

Sarah Kretzmann
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Today we celebrate Mary's song. It is often called the "Magnificat," which is simply the first word of the text in Latin. The first line of this text in Latin sounds like this, "Magnificat anima mea Dominum." *My soul magnifies the Lord*, says Mary... Whether in English or Latin, the words are gorgeous. They have been set to music thousands of times, hundred of hymns are based on them, poets and artists alike are inspired by them. The words are exquisite and lovely and pure... just like Mary herself...

...who is but a girl, really, maybe around the age of twelve or thirteen. She is a virgin, and yet she suddenly finds herself pregnant. She knows her fiancé Joseph is confounded by this unexpected and inexplicable pregnancy, so she seeks out her cousin Elizabeth. She stays with her for her entire first trimester, those scary and delicate three months, before returning home to Joseph.

Just prior to this morning's Gospel, the angel pays Mary a visit and announces to her that she will conceive and bear a son, and that he will be named Jesus, and he will be the Son of God. "How can this be?" Mary asks, "since I am a virgin?" Gabriel has just told her that her son will be the Son of God, that he will reign over the descendants of Jacob forever, and that his kingdom will never end. Mary listens to all this, but she asks only one question (I myself would have peppered Gabriel with questions until he said, "You know what? We're just gonna go look for someone else. Thanks, anyway.") But Mary has only one question, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" She has just been told that she will be the mother of God's only Son, yet she expresses confusion only over her virginity. Seems strange, that that would be her only question.

Growing up, I never really paid much attention to Mary's virginity, except for to assume it was important for the same reason the lambs had to be perfect and without blemish before they were slaughtered during the first Passover when the Israelites prepared to flee Egypt. Purity is crucial in the sacrificial ritual, both in the Old and New Testaments. So, if Jesus is to be the final, ultimate sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world, it makes sense that Jesus has to be perfect. But why does Mary have to be perfect and pristine and pure? She's not the one who's going to die on the cross. So why is her virginity even mentioned in Jesus' nativity story?

The reason Mary's virginity plays a crucial role in the birth of Jesus goes back a long, long time, back into the Old Testament, even way back to the book of Genesis, in the 6th chapter. This is a great chapter, so completely bizarre and out of the blue. In these early chapters in Genesis, we find that God is losing patience with human beings. They are doing wicked things, and God even regrets creating people in the first place. So he decides to flood the earth and wipe out all the people, except Noah and his family.

And right smack dab in the middle of the story of Noah and the flood, we come across chapter 6, wherein the sons of God look down and see how beautiful the daughters of men are... and the sons of God come down to earth and impregnate the daughters of men, and their offspring are called the Nephilim, a race of giants that eventually gave us Goliath, the one whom David killed with a slingshot.

After this chapter, though, God has had it, and he gives Noah specific instructions on how to build the ark, “and build it now, because I have had it with people, and it’s gonna start raining real soon, so get goin’, Noah,” says the Lord.

Chapter 6 in Genesis is the straw that breaks God’s back. Because the last boundary between heaven and earth has just been crossed. When creation was new and fresh, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve. I eat this fruit, you eat that fruit, God told them. But the minute God isn’t looking, they eat his fruit, because they want to be like God. That’s the first boundary that is crossed.

And then not long after that, Adam and Eve’s son Cain kills his brother Abel. Up to that point, God had been the one to decide who lives and who dies. That’s the second boundary that is crossed.

And now this. Sons of God mating with human women. The boundaries between heaven and earth are violated in a way never even heard of before, and this is the third strike for God. “Except for Noah and his family, I’m killing them all.”

Why is this the straw that breaks God’s back? After all, thirty generations have passed since the time of Adam and Eve, with all sorts of marriages and conceptions and babies, and God didn’t snap then. Why now, why with this? Because these are his sons doing this evil deed. These are the sons of God, crossing these boundaries between heaven and earth. These are the sons of God, taking whichever women they wanted, claiming whomever they desired as a wife and impregnating whomever they desired. It’s a fairly lusty chapter, and it’s a power struggle between the divine and the mortal. The resulting chaos and confusion is so great in the world after this, that God feels he has no choice but to wipe everyone out and start again.

We know that God is grieved by what has happened, we know that God is furious over what has happened. Could it also be that God is humiliated by what has happened? After all, these are his son—whatever that means, angels or whatever. Whoever they are, they represent God himself and here they go getting human daughters pregnant. It’s scandalous, it’s racy, it’s got lusty handprints all over it—both human and divine. It would seem that our sin has reached even into the heavens, bringing with it humanity’s uncontrollable sexual desire.

Not that intimacy is bad, on the contrary, it is God-created. But sin often takes that human desire for intimacy and twists it into ugly things, where people are hurt, where boundaries are crossed, where trust is betrayed, where children are taken advantage of...This is not how God designed human intimacy.

And so fast forward now, thousands of years....God has decided to intervene in humanity’s continued suffering, to bring an end to the sin that started way back in the Garden of Eden. God looks back over time, at all the nasty chapters in human history (David’s affair with Bathsheba, impregnating her while she was still Uriah’s wife...the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters...the rape of Dinah...that whole nasty episode at Sodom and Gomorrah...Delilah’s catastrophic seduction of Samson...and then, of course, the sons of God impregnating human women)...and God knows what he has to do.

He has to undo what his sons did.

And so he chooses Mary to be the mother of his child. Hers will be a spiritual conception, she who has never known the touch of a man. She will be a virgin, chaste and

pure, she who is undefiled, she who is a stranger to human lust. Through Mary's virginity, God wipes away humanity's vulgarity.

This gives each one of us reason to rejoice, to sing our own Magnificat to God, that the blood of his own Son washes away every trace of sin that leaves us sordid and filthy. When God looks at your lovely face and mine, he does not see the grimy things of your past or mine, he sees you and me as eternally virginal, forever pure, forever forgiven.