When was the last time you let your imagination run wild? Really wild?
Imagine this: Imagine the world not as it is, but as God imagines our world could be. Imagine what this would be like. Maybe this sounds impossible to us — but imagine.

We don’t do well with imagination. Children do, but adults, not so much. By the time we are grownups with responsibilities, it can feel like imagination has been beaten out of us.

When was the last time you played with paints? Some of you do – there are some great artists amongst us.
But I’m guess most of you haven’t played with paints in a long while.
Or when was the last time you wrote a poem, or made up a song? Or doodled on notepad, or let yourself daydream and not feel guilty about it?

This morning we hear a young woman – a teenager whose name in Hebrew is Miriam. We know her as Mary, and she has just learned from an angel that she is pregnant.

Miriam isn’t married, and in fact, she is betrothed to a man who is not the father of her baby. But she learns she is with child.

She has every reason to imagine the world will judge her harshly, certainly shun her, and even put her to death for transgressing all of social taboos of her day.

But Mary sings a song of joy, and her words are breathtaking.
““My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,” she sings, “my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.”

She knows in this moment that God loves her just as she is, and loves her for who she is becoming, and for what she is about to do: give birth to this child who will change the world.

The Song of Mary, or the Magnificat, as it is known, is one of four canticles – or songs – found in the Gospel of Luke.

We don’t often hear this beautiful canticle in church on Sunday. It is included in the lectionary for this Sunday as a second alternative to the psalm. I asked our liturgical leaders to include it today because I don’t want us to miss the Song of Mary.

This version of her canticle in English begins with the phrase “my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,” which flattens the meaning of that first sentence.
Older translations use the phrase “my soul magnifies the Lord,” hence its title, the Magnificat.

“Magnify” is actually closer to the Greek word, “mag-a-lenue,” meaning “God-awing.”

Mary greets the news of her baby with awe that penetrates to the depths of her soul. She is literally God-smacked when she has every reason to imagine otherwise.

Mary is, in fact, the first believer in Jesus, and that makes her the first disciple. She will be there at Jesus’s birth and she will be there at his death and beyond.

As Mary sings her song, she imagines not just the birth of her baby, but also the birth of a new world coming into being because of her baby.

Mary imagines a world of mercy and justice, a world where no one is hungry, where everyone is fed in body, mind and soul – and world that God years to bring into being.

Some consider Mary’s song as the most radical hymn ever written because she imagines a world where the politics of power and greed, tyranny and torture, is wiped away.

“He has scattered the proud in their conceit,” she sings. “He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly.”

“He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”

Her baby will grow, and he will be named Jesus and he will be seen as the anointed One, the Son of God, the bearer of a different reality than the reality of Mary’s world – or our world.

Jesus beckons his listeners – he beckons us – to imagine a different reality than what we see now.

In his parables, Jesus beckons us to imagine a world where the small and the lost are found; tiny things, like mustard seeds, grow into mighty trees with birds nesting in them.

He beckons us to imagine an arrogant lost son and his resentful brother embraced by a father who judges neither and loves both;

And beckons us to imagine an outcast – a Samaritan – who rescues the wounded beside the road when no one else will.

He beckons to join in this imagination for what the world could be like if our actions were founded on the values of kindness, peace, generosity, trust and friendship – the values of the Kingdom of God.

Yet know this too: Imagination requires vulnerability and requires seeing things that seem impossible or risky.
But who is more vulnerable than Mary, an unwed young teenager who is pregnant? What is more impossible than the birth of Jesus to this young maiden? Jesus will grow in adulthood, and he will do the impossible. We encounter him this morning in his early adulthood in this story from the Gospel of Matthew.

John the Baptist is in prison, and he sends Jesus a message. John had baptized Jesus in the River Jordan, but John still wonders what all this means. So he asks of Jesus, are you really the messiah? Or do we wait for another?

Jesus replies by echoing his mother’s song.

Imagine, he says, a world different than your prison cell, different that whatever holds you captive, different than what binds you so tight you cannot breathe.

“Go and tell John what you hear and see,” Jesus tells these messengers to John the Baptist: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”

Imagine this world Jesus speaks of, and Mary sings of. Imagine what sounds impossible.

And then ask yourself this: How can this world ever come into being unless we ourselves share in this imagination?

AMEN