

**“The Choice of Blessing”**

(Luke 13.9-56)

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**Introduction**

*“Surely from now on all generations will know me as blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me...”*

Today we celebrate the feast day of *Mary, Mother of Our Lord*... and at the centre of our tradition (and worship) is Mary’s song of triumphant gratitude... the *Magnificat*.

*Luke* is the gospel-writer who places *Mary* centre-stage in the *Jesus-story*... and he moves the action along fast.

I want to jump to that part of his story, where soon after the Annunciation, *Mary* rushes off to share the news of her pregnancy with her older cousin, *Elizabeth*.

It’s in celebrating with her cousin that the *Magnificat* bursts from her lips...

This is a story about *blessing*... *Luke* repeats the word 4 times in 6 verses so we don’t miss it. Blessing...

We could paraphrase her words something like...

*“God has smiled so abundantly on me,  
that I’ll be remembered for ever as the favoured-one, the blessed one.”*

**Sliding Doors – An Alternative Story**

So, it is a story of blessing... *but*... what if *Mary* hadn’t seen it that way?

I really like that genre of film and literature... popular a couple of decades back... where we get to speculate about sliding-door moments. You know the ones – what if the heroine doesn’t pick up the phone... if the hero doesn’t get on that train... if the lovers don’t see each other across the room...

One different choice... just one different choice... and the rest of the story is completely different.

Magnificat is a song of blessing... but what if Mary hadn't seen it that way?

What if Mary made a different choice?

Here's how the story could have gone...

*As the scandal broke on her, carrying a child that was not her betrothed's, Mary escaped Nazareth for the hill country, where her cousin Elizabeth lived.*

*Mary fell into her arms and wept... "Elizabeth, it's all so terrible – my life is ruined. I'm pregnant and it's not Joseph's... and so the betrothal's finished. He's furious... and his family's worse. He says he won't lay charges, that he'll do it as quietly as possible, but the gossip is spreading... so fast and it's so cruel. No-one will even look at me, and I hear them whispering. There's murmuring at the synagogue of stoning me! Everything is in ruins! And honestly, Elizabeth, I don't know where this baby comes from – there was a dream, a vision, an angel, vague murmurings of God, and I didn't know what to say... and then there's a child growing in my womb... and I have no idea how. But who's going to believe that? My life is shattered. Why would God do this to me? Why? What did I do to deserve this?"*

What do you think?

It could have been that way. Instead of blessing, Mary could have read this as curse... misfortune... disaster... maybe even punishment.

Many people, perhaps world-weary or cynical people, might say seeing it that way would be much more likely.

Indeed, it's actually quite unusual these days... quite counter-cultural... to see life as blessing.

It's very much a minority view.

### **The Choice of Blessing**

Mary chooses to see what is happening in her life as the action of God... the blessing of God.

*"Surely from now on all generations will know me as blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me..."*

All I'm pointing out here is that this is a choice.

She could so easily have read this unexpected pregnancy in a very different way.  
This is a choice of faith... of radical trust in God.

Faith is rarely if ever automatic.

It's a choice.

And it's a BIG choice... not easy to make.

In matters such as this, it's probably easier to say NO than to say YES.

Easier to see darkness – catastrophe, fear, misery, gloom – than to open to the wild unlikeliness  
of blessing

It's this choice – to see what's happening to her as God's action, and to read it as blessing – that  
enables Mary to say her great YES to God.

And so, it is this choice to see blessing, that opens the door to the salvation story of Jesus Christ.

Choosing to see *her* life as a blessing, enables Mary to offer her life as a blessing to others.

And there's more...

Choosing to see her life as a blessing, also opens the door to JOY... for Mary... and her cousin  
Elizabeth.

As we hear the triumphant gratitude of *Magnificat*, you've got to imagine these two peasant  
women, both of them unexpectedly pregnant – one too young and the other too old – dancing  
and whooping it up in the kitchen.

God's changing the world... and it's happening *in* them... in their bodies.

Talk about wild, wild, unimaginable blessing!

### **Reflection**

So, how is it with you and me?

How do we see our own life... what do we feel about it?

Are we blessed?

Or have we been dealt rotten cards? Are we disappointed... disillusioned? Are we sad or even  
angry with how it's turned out? Do we want a refund?

Or... do we think that God has simply ignored us all together?

I guess our childhood and family will have something to do with *how* we see it.

Some people *do* seem born with a sunny disposition and others not.

But I'm talking about the choice of faith here.

When we speak to God, what do we say about our life?

Is *this* life a story of blessing... or is it something else?

### ***Ignatius and the Will of God***

The great Christian teacher, Ignatius of Loyola, says that when we first stumble across the realisation that our life is not our own...

that is, that we can't make it how we want it to be, no matter how hard we strive, (no matter what the surrounding culture tells us)...

that when we first realise that GOD is in charge,

our acquiescence is usually at best begrudging, even resentful.

*"I accept that you're calling the shots here God, but I don't like it. I guess I don't have any option but to surrender, but I don't have to feel good about what you're doing and where you're taking me."*

That's often how it begins.

But if we stay open and attentive (Ignatius says), if we watch what is happening,

how things turn out over the years,

we slowly... gradually... come to see that we are indeed blessed

In no way am I describing a teflon-coated life here... not some Disneyland fantasy of everything being just the way we wanted it.

But how even with that which is painful... how it too leads us to a deeper experience of life and love.

Indeed, if we can't learn to be honest with sadness, grief, struggle, loss and suffering, then we'll never ever see the blessing.

But if we stay attentive, looking for the action of God, trusting that we are loved... then (Ignatius says), that surrender to God's will, which was at first resentful acquiescence, becomes an open receptivity.

A simple but powerful openness... *"Bring it on God... whatever comes is good with me!"*

The perception of mature faith – generally a gift of our senior years – is wonder.

*“This life of mine Lord, with all its pain and struggle, is so wonderful.*

*It is far better than I could ever have imagined.*

*I could never have planned it this way.*

*I am truly blessed.”*

And at that point, our relationship with God, including our prayer... becomes much simpler... for it is primarily a matter of gratitude.

### **Conclusion**

Mary, as a young woman, models for us a faith, that most of us don't come to until much later in life. She points us to a choice we can all make... to see our lives as the field of God's loving action... and to see what comes as blessing, no matter how unexpected, no matter how undesirable it first seems.

This not only opens us to joy, but also allows us to humbly make whatever contribution God asks of us.

In the precise eloquence of Dag Hammarskjold, that hidden mystic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ... prayer becomes so simple.

*“Lord, for all that has been... thank you!*

*For all that is to come... YES!”*