

**Psalm 89: 1-2:** “Your love, O LORD, forever will I sing; from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness. For I am persuaded that your love is established for ever; you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.” *Amen.*

## **Introduction**

A gray winter evening ended in a depressed steel town in Pittsburgh, and the fall semester of my last year of seminary wrapped up. Then contractions started. A first-time mom, I had nothing previously in my life to prepare me for this moment. Yes, I took the necessary classes; yes, I read every book (I’m an enneagram 5, if we could, our babies wouldn’t be born until we’ve plumbed the depths of ACOG). Yet, as the contractions began that Monday night, my life was changing. Forever. The event that was barreling at me like a freight train was one I’d have to experience as it came in waves, in pain, in water and blood, in my body breaking. Daniel could not walk with me or protect me; I had to do it alone...I, on behalf of my unborn son, would wage a campaign against death, and my body would be the battleground and I’d never be the same again.

And the only solution was to stand and fight  
And my body was bruised and I was set alight  
But you came over me like some holy rite  
And although I was burning, you're the only light  
Only if for a night<sup>1</sup>

In the act of bringing forth life, a woman will grab death by its face and fiercely declare: my life for this one. When labor comes, when the urge to bear down swells, there’s nothing else to do but submit to the event, to enter what feels like chaos and the blindness of darkness. The warrior woman and the ferocity of motherhood will be summoned, and she will stand and fight to remind death once more: life wins. Even if I die here and now, life wins.

## **Luke 1:38a**

“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’” (Lk 1:38a).

Mary, a young virgin, will take on the burden of this battle in her own body. In our gospel passage, Luke tells us the story of the announcement that Jesus will be born. After receiving Gabriel’s announcement that she—a humble and poor woman of no status—will conceive when the spirit of God comes upon her, Mary submits herself to this divine request. She will bear in her body the stigma of being a young, unwed mother and the threat of the law therein.<sup>2</sup> The task she undertakes in her submission is one that will not

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<sup>1</sup> Florence and the Machine *Only If For A Night*

<sup>2</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez *Luke Belief A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Louisville, KY: WJK, 2010. 21. “Mary will have to bear the stigma—and perhaps even the penalty—of that condition...”

only be internal (reckoning with herself as her time approaches) but also external as she must prepare herself to come under the judgment of law: criminal, worthy of death. The path laid bare will be marked by pain and humiliation.<sup>3</sup>

Mary becomes part of the fulfillment of the promise made to David by the prophet Nathan, "...the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16). Her body is the house of the son of God—not made of mortar and stone, but of flesh and bone. She will bear in her body the child and son of God the Christ *and* the full weight of the law; the great rescue begins here. Her womb, her body becomes the battle ground between life and death. Her body hosts the form of the day of favor as salvation and rescue from the religious tyranny and authority of human systems and kingdoms deeply corrupt and oppressive in their favoring of the rich and powerful. Her body will become the site of the day of judgment coming into the world on those in authority abusing their power in using God's word to marginalize and oppress those without power and authority. Mary is the site of the beginning of the world flipped right side up.<sup>4</sup> *Woe to the rich, blessed are the poor...*

Mary submits not to the oppressive command of a god taking advantage of a young and intimidated young girl, but to the mission of God in the battle of life against death. The Joan of Arc before there was a Joan of Arc, Mary enlists herself and her body in this divine war against death. Mary "...heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?'" and she said, "'Here am I; send me!'" (Is 6:8). Mary's statement of submission to the mission of God puts her in the household of God usurping her role in the family of Joseph for the things of God surpass the things of humanity.<sup>5</sup> Mary's statement of submission to the mission of God and the presence of God's spirit anointing and empowering and strengthening her<sup>6</sup> graft her into the great line of prophets who roamed this earth proclaiming the wonderful and awesome day of the Lord. She, too, becomes one

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<sup>3</sup>Gonzalez. 21 "This is the beginning of a story of pain and humiliation that will lead her son being condemned to death as a common criminal."

<sup>4</sup> Joel B. Green *The Gospel of Luke* TNICNT Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997. 92 "In antiquity, the status of a slave was determined by the status of the householder. In his characterization of Mary as 'slave of the Lord,' Luke has begun to undercut the competitive maneuvering for positions of status prevalent in the first-century Mediterranean world. Mary, who seemed to measure low in any ranking—age, family heritage, gender, and so on—turns out to be the one favored by God, the one who finds her status and identity in her obedience to God and participation in his salvific will."

<sup>5</sup> Green 92 "In describing herself as the Lord's servant...she acknowledges her submission to God's purpose, but also her role in assisting that purpose. Moreover, she claims a place in God's household, so to speak; indeed, in this socio-historical context, her words relativize and actually place in jeopardy her status in Joseph's household. For her, partnership in the purpose of God transcends the claims of family."

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther LW 25. 149. "It should be noted that the word *virtus* here is understood as 'strength' or 'power,' as *Möglichkeit* in the colloquial sense, 'possibility.' And *power of God* is understood not as the power by which according to His essence He is powerful but the power by virtue of which He makes powerful and strong. As one says 'the gift of God,' 'the creature of God,' or 'the things of God,' so one also says *the power of God*, that is, the power that comes from God, as we read in Acts 4:33...Luke 1:35: 'The power of the Most High will overshadow you.'"

of those prophetic voices who will proclaim and herald good tidings of salvation and rescue to Israel and unto the ends of the earth.

Listen to her:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in their conceit. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy, The promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children for ever. (Cant. 15 *The Song of Mary*; Lk 1:46-55)

Mary, like the prophets before her, submits to the mission of God of love in the world: *behold the day of the Lord comes!* She, like the prophets before her, participates in bringing justice to those who suffer injustice, bringing comfort to those who need to be comforted, proclaiming and performing love in the world. She is like Isaiah, the herald of good tidings; she is like Jeremiah, the suffering servant; she is like Micah, watching in hope for the coming of the Lord; she is like Malachi, announcing the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.

## **Conclusion**

The impact of the descent of God into our timeline radically alters our lives—yesterday, tomorrow, and (especially) today. The proclamation streaming out of the historical event of God’s descent into the world in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ ricochets through the halls of time, never exhausting itself and never running out of steam. It moves about the cosmos forever and unto the ends of the earth for the beloved, to reconcile the beloved, to love the beloved, to save the beloved from death. Not even death itself will put a stop to the activity of God on the behalf of the beloved (Rom 8:38-39).

This is the great mystery Paul mentions at the end of Romans, the long held secret mystery of God being revealed into the world for the whole world in the fractal of broken bodies (Rom. 16:25-27). Mary, the one low of status in wealth, society, and gender will become the blessed of God because God is with those whose bodies are broken: who are low status, hurt, who have pain, who suffer injustice, oppression, and marginalization. Mary will face death so that her son can reckon with it. Mary will go through hell, so that the Christ will shut it down. Mary will lay low the divine child in the wood of a manger so that Jesus the Savior may raise up all who suffer by the wood of his cross. Her body will be broken so that her son’s can be; so that ours, too, can be broken as we participate in reminding death—in all its forms—life wins.

And right now as death has found a seat in our pews, taking one of our beloved, we need to be reminded that death is not the final word. As Tom's timeline stopped and ours seems to surge beyond, hold on to this: there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. And if that then also this: no one is separated from us—not even by death—because Love knows not that boundary and certainly isn't restricted by it. Love descends into death bringing with it love's life. So, today we have the audacity to stand in the encounter with God in the event of faith and declare *I believe*, to sing, to look death in the face and, with confidence, proclaim: hope wins, love wins, life wins because the Christ, the child of Mary, Jesus of Nazareth is born.