

# Mary's song – the Magnificat

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Advent 4 – Luke 1 26ff – Annunciation, Journey, Magnificat

Lots of us here are of an age to remember the protest singers of the '60s and '70s – people like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin. They protested against the Vietnam war, against materialism, racism, sexism and slavery. They were songs of a new generation crying out against the wrongs of their society.

New wars have kept breaking out; materialism, racism, sexism, slavery and injustice have taken on ever more insidious forms. But thankfully, new songs keep being written, calling out the evil and naming it clearly for what it is. In this land, I think of Yothu Yindi, Helen Reddy and many others. Missy Higgins is one of our current champions on the climate crisis. She says, 'At the moment I'm really into political music because I think that is the bravest thing of all in this climate today. More and more people are less inclined to speak out for fear of being cut down on social media ... just music that isn't afraid to be torn down, isn't afraid to be judged, declares what it's there for.'

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-18/missy-higgins-apocalypse-and-climate-change-inspire-new-music/9059168>

When something really outrageous is happening – something completely unjust and apparently unstoppable – if someone sings a protest song, naming the wrong that's being done to the many by a powerful few, suddenly hurt and oppressed people out there know they're not alone. And these songs terrify their oppressors. Authorities ban them if they can – they try to shut down the social media platforms that spread them. But the songs won't be silenced.

This is not a new phenomenon. This morning, we shared a very old protest song; Mary's song – the Magnificat. The heart of

Mary's song is protest, and it has terrified powerful elites down the ages.

*The Lord has shown strength with his arm and scattered the proud in their conceit, casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly. God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.*

Meek little Mary; gentle, sweet, compliant teenage Mary? Yeah, right.

Mary fills the shoes of the great women protest singers of her tradition – Miriam <sup>(Ex 15:20-21)</sup> Deborah <sup>(Judg 5:1-31)</sup> Judith <sup>(Jdt 16:1-17)</sup> and Hannah <sup>(1 Sam 2:1-10)</sup>.

The Magnificat is such a powerful protest song that several illegitimate regimes have banned its public use. And I'm not talking about the places you'd normally expect.

When a the famous missionary priest and linguist, Henry Martyn, arrived in India in April 1806 he found that it was forbidden to recite the Magnificat at Evensong in case the idea of 'putting down the mighty from their seats' was taken too literally. <https://sayitstraight.co.uk/local-history/biographies/henry-martyn-1781-1812/>

That might sound absurd, but it's been banned in more recent times too. In Argentina after the 'dirty war' of the '70s, it was banned when the mothers of the disappeared used it to call for non-violent resistance to the government. And in the '80s the government of Guatemala is also reported to have banned its public recitation.

So what's this all got to do with Advent? Advent is the time when we remember that we're waiting for someone to come; someone who expects to see wrongs set right. And we people who are waiting – like Mary, like John the Baptist, like the prophets awaiting Jesus' first coming – we are meant to be vocal, mindful that the one we're waiting for expects us to be

public poets singing hymns of justice – just like our expectant forbears did.

Mary reminds us today to sing very feisty protest songs;

songs that name greed, injustice, oppression and prejudice;  
songs that assure perpetrators and their victims alike that justice will come;

songs that name what is good and right to make sure it stays clearly in view;

songs that tell Aboriginal people, refugees, women that their cries for safety, dignity, respect, restitution, treaty, justice and freedom are just and sacred, and will be given them no matter how confident their abusers may feel now;

songs that expose the war we are waging on Earth, our common home

songs that summon us to humility, to repentance, to renounce our greed and our delusional religion of consumptive economic growth

And why should people of the Church concern ourselves with these things? Isn't that the realm of politics? Listen to Mary again. *The Lord has ... scattered the proud in their conceit, casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly. God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.* Mary is clearly saying politics is God's business.

So let's sing it out. To quote Arlo Guthrie, 'If you want to end war and stuff you've got to sing loud.'

Amen.