

The Sound of Mary's Voice

We know from Scripture, that Mary sang *at least* once. St. Luke gives us an account of this in the story of the Visitation when we are told she sang the *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* – the *Moyo wangu wamtukuza Bwana*, as it is rendered in Swahili. How did she sound like though – we may ask? What was the sound, colour and texture of her voice?

We find the first mention of singing in the Bible after the crossing of the Red Sea. Israel has now been definitively delivered from slavery. In a desperate situation, it has had an overwhelming experience of God's saving power. Just as Moses as a baby was taken from the Nile and only then really received the gift of life, so Israel now feels as if it has been "taken out of the water."

Pope Benedict XVI, Music and Liturgy – How Does Music Express the Word of God?

We can easily imagine Mary singing Miriam's Song (*Miriam* is *Mary* in Hebrew btw) – the one she belted out just after the Israelites passed dry shod through the Red Sea: (Ref. Exodus 15:20-21)

Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously!
The horse and its rider he has thrown into the sea!"

Still, we may wonder; how did Mary sound like? Is there a chance she might have sounded like Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston, who, by the way, gave a 20th century twist to Miriam's song in that 1998 DreamWorks Animation, *Prince of Egypt*? Maybe.

Personally, I would find it very difficult to imagine the Blessed Virgin (perhaps during one of those solemn Jewish feasts like Passover or Pentecost) singing with a powerful operatic voice like that of Maria Callas - arguably the world's most famous operatic soprano. In my defense, I would invoke Pope Pius X who during the 19th century, is known to have tried his best to remove the operatic element from the liturgy; declaring Gregorian chant and the great polyphony of the age of the Catholic Reformation to be the standard of liturgical music.

Once again, we may ask; how - or even better - **whom** did the Blessed Virgin Mary sound like? If I may be bold enough to hazard a guess, I would say that she sounded like Miriam and the Israelite women; like Gregorian chant and the great polyphonies ... like all the historical figures who have allowed themselves to be moved by the Spirit. After all, wasn't she *graced* by the Holy Spirit from the first moment of her conception? Did not the Holy Spirit hover over her in her mother's womb like the Spirit that hovered over the waters before the dawn of creation? Was it not the Holy Spirit that inspired and moved her to sing the Magnificat? Her spirit and The Spirit moved and breathed in harmony from the first moment of her life, to the last.

How easy it is to imagine Mary singing the Baby Jesus to sleep. When we were children and night fell, didn't we instinctively run to our Mother's Bosom... where she would lull us to sleep with her soothing voice, i.e. assuming she was one of those singing types? When the waters of chaos, death and darkness rise up from the deep places of the world and of man, threatening to wreck the Father's good creation and reduce the world to an uninhabitable wilderness, don't we similarly feel the urge to retreat into life's protective rampart – the home, the place of security and peace – the place "of shalom"?

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the Living Jerusalem, the Mother and Archetype of the Church. She makes her presence felt whenever the primal powers of chaos rise up against both creation and us. She cooperates in recreating us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Her last approved apparition was in Fatima, Portugal during the First World War, when she asked us to consecrate the entire world to her Immaculate Heart.

Today too, we are quite tangibly experiencing the power of chaos... the boat of the Church is being battered, left, right and centre and yet, because her presence and voice are able to "anchor us in peace" (*Funda nos in Pacem*) as we sing in the *Ave Maris Stella*, we can afford to sleep secure in her bosom.

"We believe that the most holy Mother of God, the New Eve, the mother of the Church, continues in heaven her motherly task for Christ's members through her cooperation in the birth and formation of divine life in the souls of the redeemed."

Pope Paul VI – Credo of the People of God