

How to experience Christ's liberation without, that is, reducing him to a series of do's and don'ts? Well, the first step is to say 'yes' but this can only come to a soul already on its knees, brought low, and there are many different ways this can be brought about, perhaps unique to each one of us. Beware formulae – it could be any mix of nature and nurture. In Mary's case we find a heart or soul empty of self attributable to nature more than nurture, but nurture has its part to play; born into a lowly oppressed people with no nation to its name; into a family of no great standing; into a time when life can be brutal and short, both for rich and poor alike, though the poor are more likely to know this – as today.

So there's an apocalyptic feel about today's feast and its readings; a sense of an extreme time in which the poor, actually representing all humanity, can only hope for a great reversal, brought to their knees by the desperation of their daily lives. And Mary is among the first to give voice to this, liberated, as she is, by her own 'yes' to God and the workings of the Spirit. It's not a new cry but the cry of the poor, of humanity, from its very beginning; the song of Hannah repeated once more but this time in the most definitive manner possible; a cry that is answered by incarnation and rewarded by the divinisation of both body and soul.

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