

A half-hour bus ride from St. George's Cathedral and the Old City walls of Jerusalem takes you to the extreme western edge of the city, to a small neighborhood called Ein Karem. It used to be its own village, but time and the creeping expansion of urban centers is eating it up like a slow moving amoeba. There's already a hospital in town, a place of healing for children, mostly, but they'll take the occasional adult when the need is there. Olive trees cling to steep hillsides, a convent tucks herself into the rocky soil, and a couple of churches mark sacred moments passed down through the millenia. See, Ein Karem is the name of a little Judean town out in the hill country, the very same little Judean town Mary rushed to after she heard the news. Elizabeth, kin to her one way or another, and she both carried boys, and when she arrived, Elizabeth's leapt in her womb. It's a beautiful story, one a lot of us hold dear. There's even a delightfully loving statue where Elizabeth's home once stood: the two women, standing face-to-face with their impossibly pregnant bellies touching. And on the chipping walls behind them, ceramic tiles bear the words Mary says in her joy in over 40 languages.

I don't know about y'all, but the churches I grew up in didn't spend a whole lot of time on this part of the story. Elizabeth carried John, Mary carried Jesus, and they were both pretty happy about it. After saying yes to God at the beginning, though, neither said much more, at least not in the churches I grew up in. I mean, Elizabeth recognized Mary and who she bore. And Mary was pleased. That was about all I heard from either of 'em. But telling the story that way ignores so much of who Mary was and who the boy in her womb would become. Her soul magnified the Lord and her Spirit rejoiced in God her savior. But Mary kept going. "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts," she says. The King James has it this way: "He scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts." I love that.

Anyway, Mary continues, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." But those same churches I grew up in, they acted out Christmas Pageants with Mary sitting patiently on the back of a camel while the kid playing Joseph had all the lines, searching for a room at the inn, shooing away barn animals, even comforting his on-stage wife. That meek and mild Mary and that Joseph talking just to fill the space, that couldn't be more different from the picture scripture actually paints. For one thing, Joseph doesn't say a word. Not a peep. He's quieter than a mouse on the Night Before Christmas. But just as importantly, that demure image of Mary also misses the mark. Not only is she not quiet, when she speaks, she speaks with the thunder of revolution. She calls out the emperor's new clothes, the absurdity of this world's power. She calls for the disruption of systems that keep the poor poor and empty out already empty bellies. Mary sings of a God that favors the underdog, and she knows her son's kingdom will put all things right, even if it means turning the tables and temples of this world upside down. And that, for Mary and Elizabeth and even silent Joseph, that is Good News.

But for folks with full bellies and fuller pocketbooks, it can be tough to hear the Good News in Mary's revolution. It's an inspiration to the poor. The poor long for revolution, or at least enough of one to show the world their humanity. But for those on top, stirrings of revolution seem to be bad news. In the twentieth century, at least three countries banned the recitation of Mary's words for exactly this reason. India under British rule, Guatemala, and Argentina - they each outlawed the Magnificat. Because God's preferential love for the poor was too dangerous, too revolutionary. See, Mary made change feasible, and in her mouth, that change was God's intent for the world, not the suffering we see now. The great irony, of course, is that the Good News of

Mary's Song is the very same Good News available to all of us through Christ, regardless of where we stand in society. A revolution that frees any of us, frees us all, and that revolution Christ brings and sets us right again.

Over and over, as Jesus grows into a man preaching in the wilderness towns of Judea, he goes to those in power and reminds them of the revolution in his mother's song. "It is easier to pass a camel through the eye of the needle," he'll tell one rich man. "Go, and sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor," he'll tell another. "Blessed are the poor ... but woe to the rich," his steady refrain. It may seem a lopsided Good News, and I suppose it is, in a way. See, the world is lopsided, favoring those with means. But through Christ, the world is flipped around, and the lopsided preference favors the poor. But don't worry! Just like all things in God's Kingdom, revolution means something different. In God's Kingdom, those on top get some Good News, too. In God's Kingdom, the rich aren't hung out to dry. They have a role to play. Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison. Never forget their humanity, never overlook their suffering, never think you're better, for the Kingdom of God is theirs first, and it's only yours if you see the Christ in them and serve them. We are not their lords. Christ is. We are their servants.

Thinking back to that wall covered in Mary's words at Ein Karem, these languages stretching across the failing plaster, they are each a neighbor in need calling to God for that great reversal, singing Mary's hope, raising themselves to Christ, and they're doing it all over the world. It's very Good News to trust that a full belly will come, and it's very Good News to bear that promise. But it is cruelty to silence her song, and it is sin to imagine that she's not singing to us. It's no small miracle that the ways of the world creeping toward those hills bring with them the healing of hospitals and busloads of prayerful pilgrims. A little village tucked in a hillside, resisting the waves of this world while singing its own revolution, that's Ein Karem, but it's also what we long for in the coming days -- a sort of Ein Karem carried in our own bellies, a hunger for revolution and a messiah to lead the way. And that is Good News, albeit hard news, indeed.

My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior...