

Hope Is Worth the Risk
Selections from Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:46-55
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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We love the story of baby Jesus. And when the kids tell it, it's even better. How precious are they?

We love the story of Jesus' birth. And at this point in history, we've really gotten used to the story. We know it. We take it for granted. We can name the characters. We can even tell it pretty well, at least better than we can tell a lot of Bible stories.

But there is one thing we often miss - and that is the risk.

We hear the story of the angel coming to Joseph and we just assume that he will say yes, and that he and Mary will build a family together.

We forget that, as Kayla Craig says, "Joseph's decision to embrace this divine assurance—rather than succumb to societal expectations to untangle himself from his pregnant fiancée—is a radical act of hope....Propelled by this hope, Joseph uses his position not just for personal faithfulness, but as an act of profound communal responsibility by choosing to protect and stand by Mary. Instead of living out of fear for what others may say or think, Joseph places his hope in something bigger than himself" (Kayla Craig, "Commentary on Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 1:46-55" in *Words for the Beginning Sermon Planning Guide | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org*).

And we admire that. But let us not lose track of the risk that was involved. After all, he was risking his reputation...perhaps his livelihood...his very self in order to protect Mary and their unborn child. And he took this risk...he chose this hope...because of the words of an angel.

And it's not just Joseph about whom we need to think about.

We hear what we commonly call "Mary's Magnificat" - those beautiful words that Luke tells us Mary sang when she was visiting Elizabeth - we hear it and we almost don't notice the ways her words turn expectations on their heads.

But listen again to those words, especially the verses that Mark read for us today:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor upon the lowliness of his servant...He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the

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powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:46-48a, 52-53).

As Kayla Craig writes, “Mary’s response to her calling is...revolutionary. In light of all that has been foretold, she sings a hopeful anthem for the ways God turns our world upside down and brings it right side up by bringing down the mighty, exalting the humble, filling the hungry, and sending the rich away. As she sings, Mary weaves a vision of the world as God intends it, stitching together a pattern of justice and mercy in her words. Her hope in the promise of God transcends time and space, extending a sacred invitation and inspiring us today to live out our faith in tangible, transformative ways” (Kayla Craig, “Commentary on Matthew 1:18-25 & Luke 1:46-55” in *Words for the Beginning Sermon Planning Guide | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org*).

Yet we tend to call this passage lovely. Maybe we even name it as hopeful. But rarely do we consider the risk. Here, a young woman, who scripture tells us was pregnant at an inopportune time, has the courage to sing a song of shifting paradigms and of power showing up in unexpected people and places. She has the courage to sing a song in which she and others like her are the victors over their real life oppressors.

But we are so used to this story that we often forget that Joseph and Mary not only choose hope, but are also willing to risk themselves in doing so.

And, friends, this hope does not just belong to Joseph and Mary. And the willingness to risk is not simply their calling.

“In 1955, a young woman named Claudette Colvin was riding a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. At just 15 years old, she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, defying the oppressive laws of segregation....Her act of courage came months before Rosa Parks’ famous stand....Her refusal to be silenced became a spark in the civil rights movement, paving the way for the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the eventual dismantling of segregation laws....Her courage wasn’t born out of ease but out of a deep conviction that the world could be better—that the chains of injustice could be broken” (Rev. Cameron Trimble, *Courage as Sacred Work*, in *Piloting Faith: An (Almost) Daily Devotional from Convergence*, December 16, 2024).

And isn’t that what hope points us toward? A better world?

So, I wonder...

What does the world need us to be hopeful for?

What possibilities lay before us asking for us to choose them, not passively, but to choose them in ways that we are willing to work for them?

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I wonder...

What are you...what am I...what are we willing to risk in order to make those hopes a reality?

What are we willing to risk for the good of others? What are we willing to risk to help give birth to a better world?

Friends, hope isn't easy. But it is important. And it is worth the risk. May we live courageously enough to choose it. Amen.