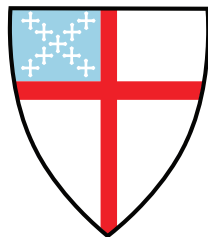


# CHURCHES *beyond* BORDERS



## JOINT DEVOTIONS 2021

16 DEVOTIONS INSPIRED BY THE ANNUAL  
16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

NOVEMBER 25 – DECEMBER 10

# And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

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.

He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

*Luke 1:46-55*

# Churches Beyond Borders: Joint Devotions 2021

As we continue to navigate the challenges of a global health crisis, we are more painfully aware of the ongoing “pandemic” of violence against women, which has been exacerbated and further exposed during COVID-19. Acknowledging this issue as vital to our gospel faith, the Heads of Communion of Churches Beyond Borders called for this year’s devotions to focus on gender-based violence, looking at both awareness and healing.

This booklet contains 16 devotions, timed with and inspired by the annual United Nations campaign, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. The campaign runs from Nov. 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to Dec. 10 (International Human Rights Day) <https://iam.ec/UNI6days>.

Since Advent coincides with the campaign, the Magnificat is chosen as our guiding text, offering prayer and reflection alongside the call for awareness and action. The devotions give thanks for the strong and enduring voice of Mary as she says “yes” to the angel’s annunciation and as she greets her sister Elizabeth (Luke 1:38-55).

For the first time, you’ll find devotions written not just by our four bishops (heads of communion) but also by others representing each of our Churches Beyond Borders: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Anglican Church of Canada, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and The Episcopal Church. Each writer has been deeply involved in this work, addressing the issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women, trafficking, women at the borders, and domestic violence. Their reflections on Mary’s word offer hope and invite our shared work and witness across all borders against gender-based violence.

We invite you to use these devotions not only for the 16 days in November and December—for Advent—but also throughout the year, whenever Mary’s Song calls to you and your congregations.

# 1

**“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.”**

*Luke 1:52*

## **Mary’s Song of Praise**

These verses in Luke’s gospel have been beloved by many over the centuries as a message of hope for those who are marginalized and as revolutionary in the call for justice.

Who suffers the most in domestic violence (DV) or intimate partner violence (IPV)? The vulnerable, mostly women and children (widows, orphans and strangers); in same gender relationships it would be the person with the least power and control and in seniors, 65 years and older it is women.

In a 2019 Statistics Canada report ([www150.statcan.gc.ca](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca)), according to police reports one in four Canadian experiences family violence and, “While 80% of survivors of domestic violence tell family or friends of their situation, only 30% report the abuse to the police (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/domestic-violence>).”

Power in a relationship could be aligned with finances, ability, education, linguistic fluency, spirituality or any other circumstances that provide power to one and leaves the other vulnerable. It is crucial to differentiate between Domestic violence (DV) which refers to persons within a home and could extend to other members in the home such as a senior, whereas Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is between romantic partners and they do not have to necessarily live in the same home.

In DV/IPV circumstances the person(s) live in fear of the other causing harm physically, emotionally, psychologically or spiritually by either doing something or withholding something. This fear of and/or actual harm can have longer term implications for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and has ripple effects not only for the person being abused but those witnessing such as children. Symptoms could be anxiety, depression, inability to sleep or focus, lack of trust, physical injuries, isolation, unable to access products for basic needs et cetera. The age range most affected is 25-44 years followed by 15-24 years.

The pandemic has created circumstances that have exacerbated power dynamics and increased stress levels and isolation resulting in a tipping point for DV/IPV. We need to check in on our family, friends and neighbors.

The impact of DV/IPV is not only limited to the persons involved but to society in lost productivity, increased demand on health care and loss of personal potential in addition to increased suffering. DV/IPV is not a personal issue, it is a societal concern since it is created and maintained by cultural norms and values.

Secrecy is the superpower that abusers have. They want to keep it hidden to maintain the status quo. Abusers often have “rationales” as to why they do what they do, they blame the victim and excuse their behavior. This is not acceptable.

A useful tool to better understand power and control and its effects is the Duluth Model of Power and Control Wheel which was designed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program in Duluth to address males abusing females and has since been translated into over 40 languages and six different wheels. <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheel-gallery/>.

There is no better call for justice than Mary’s Magnificat, her song of praise which has been used by the downtrodden in their search for freedom and liberation. The Bible urges us to take care of the widow, orphan, and strangers. How are we going to respond to this need in our communities as Christians?



**Neta Deonarain-Gear, BA, BSW, MA, FM, RSW** (her/she) is the Executive Director of The Delton Glebe Counselling Centre in Waterloo, Ontario. She has worked in the fields of Child Welfare, Domestic Violence, Mental Health and Addictions, Community Healthcare, Post Secondary Education and Brain Injury.

Her roles have included research and senior leadership. The Glebe ([www.glebecounselling.ca](http://www.glebecounselling.ca)) is a community program of Martin Luther University College that provides affordable, high quality, and compassionate care, welcoming people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, life experiences, faith and spirituality.

# 2

**“He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly.”**

*Luke 1:52*

One day, during confirmation class, I read the Magnificat aloud, then asked my students to tell me what they know about the speaker from their words.

One young woman eagerly replied, “Well, it has to be a man.”

Surprised, I asked her to tell me what makes her so sure.

“Girls don’t get to talk that much,” she explained.

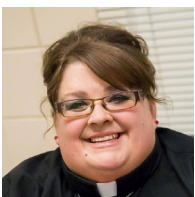
I was stunned. At only twelve years old, this girl had already internalized the message that her voice is less valued than a man’s and that she is more likely to be silenced or ignored, not only in Biblical times, but today. How ironic that I had just read aloud the bold words of a girl not far from her own age, who was excitedly proclaiming the good news of God’s desire to uplift the marginalized.

Human traffickers slowly rob their targets of their voice: first by gaining their trust, then by abusing that relationship. Victims are systematically isolated until communication with anyone other than their trafficker has been cut off. In some cases, they are relocated to countries where they cannot speak the language and told that they must remain enslaved until an unsatisfiable debt can be repaid. They may be manipulated through shame to hold their silence, believing the lie that they have lost all credibility due to what they are being forced to do. Often, fear that the trafficker will harm them or their loved ones prevents them from speaking out. Far too many victims have been silenced forever, due to the tragic loss of their lives.

Several years ago, while speaking with a woman who had both been trafficked and coerced into participating in the trafficking of other people, I asked her what advice she would give to those who wish to support survivors as they heal from trauma.

“Sometimes you just have to sit there, listen, and let them talk,” she shared.

Those who have been forced to keep silent for far too long deserve space for their voices to be heard. By listening to, valuing, and believing their words, we are taking part in God’s redeeming work in this world.



**Rev. Karen Stepko** (*she/her*) serves as the pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Rhein, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada congregation located on Treaty 4 territory in the Saskatchewan Synod. She also currently represents the ELCIC on the Canadian Council of Churches Sexual Exploitation Working Group. In her career prior to seminary, Karen spent seven years working with at-risk female youth in the city of Saskatoon. She first became aware of and passionate about combatting human trafficking in 2007 as a volunteer with NASHI, a Saskatoon-based non-profit which seeks to educate people both locally and globally about sexual exploitation.

# 3

## “from generation to generation”

*Luke 1:50b*

from generation to generation  
abuse spills over  
shelters overflow  
many abused womyn are indigenous  
some are second generation clients  
some know of womyn murdered  
others know of womyn missing  
many have family who have survived  
the residential schools

residential schools  
where indigenous children from ages 7-14 years old  
were taken away from their parents  
stripped, shaved, put in uniform  
and given a number  
one womyn survivor told me  
that for 7 years, she did not get a hug  
imagine  
residential schools  
where dead children were buried  
in secret  
often the parents were not even notified  
and they lived out their years  
never knowing what happened to their child  
there were rumors, lots of rumors  
until the 215

residential schools  
were not the creation of monsters or demons  
but rather the idea  
of mediocre white men  
motivated by greed  
they plotted a national crime  
genocide  
to address ‘the indian problem’  
and they carefully covered it all up  
with a white lie  
called colonialism  
this evil doing  
cut down generations of indigenous peoples  
and this has affected non- indigenous peoples  
and their relationship  
for it is written  
what affects one affects all  
we are all connected

the indigenous womyn in shelter  
are a part of the residential school legacy  
their immediate needs range  
from safety to shelter to childcare and supports  
their problems include poverty,  
racism, history of child abuse, addictions  
and lack of cultural services  
all are the result of the residential school legacy  
shelters deal with crisis  
they are like bandaids  
real healing comes from indigenous teachings  
and traditions  
for indigenous womyn and for indigenous men  
from generation to generation  
we have stood in the dark  
until the 215  
now there is no middle ground  
you are either in the light of truth  
or in the darkness of denial  
the choice is yours  
Christ calls us into the light  
to do the right thing  
and the right thing to do  
is to do all we can  
to make the calls to action  
from both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission  
and the National Inquiry into Missing  
and Murdered Indigenous Womyn and Girls  
a reality  
doing so would help heal indigenous peoples  
and non- indigenous peoples

we are called to be  
the heart and hands of Christ  
come let us roll the stone away  
and help healing happen  
from generation to generation



**Ruby Reske-Naurocki** lives in Beausejour, Manitoba where she has worshipped in both Lutheran and Anglican churches. She has 20 years of experience as a shelter worker with Agape House in Winnipeg. She writes poetry.

# 4

## “And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord’”

*Luke 1:46*

In the Magnificat, Mary describes herself as a lowly servant. Then she goes on to praise God’s actions in lifting up the lowly and bringing down the powerful. Women who experience violence are often perceived as the lowly, or perceive of themselves in that way.

1 in 3 women globally is subjected to physical or sexual violence. Even though this has also been my experience, I am always shocked at this staggering figure.

In Canada, the burden of this violence is carried exponentially more by Indigenous people.

Indigenous people make up 4% of the population but account for half of the victims of human trafficking in Canada. Most of them are especially vulnerable to traffickers as they have histories of abuse and many of them have been in the care of social services.

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls heard the testimonies of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA<sup>1</sup> people that oppression against them is primarily based on colonialism, racism, and gender, with other factors, such as education, income, and ability, sometimes coming into play. In particular, families and survivors consistently referred to four general ways that maintain colonial violence:

- historical, multigenerational and intergenerational trauma;
- social and economic marginalization;
- maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will; and
- ignoring the agency and expertise of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people

It is the maintaining the status quo and institutional lack of will that governments, all institutions (including churches) need to atone for. And not just the churches who administered the schools, but all of us Canadians who turned blind eyes and even now do not cry out, loud enough and long enough so that our whole society does not work to end the systemic racism and gender-based violence that is experienced to this day.

Mary proclaims good news to women who experience violence. How now can we participate in God’s justice by addressing both the individual and systemic needs for change?

God of Justice, we pray for all women who experience violence and today we lift up those who experience violence as a result of both gender and racism. Move us as individuals and as churches to seek to bring change, justice and hope to these your lowly. In your holy name we pray. Amen.



**Rev. Susan C. Johnson** (she/her) is the National Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Bishop Susan is an Ambassador for #ThursdaysInBlack, an initiative of the World Council of Churches to end gender-based violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual

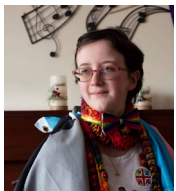
# 5

## “Singing a Song of Belonging”

Sometimes it can feel like society will stifle any form of individual expression. Some might argue that the church prefers “tolerance over celebration”; There are times where violence is committed against those who challenge the expected “norms”. Faced with these moments, it can be difficult to find a place of belonging. The idea of “belonging” is feeling a sense of connection with others and with wider communities. As Christians, many of us are blessed to experience a sense of belonging within our church communities. But what happens when someone cannot find their place of belonging?

The Anglican tradition prides itself on being a “middle way”, of trying to hold space for all people. However, this concept of the “middle way” is actually quite dangerous – as Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously said: “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you take the side of the oppressor”. In our efforts to “preserve unity” or “maintain relationships”, we commit an act of violence against the communities who are most vulnerable, who are most trying to find a place of belonging in a system that invalidates their very identities and existence. When we welcome our “brothers and sisters”, we erase nonbinary<sup>2</sup> people such as myself. When we refer to “same-sex marriage”, we ignore the diversity of the queer<sup>3</sup> and trans<sup>4</sup> community. When we turn a blind eye to the direct, indirect, and systemic forms of queerphobia and transphobia, we commit violence against God’s beloved children. We are directly responsible for the fact that trans and queer individuals do not consider churches to be a place where they can belong.

In the Magnificat, Mary proclaims a song of hope, of love, and of belonging. She reminds us that all generations are blessed, that God looks upon humanity with favour, and lifts up the lowly. This is a powerful reminder for all those who have experienced gender-based violence, from both society and the church; even when we cannot find a place of belonging elsewhere, our place of belonging is with God. And even more than that – this song is a reminder to all Christians and church communities that our mission is to ensure all of God’s children – in their beauty and diversity – can proclaim a song of belonging – now, and for generations to come.



**Sydney Brouillard-Coyle** (Ney/Nem/Nir) is a queer, non-binary youth activist from the Diocese of Huron. Ney serve as one of the co-chairs on Proud Anglicans of Huron, “a diverse group of clergy and lay individuals who are passionate about facilitating conversations and providing resources on the topic of gender and sexuality within the Anglican faith”. Ney are also a consultant for Faith, Worship & Ministry on transgender liturgies and inclusion, a member of Public Witness for Social and Ecological Justice, and the music director at nir local parish. Ney were the youth delegate from the Diocese of Huron to General Synod in 2019. In nir personal life, Sydney is studying for a Bachelor of Music at the University of Windsor and works at Trans Wellness Ontario as the Education Coordinator and Non-Binary Peer Mentor. Sydney’s hope is to promote and create spaces in all aspects of society that affirm and celebrate every child of God.

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2 An umbrella term for all individuals who identify outside of the gender binary

3 An umbrella term for all those who do not identify as heterosexual [straight].

4 A person whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not align: this includes both binary trans individuals (trans men and trans women) and non-binary trans individuals (those who identify outside of the gender binary).



# 6

## “Where have all the flowers gone?”

*The Rev. Canon Virginia “Ginny” Doctor dedicated much of her work and passion towards justice for Indigenous Peoples on the continent of Turtle Island, with a particular concern for Indigenous women and girls and the disproportionate violence they often face. Ginny was planning to contribute a piece to this collection of daily devotions for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence. Sadly, she died in May of 2021.*

*The following reflection, excerpted from a previously published article for The Anglican Journal (June 11, 2019) under the title “Where are all our flowers going?” is a call to justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Although it does not reference Mary’s Magnificat in an explicit way, the Spirit which inspired Ginny to raise her voice in the name of truth and liberation was surely the very same. We offer this reflection as a tribute to Ginny’s legacy and vision.*

“Where have all the flowers gone...?” – Pete Seeger

I grew up on a reserve near Syracuse, New York. As children, for the most part, we lived a carefree, safe life. There were times of family violence related to alcohol abuse; alcohol was not part of our traditional lifestyle, but was brought to my people by the settlers. We called it the “mind changer,” and that is what it did.

Alcohol brought with it the power to change our communities—but another, greater problem is one I remember well, and one that our whole country is now facing. For Indigenous communities across North America, the disappearance and murder of women and girls is a life changer—once that kind of violence enters the community, it doesn’t leave. I remember one of our young girls being abducted, sexually abused and murdered. It devastated the whole community, and after that our moms were more restrictive about where we went and told us not to travel the roads alone.

This kind of advice is widespread among Indigenous women and based on our life experience. When I lived in Alaska, I was driving a group of elders to a meeting in one of the Alaska Native villages. They were talking about the road we were traveling. One said there were many good berry patches off that road. Another said, “Yes, but we always have to carry a gun and never pick alone.” Then one elder said, “This is a bad road. Several women have died along this road.” She went on to say, “When I pick berries, I don’t fear the bears. I fear those crazy white men.”

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) has now produced its final report: <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>. It’s more than a thousand pages long, with personal stories of loss and the hard numbers. It’s in plain language and is available online for free. Where do we go from here? How do you talk about a problem so large that it needs a thousand pages and its own acronym?

MMIWG has been with us for a long time; it goes way back to first contact. And it’s here with us now. Every day on Facebook, I see several postings of missing Indigenous women and girls. Each one breaks my heart, and I wonder, “Where are all our flowers going?” They are gone to death and human trafficking.

What needs to change in our communities to protect our women and girls? I see two ways to help our women and girls, and our church can help in both of these tasks. For one thing, we can make a good life for them in our communities—a task that is economic and environmental. Maybe then, they won’t have to travel bad roads looking for something better. We must tend to the gardens in which our flowers grow, increasing economic justice within them. We can find value in their work and their skills, bringing opportunities to where they live.

The other way is spiritual. We can find value in who these women and girls are, in their being. This is about honouring the importance of women and girls by reconnecting with our traditional values: respect, humility, wisdom, truth, honesty, courage and most important, love.

My niece just sent me pictures of the flowers she has grown; they are beautiful, but not as beautiful as the two daughters and son she is raising. There is beauty all around us. Look for it, cherish it and safeguard it – before you have to ask, “Where have all the flowers gone?”



***The Rev. Canon Ginny Doctor** was a member of the Mohawk Nation Turtle Clan, and lived for years in New York state, Alaska, and Toronto. Ordained a priest in The Episcopal Church, she most recently served as the Coordinator for Indigenous Ministries in the Anglican Church of Canada. Ginny passed away in 2021 at the age of 71.*

# 7

## “My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.”

*Luke 1:46-47*

My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

This is not Mary's immediate response to the angel. No, it takes some time for her to reach this place of rejoicing.

Times and seasons matter. We observe 16 Days of Activism to End Gender-Based Violence in a season of transition from Hallowtide to Advent. A time of remembering the past and looking ahead to the future. And yet, I write to you from a very different time: the Feast of the Visitation, that springtime festival that commemorates Mary's first action after receiving the angel's announcement - a visit to her friend.

Relationships matter. A key tactic of abusers is to isolate their victims, ensure they have no community, convince them they need no community. Then when they need community to be there for them, there's no one to be found. They are convinced no one will remember.

Elizabeth and Mary are each other's community, such that their meeting is one of joy. It causes Mary's spirit to rejoice in God her Saviour. God is the cause and the source of her rejoicing, but what gives it voice is this community of women that supports her. Not Joseph - she hasn't told him yet, in Luke's telling. Not Zechariah - he's been silenced, for his lack of support for this miracle. But Mary's joy feeds Elizabeth's, and that shared rejoicing makes possible her testimony about the God who saves.

Community matters. We remember the past, and look ahead to the future. How can we build a community so strong, so knit together, no one can be effectively isolated from it - we would notice! Not only does such a community protect us, it gives voice to our rejoicing, and silences the voices that detract from that joy. These voices united feed the joy of others, as we tell of a God who remembers mercy from generation to generation.



***The Venerable Jordan Haynie Ware*** is originally from Texas and moved to Edmonton Alberta in 2017. She is the Rector of Good Shepherd Anglican Church, and serves as Archdeacon for Social Justice and Community Connection in the Diocese of Edmonton. She also co-hosts the podcast *Two Feminists Annotate the Bible*, and is a strong advocate and activist for gender justice.

# 8

## How do we hear the Magnificat?

How do we hear the Magnificat? With the voice of gentle Mary, meek and mild, overcome with awe and gratitude at her reception from Elizabeth an older, mature woman? Or do we hear it as the defiant, passion of a young woman claiming the history of her people and God's power for those who are so often forgotten or deemed unworthy?

Mary alone knows her calling through Gabriel to bear this child as a gift from God. Who would believe her? Others would see her as a sinner and possibly, in the footsteps of Eve, as the temptress who brought it on. Little thought would be given to how this happened or who else was responsible. Even Joseph was tempted to put her away from their engagement for the shame of her pregnancy. She must surely have had to bear gossip, taunting and community shunning, which may have been the reason for her trip to visit Elizabeth, as a respite.

Although the stigma of pre-marital pregnancy has eased in recent generations, the social consequences still fall disproportionately on women. Many are left to raise children on their own as partners deny responsibility. The shadow of Adam's blaming of Eve for his sin still lies over legal proceedings in cases of sexual assault where the character of the woman or what she was wearing are presumed to be contributing factors in temptation and so her fault. Gender violence extends beyond direct physical or sexual abuse, it is embedded in attitudes to women that lay blame and multiply the consequences in legal, social and economic ways.

In the face of Elizabeth's joyous welcome and affirmation that this child is a special gift of God, Mary is empowered to sing the song of Hannah afresh. Having said "Yes" to God and faced the uncertainty of Joseph and others, Mary is encouraged by Elizabeth's unreserved joy. She is confident, in faith, that God is acting as God has acted in the past to bring hope for the least and so claims that hope for herself, 'Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.' This is a radical counter-narrative for Mary and all who suffer under the ongoing systemic tentacles of gender discrimination that continue to allow violence to continue. Mary's feisty joy rings out in her praise of God who does, and will, lift up the lowly!



***The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls*** was born in Western Canada and has lived and served most of her ministry in southern Ontario. With a previous background in music and education, she was ordained deacon and priest in 1985/86. In 2019 she was elected and installed as Archbishop and Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada – the first woman to hold this office.



**“God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.”**

*Luke 1:52*

A college senior whom I mentored told me that her mother had discovered contraception in her backpack that morning and assumed correctly that her daughter was in a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. That evening after class, the student called her mother to let her know that she would be home late because she was staying behind for a tutorial with me. Her mother responded, “You can sleep in a ditch for all we care; you are already ruined.” My student was heartbroken. She understood that her mother now regarded her as impure and unworthy of love and protection from her family.

*And yet...Her soul magnified the Lord!*

Denying women and girls of their right to enjoy equality and non-discrimination is a cruel feature of our political and cultural landscape. Sex-selective abortions, the gender wage gap, intimate partner violence, and street harassment are examples of persistent and/or widespread forms of gender-based discrimination. Discrimination asserts that women’s physical integrity, contributions, labor, decisions, and knowledge are worthless.

*And yet...Her soul magnified the Lord!*

Little girls are buffeted by sexist messaging from many sources, including social media, trusted caregivers, educators, and friends. Girls and women experience period-shaming, body-shaming, fat-shaming, and slut-shaming, and are subjected to double standards that allow society to shame their pleasure in consensual sexual relationships, and conversely, to shame them when they are objectified and sexually victimized. Being made to embody corruption can diminish the soul (that ought to magnify the Lord) and the spirit (that ought to rejoice in God). When we demean girls and women, we deny them their potential to magnify and rejoice. We reject Mary’s song of praise.

*And yet...Her soul magnified the Lord!*

Activism against gender inequality throughout the 16 Days of Activism campaign and amidst this season of Advent requires people of faith to see girls and women as God saw Mary, his lowly servant: worthy of elevation from a marginal and subordinate status, and worthy to sing through the ages, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”



**Dr. Chiseche Salome Mibenge** is a member of Episcopal Relief & Development’s International Program. She directs the Gender Initiatives Cluster and provides technical support to program partners working for sustainable development in the areas of climate resilience, women’s empowerment and gender equity, and early childhood development.

# 10

**“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.”**

*Luke 1:52-53*

Mary’s song is exciting—it is an expression of love and hope at the prospect of Jesus’s birth and the light he will bring to the world. I believe we can also view the *Magnificat* as a call to action—a call to similarly lift up the “lowly” and bring down the powerful by challenging oppression.

Women and girls, like Mary, are incredibly resilient. So much of this resilience, however, is shaped by the way in which women and girls experience violence throughout their lives. Over the past year, the pandemic has resulted in growth of the “shadow pandemic”—a term used to describe the pandemic of violence against women. United Nations statistics show that before the pandemic, approximately 1 in 3 women had experienced intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. While this statistic is significant, it is also important to remember the stories that exist behind each number.

I was 16 when I first learned about the separation of immigrant women and their children at the Mexico-U.S. border. During the Episcopal Church’s General Convention, I visited a detention center that housed immigrant mothers. I will never forget standing outside the detention center’s fence with my fellow Episcopalians, watching as the women inside waved to us through their too-small windows. We sang and waved back: “We are with you.”

It has been several years since women at the borders—as well as movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp—have dominated mainstream headlines. But this absence does not mean women are not experiencing violence.

As we conduct research, tell stories, and believe women, we continually learn more about how violence shapes women’s lives. Some women experience disproportionate violence and aggression. In the U.S., homicide is the third leading cause of death among Indigenous women ages 10-24, and Indigenous women are victims of murder at more than 10 times the national average. Hate crimes and attacks against transgender women, specifically Black trans women, also constitute an epidemic of violence that is often overlooked.

How do we tell these women, “We are with you”?

I believe we teach love. We teach, talk, and dream about a world where all of God’s children can thrive, where we all experience love, hope, strength, and joy. Then we do the work needed to make this world a reality. We listen to, trust, and encourage girls. We do not shy away from talking about violence or survivors of violence. We honor survivors’ experiences by lifting up their voices and pursuing change in the way of what is right. We say: “I love you. I am with you.”

*Loving God, we thank you for making us in your image and giving us this life. We pray that you would help give us the courage to raise our voices and create a world where all your children can thrive. Amen.*



**Maria Gonzalez** worships in the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia and is a junior at Harvard, where she studies government and is an Air Force ROTC cadet. Maria is passionate about women’s empowerment and previously served as a representative to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the Generation Equality Forum, and The Episcopal Church’s General Convention.

# 11

**“The Mighty One has  
done great things for me,  
and Holy is his name.”**

*Luke 1:49*

When Mary learns that she will become the mother of God, she sings, “the Mighty One has done great things for me, and Holy is his name.” Often, Christians understand these “great things” to be the worldwide fame and praise she will receive through the millennia.

But Mary isn’t singing about her likeness hanging in museums, or about the great cathedrals and universities that will bear her name. Her spirit rejoices in God’s promise of mercy for her—a poor, unmarried, teenage girl—and everyone like her who suffers in human systems of oppression.

In the church, we easily fall prey to the idea that justice can be achieved simply by elevating privileged women to positions of power. But I don’t think it would have occurred to Mary that her own exalted status as God-bearer would wipe away the oppression faced by her sisters. After finding out she will play a central role in the central point of human history, Mary wastes no time patting herself on the back or reveling in her own privilege and merit. Her attention is on God’s work: bringing down the powerful from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

The women of our churches fought long and hard for equal representation and the right to be leaders, ordained and lay. As the first ordained woman to be president of the House of Deputies of The Episcopal Church, I know this history well. But in the end, our fight for equality will mean little if we do not use our authority to advance God’s vision of safety and wellbeing for all women, everywhere. The work is now more urgent than ever, as the COVID-19 pandemic has set back even the modest progress of recent decades.

<https://www.un.org/en/desa/world%E2%80%99s-women-2020>

God’s promise to us—to Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, and to their descendants as numerous as stars in the sky—is one of justice and mercy for all of God’s people, and especially the most vulnerable among us. May we bring our churches ever closer to that vision, always remembering that Mary sang of God’s greatness, not her own.



***The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings*** was elected president of the House of Deputies by her peers at the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church in 2012 and was unopposed for reelection in 2015 and 2018. She is the first ordained woman to hold the position.

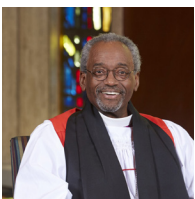
# 12 “My soul magnifies the Lord”

To all of us who have heard the words of the *Magnificat*, chanted by congregations, sung by choirs, it is all too easy to lose sight of the remarkable faith of a young Hebrew woman whose life was in the process of being turned upside down. Here was someone who knew—truly knew and understood—what it meant to be lowly, in a world where seemingly everyone around her was, relative to her, powerful.

From the emperor in far-away Rome to the soldiers in his army of occupation marching through her neighborhood streets, from the high priest in the Jerusalem temple to the local rabbi who had known her since she was a child, from her parents and childhood guardians to Joseph, to whom she now was betrothed — it seemed as if everyone around her had some measure of power while she, in contrast, was powerless, vulnerable, lowly.

And yet Mary’s faith—a faith grounded in those psalms and songs and tearful prayers in which she had been immersed, a faith that pointed not only to God’s mercy but also to God’s justice—that faith gave her strength, gave her hope, gave her the ability to stand tall and hold her head high in the face of anything, and anyone, that might try to strike her or push her down. “God has lifted up the lowly,” Mary dared to believe, and believing found her own spirit lifted up.

And not only Mary, but her countless sisters throughout the centuries who have faced insult and injury, slavery and servitude, discrimination and domestic abuse, violence to body and spirit. Walking in Mary’s footsteps, following the way of Jesus her son, these faith-filled women press on still, despite all that comes against them, seeking by the Spirit to set things right: “Let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new.”



*The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry is the Presiding Bishop & Primate of The Episcopal Church.*

# 13

## Woyatan IyechēMary

### Mary said, “My soul sings praises”

As we gather in your name Creator God, we face the Four Directions remembering before you all Indigenous women and girls who are missing and murdered. We pray for those who are victims of violence, their families and communities. In Mary’s Song we find our way, loved, blessed, protected and strengthened with God who created us. We breath. Wakan Tanka , wocikiyaye, wocikiyaye. God Hear our Prayers. Amen.

*Slow breaths and read:*

#### Luke 1:46-55

<sup>46</sup> “My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

<sup>46</sup> ēkwa Mary ōmisi itwēw,  
 “nitahcāhk mamihcimēw kā-tipēyihcikēyit.  
<sup>47</sup> mīna nitahcāhk cīhkēyīhtam,  
 ayisk kisē-manitow ē-pimācihit,  
<sup>48</sup> ēkwa nikī-kiskisitotāk, niya ē-atoskēyākaniwiyān.  
 anohe ohci kahkiyaw ayisiyiniwak sawēyimikowisiw nika-itikwak.  
<sup>49</sup> ayisk ana kā-māwaci-sōhkātisit  
 kihci-kīkwaya nikī-tōtamāk mīna kanātaniyiw owīhowin.

#### (Plains Cree)

*Slow breaths and read:*

<sup>50</sup> His mercy is for those who fear him  
 from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>50</sup> Áádóó dahodísiniígíí da’ahílchííhdéé’  
 áádóó da’ahílchííhgóó hwe’aa a’ááh  
 hasin bil dahóló.  
<sup>51</sup> Hagaan bee  
 hwe’adziil bééhózingo ájiilaa,  
 Diné bijéí biyi’déé’ ádaa hodzódli yee  
 nitsídaakeesii taznooskaad.

#### (Navajo)

*Slow breaths and read:*

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
 and lifted up the lowly;  
<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
 and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>52</sup> Tsu-na-li-ni-gi-dv du-we-ka-hv-sv u-na-nv-di-yi,  
 a-le u-yo i-yu-na-dv-hna-de-gi du-sa-la-da-nv.  
<sup>53</sup> A-go-nu tsu-ni-yo-si-s-gi o-s-dv ge-sv du-ka-li-i-s-ta-nv,  
 tsu-ne-hna-i-no a-sv-ha do-u-ne-nv-s-di-yi ni-du-wa-ne-lv-gi.

#### (Cherokee)

*Slow breaths and read:*

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
 in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

<sup>54</sup> Iye towaonxila kin he kiksuye,ca  
 Israel ookiyeye cin he ikiye ce;  
<sup>55</sup> Hunkakewicunyanpi, Aberaham  
 cinca kici, henan ohinniyan oie  
 wicakicaton qon hje iyececa ce,  
 eya,

#### (Sioux Lakota)

WO CI KI YAYE.



**Rev. Joann Conroy** is the president of the ELCA American Indian Alaska Native Association, Inc. (AIANA) and a chaplain at the Good Samaritan Society/Sanford Health in Maplewood, Minn. She was ordained in 2000.



# 14

## “Lifted Up the Lowly” *Luke 1:52*

You and I have to get messy in this text, and in real life.

The gospel writers don't tell us much about Mary's body. Her suspected age is conveniently left out of most interpretations of Jesus' birth narrative. It is messy talking to adults about taboos around sex and age of consent, and we want to protect our children and adolescents from difficult topics.

The bible is full of difficult topics. Our scriptures contain sexual assault, discrimination, and micro- and macroaggressions against women. But Mary, who as a faithful Jew knew the stories of Tamar and Dinah, not to mention the supporting evidence around her every day, was able to utter the amazing praise and prophecy we know as The Magnificat.

Given all of that, what do we do? How do we prophesy, live, advocate, and serve given the her-stories of gender violence?

The words of the Magnificat show us that Mary has been doing an acute social calculus throughout her young life. She has seen people and their wealth displace, appropriate, and abuse people in poverty – people like her, people who are “lowly” (she uses the word “low” twice).

Mary's prophecy of sending the rich away empty is meaningful. Through it, we see that she has known emptiness. Through it, we can hear the pain that echoes inside us and inside oppressed women and femmes worldwide. This emptiness is also, paradoxically, physical. Bodily. And the salvific justice Mary proclaims is at once spiritual and yet bodily.

The gospel writer Luke is known for the (relatively, given other biblical authors) remarkable attention he pays to the voices of women. He is a guide for allies of women, creating the conditions for women and femmes to express their experience as a way toward understanding and praising the “Mighty One” who has “done great things.”

And Mary's proclamation is a guide for women. It is brash, unapologetic, whole-hearted, spoken as a woman who is praising the end of difference as division, the end of wealth as power, the end of the gender status quo.

Do you feel the stirring of the Mighty One? Hint: it probably feels messy.



**Denise Rector** is a PhD student studying Womanist theology, race, history, and ethics at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Her essays on spiritual life have been featured in *gather*, the magazine for the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

# 15

**“For God has looked with favour on the lowliness of God’s servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.”**

*Luke 1:48*

In a patriarchal world ruled by purity laws and shame, the unwed and pregnant Mary certainly would not be considered “blessed.” Her very life is at stake and when she runs away her only hope is in her pregnant and older relative Elizabeth who is married to a priest. Her journey of several days also happened in a land occupied by Rome which meant soldiers, guards and danger. Does she travel by night? When Mary finally arrives in a desperate state, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and gives Mary a much-needed blessing. It is only then that Mary is safe and sings her song of praise and liberation.

Living as oppressed and occupied people is a treacherous existence. This reality is present throughout the Jesus narrative and tension arises when he refuses to be a revolutionary leader. We remember that the Jewish people eventually do revolt, only to be crushed by the empire.

Where are we in this story? I live on land that was home to the Bitterroot Salish people. They were promised homeland, only to lose it. They were given reservation land only to lose ownership of much of it. In a policy of cultural genocide their practices and language were criminalized, and thousands of their children over generations were stolen from families and put into church-run boarding schools to be Christianized and Westernized. Many never returned home, and those that did often suffered deeply from the trauma they experienced. Their land has been occupied by foreign invaders for over 160 years.

This year we have the discovery of over 1200 bodies of children being found outside of these “schools” in North America. And yet, Indigenous youth are still not safe as many young women and men continue to disappear, often forever, and often without justice or answers. The reality of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women has been devastating for all our tribal communities in Montana.

Today, myths and stereotypes of indigenous people persist and perpetuate internalized superiority for settler, and often Christian, people. Christian allies are called on to wrestle with these truths and understand the legacy and culpability of our institutions throughout this history.

For Mary the amazing thing is that God flips the script and cares for and blesses her. We know that God also cares deeply for indigenous youth. It is on us to help flip the script of who is valued, blessed, and cared for in the land that we live. Do you know whose homeland you are occupying and the story of their colonization? Is your church ready to wrestle with these issues and build relationships with local indigenous leaders? How can you help change the story of who has worth, value, wisdom, and truth as God did with Mary?



**Rev. John Lund** has served as the ELCA campus pastor and director of Emmaus Campus Ministry at the University of Montana in Missoula for the past 16 years. In this role he manages a student and young adult community of 15 residents in 3 houses as well as many others who join in, oversees many young adult interns and staff, and does community organizing through Common Good Missoula. He is married and has two boys in college.

# 16

## “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

*Luke 1:46-47*

In I Samuel we encounter Hannah, faithful and holding fast to God even in her bitter disappointment and grief. Each year Hannah came to Shiloh with her husband, his other wife, Peninnah and Peninnah's children. Hannah had no children. Each year she prayed that she might conceive. She stopped eating. In her desperation Hannah poured out her heart in silent prayer. Eli the priest who didn't hear her accused her of being drunk and said, “How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.” (I Samuel 1:14)

This is not an uncommon experience for women and girls, for missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, for women at the borders, for victims of gender-based violence. They are not heard. They are not seen, and they are sent away. Eli did not realize that he was standing on holy ground and witnessing a deeply spiritual encounter between Hannah and God. Instead, he saw a problem to be dismissed.

Though Hannah was praying silently she was not voiceless. She was heard by God, bore Samuel and dedicated him to the LORD. And Hannah sang, “My heart exults in the LORD; and my strength is exalted in my God.” (I Samuel 2:1) Hannah's song became Mary's song. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:46-47) These two women of little account in the world's eyes knew absolutely that they were heard, seen, and vindicated by God. For every way that the culture denied their personhood, God responded by raising them up.

My father's people left Ireland after the potato famine. Their home county, Roscommon, was the epicenter of the Great Hunger. Of course, St. Patrick's Day was a part of our family's calendar. It is one of my favorite days of the year. Yes, I eat corned beef and cabbage and potatoes and sing a rebel song, but I also recite the Magnificat – *the* rebel song. Every time we hear Mary, we hear the voices of the silenced women; a testimony to God's faithfulness and to theirs. Every time we sing the Magnificat, we join their defiant chorus.



***The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton*** is the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is an ambassador of the World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black Campaign: A global movement for a world without rape and violence.