

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost - August 16, 2026

Isaiah 61:7-11; Psalm 34: 1-9; Galatians 4: 4-7; Saint Luke 1: 46-55

In nomine Jesu!

On August 15, 1976—50 years ago yesterday—Lutherans in America observed the Day of Mary for the first time. That observance began as trial use and became official in 1978 with the publication of the green Lutheran Book of Worship. For more than three centuries, from the arrival of the first Lutheran and other Protestant settlers in the New World in the mid-1600s until 1976, many American Lutherans avoided observances associated with Mary to distinguish themselves from Roman Catholics. For similar reasons, Protestants began saying “Christian” rather than small c “catholic” in the creeds. In 1875, the Galesburg Rule sharpened those distinctions: “Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran ministers only. Lutheran altars for Lutheran communicants only.” Other American church bodies, including Roman Catholics, had comparable boundary-marking practices. Some still do.

But back to Mary. How did a Galilean peasant girl become an object of our disdain? Not because of Martin Luther, whose devotion to Mary was profound. Rather, Mary became a casualty of the European religious wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants from 1562 to 1648—just as our ancestors were arriving here. Protestant armies, many of them Lutheran, marched behind the cross; Roman Catholic armies marched behind banners of the Virgin Mary. It took centuries—until the 1970s—for that weaponizing of doctrine and worship to officially end. We need to remember that history, especially now. Raising barriers and weaponizing worship, Scripture, tradition, or doctrine have no place in the Church, the Body of Christ. Such division is not merely regrettable; it is deadly. It took the Holocaust and the atrocities of World War II to teach Christians that.

That is why this weekend matters: using similar liturgies and biblical texts, Christ’s Church throughout the world is observing the Day of Mary together, even under different titles.

Back, then, to Mary—and to her foundational, mission-defining song: “My soul magnifies the Lord.” In his 1521 Commentary on the *Magnificat*, Luther called this a “sacred, chaste, and salutary song,” sung “most sweetly” about “the fear of God and God’s habit of upending worldly power by lifting up the lowly and humbling the proud.”

Mary’s song is deeply rooted in Scripture. Its closest precursor is the Song of Hannah, which also celebrates a miraculous birth and God’s reversal of human power. It echoes Miriam’s song and the Psalms’ praise of God’s mercy and justice. In other words, Mary’s song flows from the heart of the biblical witness.

So we must ask: Are our lives, our communities, our institutions, and Christ’s Church consistent with Mary’s song? Are we reflecting the God she magnifies—the God who shows strength, scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry, and sends the rich away?

All of us, and all the institutions in which we participate, must ask that question together. My task as a preacher of the Gospel is not to answer it for us, but to remind us what God has done—and how God gives us the courage, resources, the desire, and the motivation to make God’s work of justice our own.

We know God’s way of accomplishing this: not by power and might, but by the nonviolent weakness of love; not by wielding the cross against others, but by bearing the cross unjustly laid on him by dominating power for the sake of all; not by allowing unjust death to have the last word, but by raising the One unjustly killed into new and abundant life. In Christ, God makes his death the only death we need fear, and his resurrection our promised future. God gives us the Spirit —the nourishment we need—not to fear God’s work of justice, but to join it with joy.

In poetry and music, Mary sang of God’s justice. Then, through the power of the Spirit, she bore its embodiment—her son—in her own body for all to see. We who sing God’s praise are called, nourished, filled by the Spirit, and sent to do the same: to bear Christ in the world, so that all generations may call Mary, one another, and even us blessed, and magnify God’s holy name.

Amandus J. Derr, Interim Pastor