

# Baptised to magnify love

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 5 December 2021

A Reflection by Rev Dr Josephine Inkpin

Advent 2C

Contemporary Reading: *An Ode to Fearless Women* by Nikita Gill; Luke 1:46-56

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

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Today's baptism was delayed from the end of June by the lockdown this year. It is therefore long awaited. In another way however, it is especially appropriate to take place at this particular time: as we celebrate hope and the embodiment of love, especially with Mary and her extraordinary cry of liberation, typically known as the Magnificat. For the person we baptise is, in my view, a truly remarkable person, and a wonderful embodiment of love: both gentle and fearless, just like Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Like each of us, she is a truly special creation of God. In her case, I am deeply humbled and enriched by the love and kindness of her presence, by the deep courage of their journey in life to join us; and by the possibilities and dreams she bears. For, like Mary, in her life and baptism today, she helps birth divine love anew among us. Like Mary, but in her own particular way, she thereby encourages us to magnify God's love and help make it real among us...

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I want to pick up a great spiritual theme which speaks to us today: that of crossing over. For our received baptismal theologies and liturgical traditions are full of contrasting words which are linked by this theme. These include the following great themes of Christian faith: darkness and light, sin and redemption, evil and good, exile and restoration, dryness and refreshment, barrenness and creation, slavery and freedom, death and new life.

In each case, baptism invites us to cross over, and gives us the grace to do so, and to keep going. For whilst the Church has always understood baptism to be once and for always, it is also because baptism, in this sense, is perpetually at the heart of a Christian life. We are always pilgrims, crossing over: crossing over to light, to redemption, to goodness, restoration, refreshment, creation, freedom, new life. These are what are embodied in becoming one with Christ in baptism.

Crossing over - how hard that so often is to do! So many people, and so many parts of us, prefer to live in darkness, in oppression, in the opposite of freedom and new life. Like the Hebrew slaves in Egypt in the Bible, so many people, so many parts of us, remain for so long bound by various forms of bondage. For it is tough to step out, to step into the river, to plunge into the waters which threaten to submerge us. Better, so many say, so many parts of us say, to stay in safety, even when it means denial of parts of ourselves, or others, of truth or freedom. For what does it take to leave behind one form of existence and to take another pathway, with risks and dangers you just can't calculate?

I'm deeply moved today, because the person we baptise shows us something of what that means. She, like others who have left the security of what was expected of them, show us what baptism is. They seek to live into their truth, enter more deeply into freedom, and live life in its fullness - and in that they already share in the way of Jesus.

For baptism is not a mere act, or a spiritual idea. It is a way of living, a way of relating, a way of committing ourselves, ever more wholeheartedly, to God, through the grace of God which calls us forth into that way, that great pathway of costly, yet fulfilling, love. For the great singer-sage Leonard Cohen had it right, didn't he? *'Everyone to love must come'*, he said, *'but like a refugee.'* Spiritually at least, and in whatever practical ways we are variously called to, we have to let go of the ties that bind us, and cross over into the freedom God seeks for us all: magnifying love.

Magnifying love: that is also Mary's great gift to us. That is why it is particularly fitting to hold this baptism today. May she who is baptised today know the same courage that was in Mary, and be strengthened in that same love. May she become ever more the fearless child of God that she, and all of us, are called to be.

For how are we to take forward Mary's Magnificat today? Surely it is by magnifying love ourselves and being fearless in baptismal strength, even when it requires us to cross over. That is why I chose as our first reading - *An Ode to Fearless Women* - from the now popular poet Nikita Gill. For Nikita's story, like that of Mary, is also one of speaking out from hitherto marginalised spaces with a fresh and liberating voice and presence. After all, Nikita is a Kashmiri Sikh writer who was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland and brought up in Gurugram, Haryana in India.

She began work as a cleaner, and her poetry was initially rejected 137 times. Yet she is now one of an accomplished and one of the most influential writers of her generation, particularly through her Instagram presence. Among varied topics, Nikita powerfully addresses trauma, depression, anger, feminism, romantic relationships, and mental health.

Like Mary in the Magnificat, she takes traditional themes and stories and turns them upside down in the search for liberation. She believes in reinventing herself no matter who tears her down and no matter how broken she or the reader may feel. This shines out in her poetry: a voice of hope in a world of great need of renewal. This is the message of Mary, and the gift we, as baptised people, are offered through God's grace and our solidarity together.

We so need fearless women like Mary, like Nikita, and like our sister who is baptised today. This week the Jenkins Report has highlighted this even more - bearing out the cries for change, from other fearless Australian women like Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins, and Marcia Langton. We so need the inspiration of the Magnificat and its courage and will. We so need each of us to live out the true meaning of baptism; the magnifying of love. For all of those of us who are here with the one who is baptised today are invited to share in magnifying love, and to help our sister live it. For baptism is about crossing over in divinely human solidarity.

We each make that journey ourselves, but we do it best as a community. And, thank God, we do it not in our own strength, but in the love and grace of God. For in divine love, our baptismal liturgy proclaims, just like the Magnificat, we find our ultimate freedom beyond all oppressions, light in darkness, life beyond all deaths we face, now and for always.

In Christ's name. Amen.