people
and will hunt her son and then crucify him.

Her name is Mary.

She's not moving.
She's not talking.
She's taking her stand,
poised, peaceful, and powerful,
blown by the wind,
her dress swaying in the breeze.

⁴ David L. Blach, "Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46b-55) and the Price of Corn in Mexico," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136:3 (2017), 651-665 [accessed [EBSCOhost](#), December 18, 2020].

Her name is Ieshia Evans.

She's not who people think she is.

In an interview, Ieshia talked about people's assumptions of her based on that one viral photo.

"I've had people who see the picture,

and they have this idea in their head of who they want me to be," she said.

"And when they get a glimpse of who I actually am, they don't like it.

When people hear the way I speak,

they're usually like, 'uhh, this is not what I thought.

We thought you were just about peace and holding hands!"⁵

When she was asked about how people

would remember her in that photo, Ieshia said,

"I *think* I will be remembered as a peaceful protester

who saw injustice going on and took a stand.

But I'd *like* to be remembered as a revolutionary."⁶

In an op-ed, Ieshia wrote about what caused her

to leave New York to attend the protest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

following the police killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.

That's where she was photographed.

She writes:

*When Ferguson, Baltimore and other protests broke out,
I would make selfish excuses.*

*I couldn't travel. I had to work in my job as a nurse,
because I had to pay the bills.*

I remember the guilt of feeling that I should be there.

This time, enough was enough. I had to do something.

*Too many people are being slaughtered by those
who are employed to serve and protect us.*

It is becoming the norm.

Our government is not doing anything for us.

So we're going to have to do something for ourselves.

Baton Rouge was enlightening.

It opened my eyes.

I had been sleeping for years.

I have been sleeping and now I'm awake.⁷

⁵ Jones, Ja'han. "2 years after her iconic photo, Ieshia Evans wants to be remembered as a revolutionary," *HuffPost* (July 16, 2018), www.huffpost.com/entry/two-years-after-going-viral-ieshia-evans-reflects-on-her-iconic-protest-photo_n_5b3bbefde4b09e4a8b28129f.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ieshia Evans, "I wasn't afraid. I took a stand in Baton Rouge because enough is enough," *The Guardian* (July 22, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/22/i-wasnt-afraid-i-took-a-stand-in-baton-rouge-because-enough-is-enough>.

Mary was an unwed teenager living in an occupied country far from the center of power.
Ieshia Evans is a registered nurse from Queens, New York.

What do you expect when you are expecting?
What do you expect when Christ dwells within?

The Christmas story is about God taking up residence in the flesh
and all the risk that comes with it.
It's the same risk that God takes when he takes up residence in us.
It's the risk of embodying,
the risk of being fully human, fully vulnerable, fully open.
It's the risk of saying yes to God and taking what comes.
For those of us with privilege and wealth,
it means willingly using and losing both in the new world that is being revealed.
God coming into our world and taking up residence
lacks the pomp and the circumstance associated with kings and presidents.
No, we don't need to do something fantastic, incredible, extraordinary
so that God will dwell with us.
We just have to be willing to say yes to bearing Jesus in our flesh
in the midst of the ordinary, mundane, and the everyday.
Like Mary.
Like Ieshia Evans.
It is then when God transforms our humble places into sacred spaces,
vessels for the divine to be born into our lives and into our world.

*Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming,
and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed;
nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!'
For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21, NRSV)*

And there she stands,
the powers cowering before her.
The wild wind of God blows through her,
her dress sways in the breeze.
She's a young woman, bearing Christ.
When God chose to take up residence among us,
this is where God first chose to dwell,
Christ in the womb,
born again and again and again.

"Here I am, the Lord's servant," said Mary,
"may it be with me according to your word."

"This is the work of God!
I am the Lord's vessel!"
wrote Ieshia.

What do you expect when you are expecting?
What do you expect when Christ dwells within?

You are the Lord's servant.

You are the Lord's vessel.

In the name of Jesus,
 may it be with you according to God's word.