

The Rev. Giovan King, Celebrating St. Mary the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ (transferred from August 15, 2013), August 11, 2013, St. Christopher's Episcopal Church, Kailua, HI

So, here here we are, folks, 143 shopping days until Christmas. A little early, some might be thinking, to be talking about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Thursday is actually her "feast day." Often, with saints, we celebrate on their "Feast Day" their departure from this earth. Just what we celebrate on the Feast Day for Mary, and how she left this earth, could both be topics for other days, but I'd just like to talk about Mary, in general, today.

I grew up as a good Methodist and served as, hopefully, a good congregational minister for twenty-five years or so. You wouldn't find us thinking about Jesus' mother, Mary, very often. We'd pull her out with the rest of the figures of the crèche, just before Christmas. Well before Christmas eve, I might add. But as soon as Christmas was over, we'd put her right back in the closet with all the other Christmas decorations and there she would stay until the next December.

So, who is this Mary, this mother of Jesus? She has at times been held up as the model of the perfect female: chaste, pure, humble, quiet, passive - a model that no one can emulate, but, also, one that most 21<sup>st</sup> century women wouldn't strive to emulate. I probably wouldn't be best friends with the stereotypical Mary if she lived in Kailua. It just doesn't seem that we'd have much in common.

But, remember Mary's song. The passage we just heard, from Luke's gospel, is poetry fit for a political rally for justice. Do you ever think about Mary, the mother of our Lord and Savior, at a political rally. Here, she seems to be the voice in the town hall, affirming that all people, regardless of their place in society, deserve affordable and dependable health care. Hers is a voice singing about leveling the playing ground for the rich and poor, the powerful and powerless.

From the mouth of a simple young woman in a hole in the wall occupied area in the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago, these are highly subversive statements, precursors to her son's words years later. Mary is not just preparing to give birth to one who will transform the world; she herself announces the radical nature of his mission.

So maybe – just maybe – this Mary is not so meek, or mild, after all. Perhaps she's a bit dangerous. She is, after all, the first one to know just who Jesus is and, at least at this point in the story, she can't help but shout it to the mountaintops. Hey, I'm liking this bold woman more and more.

Mary said "yes" to God. Simply by virtue of that, you can't get a much better model. Thomas Aquinas saw three miracles in Christ's nativity: 1) that God became human; 2) that a virgin conceived; and, 3) that Mary believed. He considered the last one to be the greatest.

I wonder how many of you knew that Luke, not unlike John, borrowed heavily from the creation story as he spoke of Jesus coming into the world? Luke described the Holy Spirit literally as "shadowing over" Mary, just as the Spirit "shadowed over" the waters before the beginning of time, when God created life. Mary has been identified from the beginning with the figure of the divine Wisdom, Sophia – we spoke about her in the spring in the Adult Education class - which joined with God in the work of creation. She is not so much an icon of veneration but rather an icon in the true sense of the world: as one who points to the divine that was incarnated within her.

The purity of Mary is what makes her the perfect theotokos – God bearer to the world. She is not blessed because of the marvelous miracle that occurred within her. Mary is blessed because her true joy came from pointing away from herself, to the divine that she was chosen and agreed to bear to the world.

"God-bearer," or "theotokos" became Mary's most common moniker in Eastern Christianity. She became what someone has called the "container of the uncontainable." demonstrating how God's radical grace allows the freedom of human response, which can then Mary continually orients believers toward Christ, deflecting glory off of herself to God, because her faithful witness signifies the depth and power of God's grace and love.

Mary did not have to worry about whether she was worthy or how well equipped she was for the task God had chosen for her. She knew in her young, yet wise heart that God had equipped her to do whatever was asked of her, and so she responded affirmatively with confidence.

It is significant that in Eastern, as well as in Anglican, iconography, Mary is never depicted alone, but always with Christ, reminding us that neither she nor we will ever stop bearing him to the world.

In the words of Meister Eckhart, the medieval mystic, ‘We are all meant to be “theotokos” – bearers of God – bearers of Christ. What good is it if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace?’

Each of us is called to be a God-bearer. Each of us can reflect the light of God to another person. Yes, we live in uncertain times, as did Mary. But that did not stop Mary, and can’t stop us.

There really aren’t qualifications to be a God bearer, a ‘theotokos’, but there are some conditions that make it right. First: Cast your lot with God. When you start to feel fabulous in your self-sufficiency, stop with the multitasking and focus on the source of your life, the source of your faith, the source of your love, and bare your soul before the One who created you with compassionate love. Also, remember that God has always worked through very ordinary people, people who may not always get the big picture, but who nonetheless manage to say YES. God works a myriad of people in a myriad of places in their spiritual journey. God dwells within you and works through you and if you trust God at all, you will find that you can mirror, you can reflect, God’s light and love to others in any situation. And, finally, prepare, and even work for, level ground. Know that God desires wholeness of life for all, good food and water and health for all, freedom from fear for all, and abiding peace for all.

Incarnation - in the flesh - in Jesus’ flesh, yes. But also in your flesh and mine. In your life and mine. Come, let us all magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our savior.