

Advent 2007

Dear Friends,

It is a delight to wake up in this season and enjoy the birds singing. They seem to love the black olives on my tree in the courtyard. They are constantly singing in spite of the bitterness of the olives. They call other birds to share with them the food, and the whole community of these birds is celebrating. These birds and their positive energy remind me of Mary, mother of Jesus.

Mary, our lady of Palestine, looks unblinkingly at the realities of life lived daily under empire. That is, she bears witness to the rich oppressing the poor, the powerful lording over the weaker ones, the erection of walls of exclusion and confiscation, the stealing and demolishing of homes, the confiscation of lands, the violation of water rights, the restrictions on freedom of movement, and the denial of access to holy sites.

Standing in the shadow of empire, Mary saw with clarity and bore witness; she sang to God our savior. And she still sings today with full throated confidence in God's deliverance for the captives and release for those living under lawless oppression. God will, Mary proclaims, turn the world upside down, bring down mountains, and raise valleys. God will be merciful and strong in ways we do not yet see; empire will be brought down and a new human community of all God's people will rise up.

*"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...'" (Luke 1: 46-53)*

After 40 years of occupation and denial of all our basic rights, how can I continue in joyful witness and singing like Mary?

In Luke's account, the unwed Mary does not remain isolated with her anxieties, but seeks support from another woman, Elizabeth. Filled with the Holy Spirit who exalts the violated, the two women rejoice in God's liberating action. In the Magnificat, the pregnant Mary enunciates God's salvation to the humiliated and downtrodden.

The future of the peace and wellness that God provides to all without exception is not to be awaited passively. Rather, it is being born in us today, from our flesh and blood, from our commitments and struggles for justice. It becomes the hope for those who do not have hope.

We remember that Jesus opened his public ministry in another program of hope.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18).*

It was addressed to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the broken victims. Yes, Friends how then can I keep from singing?

Friends, your gift of friendship is one of the greatest gifts I received. You brightened my days by joining me to light candles of joy, despite all sadness, and candles of hope where despair keeps watch, and candles of love to inspire all my living.

I will light the candle of fellowship this season; I know that the experiences of unity in human relations are more compelling than the concepts and prejudices which divide us. Life keeps coming on, keeps seeking to fulfill itself, and keeps affirming the possibility of hope.

May this Christmas season be a time of renewal of our commitment and hope! With all my best wishes and great gratitude to each and every one of you for your partnership, accompaniment, and love.

Jean