

The letters M, A, and G are rendered in a bold, stylized font. Each letter is filled with a different pattern of colors: M is orange and teal, A is red and black, and G is orange, red, and black. They are set against a background of faint, overlapping faces of diverse women.

D E B B I E B L U E

The letters W, I, and F are rendered in a bold, stylized font. Each letter is filled with a different pattern of colors: W is purple and orange, I is teal and orange, and F is teal, orange, and black. They are set against a background of faint, overlapping faces of diverse women.

un Dios que nunca dejó
de considerar a las mujeres

The letters U, A, and T are rendered in a bold, stylized font. Each letter is filled with a different pattern of colors: U is purple, red, and black, A is black and red, and T is red and black. They are set against a background of faint, overlapping faces of diverse women.



MAGNIFICAT

Praise for Debbie Blue and *Magnificat*

Magnificat is a sermonic tour de force where the women of Scripture are more fully seen, taken seriously, and considered tenderly. Debbie Blue preaches through the stories of women and the feminine testimony in the text with skill and insight. She explores the reach of these women in the folds of our Christian tradition, but also from Jewish and Islamic sources, bringing their humanity and redemptive potential into full view. She weaves together rigorous interpretation, complexity, and a holy audacity as she bears witness to the expansive trajectory these women set for the community of faith today. This exploration through a collection of sermons reveals a deep love and mercy for the women in Scripture and the communities today hungry to connect with them. Their stories instruct and inspire, provoke compassion and invite us to join in the salvific arc of Scripture by the grace of the Spirit at work in each sermon. Magnificat follows the lead of the women, where there are no easy heroes or happily ever after's, but where one can glimpse profound hope in each testimony given. Debbie Blue honors the women of Scripture and honors the community of faith with this gift of sermons for our journey onward in the ways of Jesus.

- **Kelley Nikondeha**, Author of *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* and *Defiant: What the Women of Exodus Teach Us about Freedom*

If you suspect that the Bible wasn't written to warm our hearts (at least not female hearts) you're ready for Debbie Blue. Elevating texts that feature women, she peels away misogyny to show how complex humans navigated a relationship with God — the One who is merciful and loving,

but also beyond our grasp. Her words help scripture achieve its purpose and break our hearts open.

- Rev. Ruth Everhart, Author of *The #MeToo Reckoning and Ruined*

Debbie Blue's Manificat is a powerful collection of reflections on the profoundly important role that women have played throughout the history of our faith. Her insights into the stories of these women and the lessons that their lives teach us will challenge and inspire everyone who picks up this book, inviting us to look again at many familiar stories with fresh eyes and from a new perspective and be captivated by the prophetic wisdom and faithfulness of these women of faith.

- Rev. Brandan Robertson, Author of *Filled to Be Emptied: The Path to Liberation for a Privileged People*

They are few books on re-readings by women that I have read with keen enthusiasm and interest. Debbie Blue's Magnificat, is one of such books. As I was preparing my endorsement I thought that it would suffice to read the Introduction and perhaps one or two chapters. But as soon as I started with the Introduction I could not stop reading Debbie's "sermons." Each one of the re-readings of a chosen text is unusual, imaginative, courageous, audacious and pleasant. Amusing in some passages, startling in others. Debbie has a special knack for observing every corner of the text. She considers them up and down, she peers into every nook and cranny, there is no detail that eludes her gaze. She un.masks malicious patriarchal interpretations and brings forward fresh approaches. She gets out of comfort zones, which is the most appealing trait of her contributions: you receive what you are not waiting for. You might go along her writing thinking that you are going to find what it usually has

been and is said about the text, but then you discover that such is not the case. And you give her a nod of assent. She helps her readers to see that things are complex, that they are not that simple as one might believe; nothing is black and white, all of us are bad and good at the same time. And yet, reading Debbie Blue is not just a pastime. Her narrative challenges the traditional ways to read the Bible. Her contribution is even of a methodological nature since it persuades us that things are not what they seem to be. Moreover, Debbie's simple and enjoyable reading allows for her rabbinic and Christian, and even Islamic sources to be seen, as well as the influence of thinkers and artists. She questions patriarchal interpretations of the Bible, but she does not do away with the sacred text. She simply sets that text within this complex human history and lets her readers see its striking aspects, which are the same that are rarely exposed.

- **Elsa Tamez**, Mexican-Costa Rican Bible scholar and Theologian, author of several books, such as *Women in the Jesus' Movement* (JuanUno1 Books, 2021)

Magnificat: How God Never Stopped Considering Women by Pastor and Author Debbie Blue is a compilation of fifteen sermons. Each homily concerns biblical women, eight in the Hebrew Bible and seven in the Christian Testament. Some sermons focus on more than one character, others have as subject a singular figure, while two are centered on female personification of a biblical concept, Woman Wisdom and the Whore of Babylon. Every discourse surveys a wide array of concerns about human existence in its relationship to the Holy One and the world. The presentations are bound to entertain, amuse and inspire. At times I laughed and other times came close to tears. Storylines are followed and characters are explored with dexterity and attention to the text and its interpreters, including the contemporary audience. Blue displays phenomenal skill in engaging the audience with the biblical story and characters while casting them in fresh perspectives. Regarding the daughters of Zelophehad: "It's not often you find a story in the Bible where women challenge God's law....and God says, the sisters are right. Sorry. My bad. Scratch that whole patriarchal thing we wrote at Mount Sinai about inheritance, give these women some land!" The female subjects are depicted in a nuanced way, not entirely good or entirely bad, but with all the proclivities of which the human heart is capable. In her remarkable sermon on Salome, Blue highlights the fear that permeates the story. As a part of the conclusion she writes: "The way out of fear is trust. But trust isn't something you can exactly attain to or strive for or work up. It's something that slips in beside you when you are loved in a way that can be trusted. God loves in this way." One can only say "Amen" to that.

- Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, Professor of Old Testament Emerita at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

I start a sermon by Debbie Blue with a sense of adventure and expectation. She leads me to see biblical texts with new eyes. She unrelentingly searches for the yes of God's love even in texts that appear only as a no. That is not to say her sermons are gentle—all warm fuzzies. She, like the God revealed by Jesus Christ, lovingly confronts the many ways we have strayed. These sermons on women in the Bible give her ample opportunity to do all I have said above.

- Mark D. Baker, Professor of mission and theology at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and author of *Centered-Set Church: Discipleship and Community Without Judgmentalism*

In a religion that has historically not been so considerate of women, Debbie Blue is masterful at finding the cracks in the patriarchal foundation and blowing them up with homiletic dynamite. (Ruth actually proposes to Boaz? Wisdom can be personified as God's nursing child? Mother Mary is a threat to monotheism?) The rubble is something glorious, a reminder that we do not have to be good or pure or male to be loved and embody Love in return.

- Erin S. Lane, Author of *Lessons in Belonging from a Church-Going Commitment Phobe*

A thorough reading of this book, going through every single story, actually is a necessity. We as readers start to see the cracks in the patriarchal reading of the biblical text. Thus the bodies, desires, blissful ambiances, anger, power, struggles of women well up to the surface: women in the Bible, their faces and voices. As she goes mentioning them by their names, Debbie touches off a creative process that helps us to be and stay with them by means of the word, to undermine weighty historic mandates, to dismantle prejudices, to abandon naivety.

As one who is engaged in a broad women's movement that works in dialogue with those who fight for children's rights, Debbie Blue spurs us on to display reflections, feelings and reinvigorated actions. Her criticism destroys dominant adultcentrism and heteronormativity thus allowing for the construction of love-based visions from feminist perspectives and with a strong emphasis on rights.

- **Liliana Simari**, Pedagogue and Educator, Social Activist in Argentina.

A sunburst graphic consisting of numerous thin, light gray lines radiating outwards from a central point, positioned behind the title text.

MAGNIFICAT

a God who never
stopped considering women

DEBBIE BLUE



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MAGNIFICAT

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For Olivia
until it is true.

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INTRODUCTION

Some days I stare at the Bible passage I have to preach on for hours, paralyzed. I've probably read it a million times in the twenty-five years I've been a pastor. As much as I want to believe in the life-giving love of Jesus, I can't shake the feeling that I'm looking at a dead fish. I stare some more. I call a friend, "I have lost my faith," I say, "I suppose I should quit the ministry." This happens, maybe, once a month. You'd think I would learn the condition is cyclical. I will move through it, find some faith (or the spirit will find me) and I will manage to give a sermon once Sunday comes. But if you asked Jim, my husband, he could tell you how many times I've insisted, against his reassurance, "Yes. I know it passed last time, but I'm afraid this time there will be no revival." I'm grateful that (so far) he finds my ritual histrionics amusing.

There are weeks when it is not like this at all, when I start off running, with passion (if not always perfect faith). This is almost inevitably the case when the text before me includes a woman. Every text that comes up in the Revised Common Lectionary involves a man (as an author or character or voice). Jesus is a man, obviously, and though YHWH is not, God often comes across that way: male pronouns and titles abound (He/Him/His, The Father, King, Prince, etc.) So, it is thoroughly refreshing to encounter a woman or an image of God that is not male in the Bible. I don't think patriarchy has been good for the world or the church (not women or men or non-binary folks, not children or marginalized people, not the colonized, not the water or the

earth). So I am eager to find the cracks in the patriarchal narrative and pull, dig, plant dynamite if necessary to open space for the alternative narratives that are not always recognized, or that lie under the surface.

This is a book of sermons on texts in the Bible that include women. Many of them are drawn from the year our church, House of Mercy, decided to forgo the Revised Common Lectionary in favor of a lectionary we created that featured stories of women every Sunday. It was a fruitful year. I can imagine spending the rest of my years in ministry preaching on the passages in the Bible that include women, but I recognize this might not work quite so well for everyone else in our church (and I suppose there are quite a few crucial moments in the scripture we would miss). The folks who write the curriculum for our children had difficulty handling some of the stories in a way that felt child appropriate. My male colleague was totally on board but in practice, found it challenging.

The women in the Bible break a lot of rules, resist empire, disobey the cultural norms, cause good trouble (and sometime not such good trouble). They are fully human. They help us glimpse the possibility of transformation (not always, but often). I think we are at a time and place in the life of the world where we need to hear their stories.

I am fascinated by the history of interpretation. Though I am often frustrated by it as well. Shocked, some times. This has happened over and over again through the years I have been a preacher especially (though not exclusively) when I am researching passages that include women. Luther was a tremendous theologian to whom I am grateful for many things, but when he accuses Hagar of kidnapping Abraham's son and claims she is the cause of all the sins of the family, I am not persuaded by his exegesis. Tertullian is adamant that God became fully human in Jesus. As someone who values incarnational theology, I am thankful for this. But when he goes on about how much the implications of that humanness disgusts him, "the filth within the womb of the bodily fluid and blood, the loathsome curdled lump of