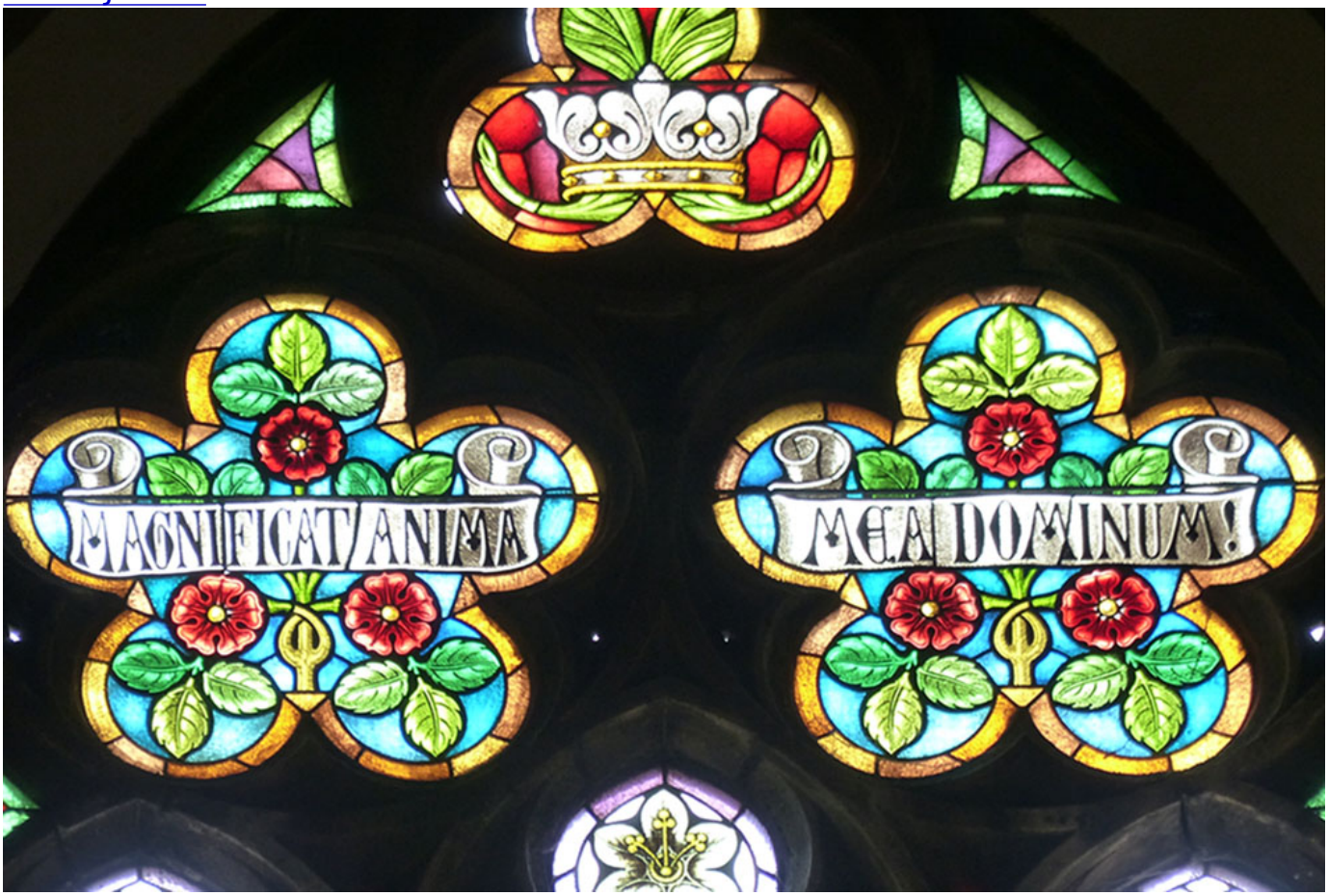
Spirituality
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by Sr. Mary M. McGlone

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December 16, 2023
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In Jesuit Fr. Bill Cain's rendition of *The Diary of Jesus Christ*, we hear Jesus talk about listening to his mother sing her favorite song, the "Magnificat." (We pray it today as our responsorial psalm.) Jesus challenges Mary, saying that the promises of the song may have been true, "once, a long time ago."

When she challenges him to do his part, he learns how very subversive it is to sing that the hungry will be filled and the rich sent away empty. The Magnificat isn't a lullaby, but a prophetic proclamation.

Between Isaiah, Mary's song, Paul's message to the Thessalonians and the evangelist John's description of John the Baptist, we get more than enough calls to prophecy in this last week before Christmas.

For ages, scholars have debated about the identity of the Servant of Isaiah's songs (see Isaiah 42, 49, 50 and 51). The early Christians felt the servant described Jesus, the long-awaited, surprising, Messiah. Others suggest that the servant depicts Israel herself as God's chosen.

Third Sunday of Advent

December 17, 2023

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11
Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Today, especially in light of praying the Magnificat with Mary, we might look at how she and John the Baptist invite us to become servants of the Lord with them.

The first attitude we learn from Isaiah, Mary and John is that they focus on God. Isaiah says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Mary sings, "My soul rejoices in God, my savior," and the baptizer proclaims, "I am not the Christ ... whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

What would change in our lives if we would say with conviction, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"?

Sometimes we may proclaim something like that by our conviction that our opinion is infallible. (The mother of one of my closest friends used to say, "I've thought about it, and I'm right!" Of course, her tongue was blatantly planted in her cheek as she said it.)

Supposing that we've got it absolutely right ends up being the polar opposite of prophecy. Mary and John, our guides, remind us that prophets don't proclaim their opinions. They invite others into an awareness of God's love, of the gift of God's Spirit; they proclaim that grace that awaits us just around the bend if only we will be open to it.

Secondly, as Mary in Cain's book challenged the boy Jesus, the prophet calls us into an ever-greater awareness of the needs of others and our potential to respond.

Isaiah's servant, like Jesus, recognized that being anointed was a job description. They were to bear genuinely good news, to listen attentively to the sorrowful and to help free others from whatever might bind them.

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Mary's response, her open-ended "Here I am, thy will be done," became her life's orientation.

Paul preached the same message from a different angle when he said, "Do not quench the Spirit." How often do we feel a twinge about not responding or not knowing how to respond to something that is going wrong? We think of hunger in the world, wars, division, or discrimination against others for their orientation, ethnicity, age, gender, etc., and we ask, "But what can I do?"

The fact that the question even arises in us is a sign of the Spirit, who will never call us to try something we cannot do.

Paul tells us, "Pray without ceasing." If our prayer says, "Here I am, I come to do your will," we will eventually understand what we can do, even if it is no more than to stand silently by another, never pretending to understand all that is going on in

them.

Ultimately, John the Baptizer reminds us that the coming of God's reign is gift and grace. We cannot make it happen any more than the rooster makes the sun rise. Nevertheless, like John, we can live like prophets, helping others catch a hint that there is something good afoot, something deeper, and more meaningful than society offers. That's what it means to prepare the way.

Today, the Spirit of the Lord urges us to rejoice because we know that the hungry can be fed and the brokenhearted healed. We rejoice because, like John, we can point toward a road that leads to something unimaginably wonderful. With Paul, we can proclaim one infallible message: "The one who calls you is faithful" and will lead creation into fulfillment.

Mary sings of what God is working in our midst, Isaiah describes it, John announces that it's coming and Paul reminds us that God does great things, not just "once a long time ago," but today, among and through us. That's divinely subversive!

A version of this story appeared in the **Dec 8-21, 2023** print issue under the headline: A divinely subversive call.