

The Mothers of Jesus: Mary

Advent Series #5

Luke 1:46-56

Pastor David Sunday

December 24, 2011

We're looking tonight at Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46-56:

⁴⁶ *And Mary said,*

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

⁴⁸ *for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ *for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

⁵⁰ *And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

⁵² *he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

⁵⁵ *as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

⁵⁶ *And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.*

I hold in my hands tonight a magnifying glass. A magnifying glass has a variety of uses. It can make something that is small appear larger. For instance, the fine print that you might read at the bottom of a credit application. No matter how good your eyes are, you need a magnifying glass to really see what it's saying.

A magnifying glass can also be used to help people whose vision is impaired see things that otherwise they could not see. I remember when I was growing up, one of my favorite things to do was play Scrabble with my Nana Hazel. She was born on Christmas

Day, 1921 and we're celebrating her 90th birthday tomorrow. She was very competitive so whenever we played Scrabble together, she always had a dictionary on hand and beside that dictionary, she'd have a magnifying glass. With my young eyes and 20-20 vision before I needed glasses, I could see that dictionary just fine but my Nana Hazel couldn't see without the magnifying glass.

We whose eyes have been opened to God's glory see so dimly right now—that's why we need to magnify the Lord. Furthermore, the Bible says the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the knowledge of His glory (John 12:39-41). So we magnify the Lord to help us see more clearly His glory to which our eyes have been blinded through sin. When we magnify Him, we say, "Do you see what I see? Do you see His glory?"

There's one more use of a magnifying glass. I hesitate to talk about this with children present—don't try this at home tonight. It can be used to start a fire. What you do is use the magnifying glass to concentrate something that is intense and great, namely the rays of the sun. You capture the intensity of those rays and focus them at a particular point in such a way that a fire ignites. The Greeks knew about this technique way back in the fourth century B.C. and the Vikings used this technique in the 11th and 12th centuries to start fires all over Sweden.

That's what we hope to do when we magnify our God. We hope to so concentrate our soul's attention on His greatness, on His goodness, on His glory, that a fire of joyful passion for Him is ignited in our hearts and in the hearts of others. That's what's going on in Mary's life when she writes and sings this famous hymn known as the Magnificat.

Here the virgin is so concentrating her soul's attention on the character and the greatness of her God that she is ablaze with joyful passion for Him. It's the only long statement that Mary makes in the entire New Testament and in it, she opens her soul to us. She let's us see her delight in the Lord.

Consider her prized position as she speaks these words. The child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Dwelling in her womb is the one whom the Apostle Paul speaks of in Colossians 1:15-19. Paul says of this child in Mary's womb,

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were

created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Can you imagine what it must have been like for this young, obscure, unwed teenage girl? A nobody from nowhere to now hold in her womb the One who holds the whole universe together? Just imagine the wonder that she, of all women who ever lived, was chosen by God to bear and to give birth to and raise this boy in Whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. It's an awesome privilege. It's an amazing mystery to consider what we are singing about this Christmas Eve.

In the words of one of the Puritans, Thomas Watson, trying to describe the mystery of God taking on human flesh, he says,

“He was poor, that he might make us rich.
He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God.
He took our flesh, that he might give us His Spirit.
He lay in the manger, that we may lie in paradise.
He came down from heaven, that he might bring us to heaven....

”That the ancient of Days should be born.
that he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle....
that he who rules the stars should suck the breast;
that a virgin should conceive;
that Christ should be made of a woman, and of that woman which himself made,
that the branch should bear the vine,
that the mother should be younger than the child she bare,
and the child in the womb bigger than the mother...

“Christ taking flesh is a mystery we shall never fully understand till we come to heaven.
If our hearts be not rocks, this love of Christ should affect us.
Behold love that passes knowledge!”

(Taken from Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pages 196 and 198)

That's what's going on inside the womb of this virgin. She's pondering this mystery. She's contemplating the great honor that God has placed upon her—the most blessed among women. But what does she do with that honor? Does she go running through the streets and neighborhoods and cry out, “Hey, look at me. I'm the mother of God. Bow down to me.” No, instead her response to God's grace and goodness in her life is to worship Him. To concentrate her soul on His greatness and to magnify Him with great joy. We will honor Mary best when we follow her example and praise her great God.

Look at how she opens her song of praise in verse 46, “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” She recognizes in verse 49 that “*He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.*” There is none like Him who acts in such mysterious and wondrous ways to bring blessing to His people. Mary acknowledges that she herself needs a Savior when she calls Him “my Savior” and she rejoices that her Savior is near. She is astonished that the very One who came to be her Savior is now residing in her womb. She focuses her soul, her spirit, her total being—all that she is—on His greatness, His glory, His power, His mercy, His strength, His faithfulness, His kindness and His goodness. She’s making her soul a magnifying glass and a fire of joyful passion is rising up within her.

The same thing should be happening within the hearts of all God’s people this Christmas Eve as we consider God’s indescribable gift. The Apostle Peter says, “Though we have not seen Him, we love him. And though we do not see Him now, we believe in Him and we rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory because we are receiving the outcome of our faith as salvation of our souls” (paraphrase of 1 Peter 1:8-9).

As we look at Mary’s praise, there are two attitudes that stand out—two characteristics of her life that stand out as very God-magnifying characteristics.

Mary Trusted the Lord

First of all, Mary was a woman who trusted in the Lord. The announcement that the One whom she will conceive, who will reign forever, who will save His people from their sins—that announcement came at great cost to Mary. She had to put her future on the line. Her reputation on the line. Her betrothed marriage on the line. That announcement continued to cost her all the days of her life. She had to follow her Son—her Savior—all the way to His cross. As He died, a sword was piercing her own heart as well and she was grieved as she watched her Son die on the cross. Yet from the beginning of her life with Jesus to the end, her attitude was one of trust in the Lord. I love her response in verse 38 to the angel, “*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*” “God, You’re in charge. Do what You please with me.”

Elizabeth also encouraged Mary in this faith and trust in verse 45 when she said, “*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was*

spoken to her from the Lord.” Mary trusts in this God. She realizes that He’s a trustworthy and faithful God. As you read her song, it’s no surprise that it’s this aspect of God’s character she focuses on a lot.

Look at verse 50. She says, *“his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”* He is a God who keeps His word. Promises that He has spoken long ago are now being fulfilled in this Baby in her womb. And look at verses 54 and 55 where she says, *“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”* She realizes that whatever God says in His Word, whatever He promises, is a done deal. She realizes that in this Son whom she carries in her womb, all of God’s promises are Yes and Amen (2 Corinthians 1:20). They are all coming to fruition in Jesus. She’s saying, “In my womb, I’m carrying the ultimate promise kept—Jesus, the One for whom the prophets and forefathers have longed for generations.” And she trusts in this God. Blessed is she who believes.

Blessed are you who believe and trust in God in the midst of darkness. To trust in God when the future is unsure. To trust in God when you don’t know what 2012 will bring. When finances seem in disarray. When health issues seem to be on the rise. To trust in God when relationships are perplexing. To trust in God when you realize, “I’ve sinned. I’m guilty and I need a Savior.” To trust in God is to magnify Him. It’s to praise Him as the One who alone always keeps His Word. So if you want to magnify the Lord with Mary, trust Him.

Mary Treasured the Word

The second characteristic that stands out is that she treasures God’s Word. Did you ever wonder how a young teenage peasant girl could speak spontaneously an outburst of praise like the Magnificat? This hymn is so magnificent that it has been handed down through the ages in all the great liturgies of the church. It is considered one of the greatest poems that has ever been written. It’s magnificent in

its depth and breadth. Yet the first person who spoke it was just a teenage girl. Where did she get this wisdom? How did she know how to praise God like this?

Well, it's quite clear how. From her childhood on, she had known the holy Scriptures and she had treasured God's Word in her heart. There are at least fourteen different quotations or allusions from the Old Testament in this short hymn of praise from the virgin Mary, especially from 1 Samuel 2, Hannah's Song. Mary was a young girl who knew her Bible, who loved the Scriptures, who cherished God's Word so when the greatest thing that ever happened to her—the most profound and mysterious thing that ever happened to her—took place, how did she respond? By echoing back to God His praises contained in His Word that she had learned throughout her young life.

Let's follow her example. She's like a quilter who stitches together different pieces of fabric to create something beautiful. She's taking the fabric of Scripture that she is so familiar with and she's forming it into a magnificent hymn of praise. So if we want to magnify the Lord this year so that people will see His greatness through us, let us treasure His Word and hide it in our hearts.

Two characteristics—she trusted the Lord and she treasured His Word. These are God-magnifying attitudes and God-magnifying behaviors that I would commend to God's people this Christmas.

But there's one prerequisite—one disposition of heart that stands out as most prominent in this hymn of praise. If we want to be people who know God, who experience His grace, who really taste and see the salvation that He came into the world to give, we need this prerequisite. If we want Christmas to be more than just a sentimental event that we go through once a year but want it to actually be the joy of our lives day by day, there's one attitude that more than anything that is absolutely necessary. That prerequisite is humility.

Did you notice the first reason Mary gives for her rejoicing in God? For her praise to God in verse 48? This is what amazes her. This is what astonishes her.

“For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” “He’s looked at me. He’s noticed me.” This is a very humble response to and expression of praise to God.

As John Piper puts it, “He’s the Lover of the lowly.” That’s her God. He looks on the humble estate of His servant. Mary was not expecting this honor—this privilege—to have Christ live in her. She’s amazed that God has chosen her and has come into her life and visited her. He could have chosen the daughter of the high priest or the child of a Roman senator or the heir of wealth and privilege. But God chose a peasant girl from an obscure, unknown place, with unknown parents. She is the one whom God has noticed. She’s the one who has been looked upon with favor.

She’s of no account in the eyes of the world and as we look at this hymn, we realize, she’s of no account in her own eyes as well. This is not a woman who has a high opinion of herself. This is a woman who has an exalted opinion of her God. She is not preoccupied with, “What do people think about Mary?” She is preoccupied with, “What do people think of my God?” She is amazed at what He has done in her life and she’s saying to us in this hymn, “I am unknown. I am despised but that did not stop God from choosing me and showing mercy and favor to me.”

That’s what Christmas is all about. It’s about a God who chooses nobodies. Not many mighty, not many noble, not many strong, not many who are wise in the world’s eyes did God choose, but God chose what is weak and foolish and despised in the eyes of the world so that He might shame the strong. He’s a God who loves the lowly. A God who visits those who have nothing to offer Him but their need and their poverty of spirit, who blesses those who deserve nothing but His judgment (see 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Mary understands what God is doing inside her is not for her alone but is for the whole world. What God is doing inside her womb has earth-shattering effects for the whole world. When she says, *“From now on, all generations will call me blessed”* (verse 48), she’s acknowledging that a great reversal is taking place when

Jesus comes into the world. Jesus came into the world, not to preserve the status quo. Jesus came into the world, not just to give us a little help along the way. Jesus came into the world, not to enhance our pride or to fill up our financial portfolios. Jesus came into the world to turn this world upside down. Jesus came into the world to exalt the humble and to humble the exalted. He came into the world to bring salvation to rebel sinners who recognize, "I am guilty. I am vile. I am helpless. I do not have any power to save myself. I don't have any wisdom to offer my God but I need a Savior. I am needy."

As we recognize and acknowledge our need, along with Mary, we become just the kind of people Jesus came to save. The more you look at this poem, the more you realize this is not just a fine piece of poetry. This hymn of praise is a radical statement about what God values; what God esteems.

An old French mathematician by the name of Blaise Pascal summarized Mary's message like this:

"Jesus Christ came to blind those who saw clearly, and to give sight to the blind; to heal the sick, and leave the healthy to die; to call to repentance, and to justify sinners, and to leave the righteous in their sins; to fill the needy, and leave the rich empty."

That's what Mary is singing. If you think you're rich, you're going to find in the end that you're empty. If you think you're strong, you're going to find in the end when He finishes His work of turning this world upside down that you're weak. If you think you're righteous, you're going to find in the end that you're guilty. But if you realize, "I'm guilty," you're going to find in the end that you're exalted (Matthew 23:12; Luke 16:15). If you realize, "I'm empty," you're going to find in the end that you're full of God's riches and mercy (Colossians 2:2-3). If you realize, "I'm weak," you're going to find in the end that He is your strength and your song and He has become your salvation (Psalm 118:14; Isaiah 12:2).

That's what Mary is rejoicing and celebrating here—a God who turns things upside down, who overturns the values of this world. That's why His entry into our world started in this most humble of places—in the womb of an unwed, teenage

mother. A nobody from a nowhere sort of place who realized, “I am nothing. I am lowly. I am humble.”

How do you view yourself? Do you stand with Mary and say, “I am nothing apart from God’s grace to me”? That’s what made Mary rejoice. When she contemplated that the One in her womb—this gift of Christ in her—came to exalt the humble and to humble the exalted. This same joy that Mary has can be yours when you stand with Jesus’ mother and when you say with her, “God be merciful to me, a lowly sinner. Be merciful to me.” For “*His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation*” (Luke 1:50).

As we sang tonight, “Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.” [O Little Town of Bethlehem by Phillips Brooks and Lewis Redner.]

Let’s pray. Lord, grant that we, with Mary, would stand emptied of self and full of wonder, joy and praise. Thank You for being a God who loves the lowly. Thank You for not coming to call righteous people but sinners to repentance for that is who we are, God. Thank You for being a God who is rich in mercy to all who repent and believe in Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

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