

PREGNANT WITH LOVE
Randall Tremba
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We'll get to Mary's startling pregnancy but first a prophecy which may have been in her heart as she arrived in Bethlehem with Joseph. It's a song her people had sung for 700 years. It's from the prophet Micah.

But you, O Bethlehem, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth one who is to rule, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. He shall feed his flock. And they shall live secure. He shall be great to the ends of the earth and shall be the one of peace. (Micah 5:2-5a)

That sounds like one person is coming, traditionally known as the messiah. But this is a Jewish prophecy and Jewish prophecy sometimes uses a person to personify something else. As it turns out, "the one of peace, the one to rule the world, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days," could be the "love" by which the world was conceived and created.

And speaking of conception, when Mary found she was pregnant, she sang a song. Her song was like a rose blooming in the desert for her people lived in a dark and gloomy time.

My soul magnifies the Lord who has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. His mercy is from generation to generation. He has scattered the proud, brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly according to the promise made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Luke 1:39-55)

Apparently, Mary was pregnant with something more than a child. Today we ponder Mary's pregnancy.

You know the story. You know of the angel's visitation. You know of the suspension of the natural laws of conception, the "virgin birth." That mind-boggling story has inspired billions of people and hundreds of songs. There's nothing wrong with that unless we put Mary and Jesus on a pedestal safely removed from our lives. As someone said, if truth be told, Mary is not some porcelain saint but more like a defiant, teenage punk rocker. Imagine that if you can!

Many Christians stumble over this story. It seems bizarre or freakish if taken literally. But there is another way to read it just as there is another way of reading the "seven-day creation story" in Genesis.

The nativity story is partially mythic which is to say it's larger than mere facts can convey. That doesn't make it fiction. That doesn't make it untrue. Not at all.

The Jewish people told and tell stories aimed at the heart. Luke was Jewish. He wrote the nativity story not to convince skeptical minds but to move fearful hearts toward Jesus and away from Caesar Augustus whom the Roman Empire had proclaimed virgin born, Son of God, Lord and Savior, and the Prince of Peace for whom the heavenly angels had sung.

Luke's embellished nativity story aims to subvert and discredit the Empire's myth and propaganda. Luke taunts the Emperor. You think you're great. Let me tell you about Jesus. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Not Caesar. Which is to say, Love is our master not fear and intimidation.

Mary's Jewish name was Miriam. Her namesake was the sister of Moses, the liberator of the Hebrew slaves from Pharaoh's Egypt.

When Pharaoh's armies drowned in the sea Miriam stood with her liberated sisters, banging tambourines, and gloating over the death of their oppressors.

Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
(Exodus 15:21)

Miriam sang that song of victory a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. Many still see God as a warrior and a judge ready to kill and condemn the wicked. It's how many imagine God. Mary's song of hope under the dark terror of the Roman Empire echoes the song of her ancestor Miriam.

Jesus was born of Mary. Jesus had a Jewish mother. Jesus was weaned on the traditions of his people. He knew the Jewish jihadist, holy war tunes but chose a different tune from the traditions.

Jesus knew the tune claiming his people were exceptional and chosen while all others were infidels. But he chose a different tune. Jesus would not gloat over the death of so-called enemies or be complacent when any one was hungry, cold, homeless, sick or neglected. Jesus chose welcome.

Like his mother before him, Jesus put his trust in a God of mercy who embraces all people in a universal kinship—a God who longs to heal our angry, fearful, wounded hearts. Not God as warrior and judge. But God as a tender parent ready to comfort and heal. God as abba or pappu. God as mama.

Mary was pregnant with *that* God. Jesus was pregnant with *that* God, which is say pregnant with love. It's the love by which the world and we were and are conceived. The world and each one of us are conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The world is pregnant with love. Our nation is pregnant with love. Our community of faith is pregnant with love. You are pregnant with love.

It's the love we see in Jesus. And we don't need a virgin birth to convince us.

But like Mary, we must say, yes. Let it be. Mary chose welcome. Hard labor would follow before the light shone.

Mary was a dreamer. In a dark and gloomy time with the threat of terror hovering over her people, she defiantly imagined new possibilities. She discovered that the inconceivable is conceivable when we imagine the peace promised before the world began, promised to one and all by the Merciful One.

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine all the people
Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

That may be from a different tradition but it, too, is Mary's song.