Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"My soul proclaims the greatness of God" (Luke 1:46).

1 Sam 1:24-28; Luke 1:38-48

Today's two readings again parallel a story from the first Covenant with one from the second. Hannah, the barren wife who conceives her son Samuel, offers a song of praise that is echoed in the canticle of Mary. Mary breaks into song upon meeting

her elderly cousin, Elizabeth. Their pregnancies are more than just the miracle of life for two women in ancient Israel. The grace that made this possible will be magnified throughout all of salvation history. God is fulfilling the covenant he made with Israel in the birth of Jesus, but it will have universal, even cosmic, implications for creation and the destiny of humankind.

The births of John the Baptist and Jesus set in motion the liberation of the human race from the hopeless, escape-proof prison of sin and death. In their context, this also meant the end of oppression of the poor by the rich and powerful. In her Magnificat, Mary boldly celebrated the downfall of those on thrones and the scattering of the proud and self-satisfied. God will stand with the poor, the hungry, the vulnerable mass of humanity.

This makes Christmas one of the most provocative, revolutionary events in history. Taming and toning down the message of the Incarnation has been one of the greatest victories of modern culture to control human longing and maintain the disparity necessary for a world of the rich and the poor, the privileged few and the desperate majority.

Keeping Christmas only a cultural and commercial event or a religious one with only a spiritual message is one of the most effective strategies to hide its deeper meaning. If Christmas does not mean that God is with us in the full human condition, including the poverty and injustice that so define our world, then the Incarnation is meaningless. But if God is in fact among us, the revolution of the heart and within every social structure and system is underway.

Two women are the first to know what God is up to. Some 30 years later, when the crucified Jesus rises from the tomb to reveal God's secret plan to open the gates of death to human hope, it will be a small group of women who first announce this victory to a fearful, skeptical band of men cowering in the upper room. Women know, because the promised revolution comes first to them and to their children, God's *anawim.*

We rejoice to see it. It is the song of praise and gratitude that never ends.