

Whatever else might be happening anywhere in the world,
whatever the emperor might be planning in Rome
whatever King Herod might be up to in Jerusalem
whatever prayers and sacrifices the priests might be offering in the temple
the only thing of real consequence is happening here.

In an unnamed town somewhere in the hills of Judea two women,
each of whom is carrying a child of great promise meet and sing.

Unnoticed by men of power, ordinarily without name or voice,
Elizabeth and Mary sing of blessing from the God who has noticed them.
They have been heard, remembered and blessed in every generation since.

Related to one another by birth, they have been drawn together on this day into
new relationship, connected now by God's acting in them, to transform their lives and
their futures, and the future of the whole world.

The angel Gabriel is the one who ever so gently set up this meeting, when he told
Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, "who was said to be barren," "in her old age has
conceived a son" Elizabeth is in her sixth month.

Announced by an angel, this pregnancy, too, must be from God and for God's
own mysterious purpose. So Mary has hurried down from Nazareth in Galilee to Judea in
the south, to be with Elizabeth, to do just what they are doing now, to sing into being this
new community of blessing.

It takes a community to hold and celebrate the good news of God's favor; and the
news itself creates community. Mary, Elizabeth and John form the very first community
to contemplate and celebrate the news of the coming birth of the Holy One, the Son of
God. Together they are a welcoming and wondering container for the presence of the
Holy that has entered fully into creation in a human being.

It begins here with Elizabeth's song of welcome and recognition, and John's
dancing in her womb for joy. Mary is newly with child. Elizabeth knows far more than
she could have seen or imagined by looking at her. What she knows about Mary and the
child she bears has come to her by the Holy Spirit, that fills both Elizabeth and John,
even in the womb.

These women sing. Their language is poetry, song, not prose. Poetry and song
taking us into a dimension outside the ordinary, cut loose from strict logic, the common
order and rhythms of speech. They cut us loose from the fixed order of human society as
the powerful have shaped and controlled it. In poetry and song there is a spaciousness in
which hope in the justice and peace of the realm of God can freely circulate.

Their songs connect them with each other, and with all of history, past and future. Mary sings of generations to come that will call her blessed. Her song comes to her from Israel's own history, grounded in the song of Hannah, mother of Samuel, who also sang of God's reversal of power in the world

casting down the proud and lifting up the lowly
filling the hungry while the rich learn to hunger—for God's justice and peace.

The action of singing, breathing in deeply, singing out from the center of our being, gives more power to the words, fills us with more courage, confidence, and joy.

In the Church, down through the ages, Mary's song has become part of our evening worship, in Evening Prayer and Evensong. We sing it then as darkness gathers around us. We sing it into the gathering darkness and dangers of the coming night, into the darkness and dangers of the world and of our own lives. We sing it with Mary in trust and confidence in the reality of God's justice and peace, even as wars, grinding poverty and hunger continue.

Mary is young, but she is not naive. She knows the effects of poverty and oppression. What is more, both her son and Elizabeth's will be executed. Luke knows this. So does everyone who has heard the song that Mary sings. And yet, we sing that song with her, because we, too, know the power of God to transform not only her life and ours but all human society.

As we gather, the Holy Spirit is in us and among us--gestating, bursting forth in poetry and song, bringing light and life. God still takes what is small, insignificant, the acts of love, the communities we bring into being, to show forth God's love. To turn the world upside down.