

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,
My Spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

You remember the Supremes -- that famous Motown group with the three female singers?

Well, today's gospel introduces three rather “supreme” women with songs of their own. There's:

1. Elizabeth, whose baby John (the Baptist) literally danced in her womb when she greets her relative, Mary;
2. Mary, pregnant with Jesus, who breaks out the song you call the Magnificat, extolling the radical, topsy-turvy love of God which changes everything; and then there's . . . [put on “shawl” costume]
3. ME! I'm Hannah – and it's ok if you didn't catch my name.

You do have to read between the lines to see me in that Gospel.

I might not be mentioned by name – but I'm there just the same.

And I've got a song to sing too.

A form of the Magnificat was my song – Hannah's Song – before it was Mary's.

Realizing that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,

I'll tell you a few of the best lines Mary stole – I mean, *borrowed* – from me, Hannah.

But first let me introduce myself.

Like I said, I'm Hannah, and you could read all about me

in the first couple of chapters of the Book of 1st Samuel (Old Testament).

There it tells you that I'm a woman of a certain age,

long married to a wonderful man named Elkanah.

There was only one issue: Try as we might we couldn't have children.

Even at my age, I continued to pray and sacrifice and seek counsel from the priest. Elkanah and I kept up our relationship.

And one day to our great surprise I found I was at last going to have a baby.

I named him Samuel, which means “God has heard.”

How could I not break out in song?

Dedicating my son, Samuel, to God, I sang, "My heart exults in the Lord."

Not so different from Mary's opening line,
the line which give you the word, "Magnificat":

"My soul magnifies the Lord." (Or, as today's vanilla translation puts it,
"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.")

And, like Mary, I extol God who comes into our world, our lives,
and turns everything upside down.

In my song, I sing that: "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who are hungry are fat with spoil...

He raises up the poor from the dust...but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness."

All that's from my song, back in 1st Samuel.

Now here's how Mary puts it in her song, the Magnificat:

God has "cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;
filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty."

Hear the echoes?

Mary and I were both expressing our experiences as best we could.

How God had burst into our ordinary, everyday lives
and made them special, meaningful, holy.

How God turns everything upside down, and
puts us to work doing the same – speaking truth to power,
welcoming the outcast, feeding the hungry,
comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

That's not just what Mary and I sang about,
it's what we did. *It's what we raised our sons to do.*

I dedicated my son Samuel to be a Nazirite,
a member of a religious order within Judaism.

Some people think that Elizabeth's son, John (the Baptist), was a Nazirite too.

My son Samuel led the people Israel to David as King,
and it is from David's lineage – the branch of Jesse –
that leads directly to Jesus.

And Mary's son, Jesus?

You just may be hearing more about him in the next few days.

How God turned the world upside down, yet again,

to come among us as an infant in our humble flesh.

How Jesus grows up and shakes up the powers that be.

And, in time, how he was lifted high upon the cross,

knocking the mighty off their thrones.

But all that's a way off.

I've come many miles here today

over many years (three millennia, actually) to join my sisters Elizabeth and Mary
urging you to let God be born in you.

Let God in Christ make a home in and for you.

Our stories, our songs, tell you that you're never too old (or young),

you're never too lowly (or high and mighty),

for God to come into your life.

This Christmas, let God in Christ turn your life upside down

and lead you into the work of mercy and justice

that your soul too may exult, magnify, the Lord.

So be it: Amen.