

Mary's Magnificat
Luke 1:46-56
Pastor John Miller

In Luke 1:46-56, Luke says, "And Mary said: 'My soul magnifies the Lord...' " that's the theme of our text "...and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant..." which is a female version of a bondservant "...for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.' And Mary remained with her..." that is, "Elizabeth" "...about three months, and returned to her house."

Christmas is a time to sing. It's hard to stop that congregational worship time of singing, praising and magnifying God. What a great time of year to worship the Lord. Christmas is about singing.

I looked up on Spotify a music catalogue, and you find 914,000 tracts representing 180,000 unique songs by 63,000 artists over 1 million songs recorded of Christmas. And every year they add hundreds to that million. The top-10 recorded Christmas songs of all time, starting with number 10, are Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas, which we don't sing here, God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen, Away in a Manger, What Child is This, one of my favorites, The First Noel, O Holy Night, White Christmas, Joy to the World, which was originally written as a song about the Second Coming, but we've adopted it as a Christmas song, Jingle Bells, which we don't sing here either and Silent Night, which has been recorded over 7,000 times.

Christmas is about singing to the Lord, but I would venture to say that the first Christmas song ever recorded was recorded by Luke in chapter 1, sung by Mary and is called The Magnificat. It is taken from verse 46 where Mary says, "My soul magnifies the Lord." It is taken from the Latin. And she says, "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." So we will look at Mary's Christmas song, The Magnificat.

What is the setting, the background, for this text? The Lord had sent an angel to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, who then became pregnant with John the Baptist. She was six months into her pregnancy when the angel Gabriel was sent from heaven to a little peasant village in Galilee to a young maiden named Mary. Gabriel said, "Rejoice, highly favored one...blessed are you among women!" God had chosen Mary to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary's response was, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Mary was a virgin. Then the angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you" (Luke 1:28, 34-35). "With God, all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

So when Mary found out Elizabeth was expecting a promised child, she went to visit her. And when Elizabeth met Mary, Elizabeth began to prophesy over her. Elizabeth's baby, John the Baptist, leaped in her womb when Mary gave a salutation to Elizabeth. Then in response, Mary begins to sing. And verse 56 says that "Mary remained with her..." that is, "Elizabeth" "...about three months, and returned to her house." Elizabeth was about ready to give birth to John the Baptist, and then Mary returned to her home in Nazareth.

Mary's song shows her knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures. She was very young but had a great knowledge of God's Word. I believe that doctrine leads to doxology. When the Word of God fills your heart and fills your life, praise comes out of your heart and your lips to God. So Mary was a woman filled with God's Word. It could be that was partly why God chose her to be the mother of the Lord; she was so filled with the Word of God.

Charles Erdman said that these verses of the song of Mary form a perfect mosaic of Old Testament quotations. I've read critics who say that young Mary, living in Nazareth, never could have this theological knowledge or understanding of the Bible. But we know that God filled her with the Spirit, and she had the Word hidden in her heart. The Bible says, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). So when we hide God's Word in our hearts, not only does it keep us from sin, but it keeps us singing. If you want to sing, if you want to magnify the Lord, you must be filled, like Mary, with the knowledge of God's Word.

Mary's song also parallels the song of Hannah. So it could be that Mary was thinking of Hannah and her song. Hannah's song was a little different in that it was a shout of triumph for victory over her enemies. Mary's song is a humble contemplation of the mercies of God. R. Kent Hughes describes the Magnificat as a "pungent, profound, divine, human composition." So this young girl, Mary, filled with the Spirit and with God's Word began to magnify the Lord.

There are three ways that Mary magnified the Lord, and let's apply them to our own lives. First, Mary passionately magnified the Lord. In verses 46-47, Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

Throughout this song, Mary is using what's called "Hebrew poetic parallelism." Unlike our English poetry that has rhyme and meter, the Hebrew poetry is done in contrast or saying the same thing in a different way. So Mary repeats it twice: "My soul magnifies the Lord," "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." She said the same thing but in different ways. There is parallelism and contrast there.

What does it mean to magnify the Lord? It does not mean that we make God bigger. In my top drawer of my office desk at home I have a magnifying glass. But when you look at something through a magnifying glass, you don't make it bigger; it only looks bigger. So when we magnify God, we're not making Him bigger; that would be impossible. What we're doing is making Him appear bigger before other people who are watching us. We want God to look bigger; we want His glories to shine forth. So we want to magnify Him or enlarge Him in people's hearts.

Notice how we magnify the Lord. First, in our minds when we form God's Word and learn about His greatness. If we are going to magnify the Lord, we must hide God's Word in our hearts and in our minds. So Mary magnified the Lord, because she knew the Bible. And we can magnify the Lord when we read the Bible and know the Bible. This is why I said doxology comes out of doctrine. When you know the Bible, you glorify Him. It's so important that we do that.

I encourage all Christians to do a study on the attributes of God. There is nothing more important for you than to know the God you worship, love and serve. The more we know Him, the more we love Him, the more we worship Him and the more we magnify Him. So it's very important that we think right about God—about His attributes, about those things that can be attributed to God from His Word that He has revealed to us, so we might magnify the Lord.

Second, we also magnify the Lord with our mind and our lips. Mary began to sing and praise the Lord. As we think greater thoughts of God, our lips magnify or rejoice in God in praise. I believe one of the evident signs that you have been regenerated or born again is that you have a song in your heart. If you sing to the Lord, it's because God placed that song in your heart.

I never sang to the Lord or worshipped the Lord before I was saved. I never entered into congregational worship, but once I was born again, once I was given new life, given a new heart, He put a song in my heart. Like the psalmist said, "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth" (Psalm 40:2-3). So we sing with our lips to the Lord. We "make a joyful noise to the Lord" (Psalm 100:1-KJV).

And third, with our soul we magnify the Lord, verses 46-47. We worship with our soul or with our spirit. What Mary is saying in Hebrew poetry is that her inner being, her heart, her soul and her spirit—her whole being—is worshipping God. In other words, her worship is not external; it's internal. It's not just going through the motions; it's a heart thing. She was worshipping the Lord with all her heart, all her soul and all her spirit. David said in Psalm 108:1, "O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory."

In Ephesians 5:18-19, it says that the Holy Spirit will pluck the strings of my heart. When Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," it has the idea of striking the strings on an instrument. The Holy Spirit begins to pluck the strings of our heart, and then we begin to worship God from the interior.

When Jesus met the woman at Jacob's well, He said that God should be worshipped "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). So we worship Him in spirit, as opposed to externally, and we worship Him in truth as found in His Word, as opposed to that which is not true.

And fourth, we magnify God passionately when we gather in the congregation of the saints and worship Him. Psalm 34:3 says, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." There is something special, unique and wonderful to be in a congregation of God's

people singing to the Lord. It's not the same as being out on the patio and watching on the overflows screens or watching at home on the computer. That's wonderful if that's all you can do, but if you can be in the house of the Lord with the people of the Lord worshipping God, there is no substitute for that. When we lift our voices to God, there is such a sense of God's presence. The Bible says that He inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3).

I think sometimes the Lord tells His angels, "Shh, be quiet; they're worshipping at Revival right now. I want to listen in." And the Lord just visits us.

So I want to encourage you—not just at Christmas but all year long—to gather together with God's people and lift your voices in praise to the Lord. We should all be singing to the Lord.

You say, "Well, Pastor, I don't sing very well." Make "a joyful noise to the Lord." It's Biblical. Just try to grunt in key.

How I thank God for congregational worship! As we sing together, we magnify the Lord. As we close in worship, we magnify the Lord. As we gather together, we magnify the Lord.

So Mary passionately—and so should we—magnified the Lord. Are you magnifying God passionately with your soul and spirit this Christmas?

The second way Mary magnified the Lord was with purpose. Mary was purposeful in magnifying the Lord, verses 48-50. She said, "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant." Notice the phrase "He has." She said in verse 48, "He has"; in verse 49, "He who is mighty has"; in verse 51, "He has" and "He has"; in verse 52, "He has"; in verse 53, "He has"; and in verse 54, "He has." Mary had focused on what God had done. She's not focusing on what she wants God to do—that's fine, to say, "Lord, give us this day our daily bread." But we should also focus on what God has done. We used to sing:

"Count your blessings;

Name them one by one."

Count your blessings;

See what God has done."

But what we do is "count our bummers," so we get discouraged. I hope that as a result of this study, that you'll begin to count your blessings and rejoice in what God has done. We do rejoice in what God is going to do, but we look and see what God has done.

We want to look at Mary's purposeful magnifying of the Lord and see why she does this. Number one, it's because God divinely condescended to her. God came down at Christmas to Mary, verses 48-49. "For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant." This is what God had done. Christmas is all about God coming down to us. Someone said, "He wrapped

His love in flesh and blood, and sent it down to man.” At Christmas, God condescended, He came down. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

So Mary was thinking of when God came down to her, when God came down to Israel, when God came down to earth in the form of a baby. God came down to Mary in her humble state. She was a humble maiden, who lived in an obscure village. Yet God came to visit her.

Can you imagine how thrilling to have an angel show up at your house?! To have an angel say, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:28). She was going to be the mother of Messiah! She would just be blown away. How does that compute?! Then Mary asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34). So the angel described the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon her. She would have been overwhelmed with God coming to her.

A common theme running through the nativity account, and in all Scripture, is that God comes down to the humble—to the shepherds, to the lowly, to people who realize their need and know they can’t save themselves, to people who know they need a Savior.

When God visits you and you become aware of your need of Him as your Savior—I don’t understand it, I can’t explain it—but it’s by the grace of God. God comes to visit you.

I think of when I got saved in the summer of 1971. I was a young boy, just fresh out of high school, and God came to me. He softened my heart, opened my eyes, drew me to Himself and saved me by His grace. Then I opened the Bible, and it said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). I can’t fathom that! “Lord, why? Why would you choose me?!”

So what do we do when we want to magnify Him? Just remember that “He came to me.” God comes to us at Christmas. Psalm 34:18 says, “The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” So praise Him if He comes to you in your brokenness and humility.

Number two, Mary praised God because of His divine blessings. It’s because God came down to her and because He blessed her. She said, in verse 48, “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.” But I don’t believe the Bible teaches that we should pray to Mary or worship Mary. Note that she needed a Savior, which indicates that she was a sinner. Yet she is blessed, and she should be highly respected. She was the chosen instrument for God to come into the world and take on flesh. So she is blessed.

What you need to do if you’re going to magnify the Lord is to remember God’s blessings to you. Read Ephesians 1:4: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” Jesus, God the Son, died for you on the Cross and shed His blood to redeem you back to God. Romans 5:8 says, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God the Holy Spirit “sealed [you] for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). You’ve been given the down payment of the Spirit in your heart (Ephesians 1:13). These are blessings for which we should all rejoice. So we are blessed in Christ Jesus—not because of who you are but because of your position in Christ.

The number three reason for magnifying and blessing the Lord is because of His divine perfections. Mary goes from praising God for what He has done for her to praising God for what He is. He is awesome! First, God is powerful, verse 49. "For He who is mighty has done great things for me." God is omnipotent; there is no limit to His power.

I've already mentioned the virgin birth, where Mary had asked, "How can this be?" Then the angel Gabriel said, "The power of the Highest will overshadow you." Then he said, "With God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37). If God can create the heavens and the earth by the power of His word, why can't He save me from my sins? Why can't He come to me and bless my life? So God is all powerful. He has the infinite power to do as He pleases.

Second, we praise and worship the Lord and magnify Him for His holiness, verse 49, just as Mary did. "And holy is His name." "His name" is His nature and His character. So we worship and magnify God because of His power and His holiness.

The holiness of God in Scripture is His chief attribute. Every one of the attributes of God is holy. "Holy" means that God is set apart, that He is free of any sin or evil or darkness, that God is light, and "In Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). And God is perfectly righteous: "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). So God is perfectly holy.

When Isaiah saw the Lord "high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple," the angels sang "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:1,3). So God is separate from sinners and perfectly righteous. Psalm 99:9 says, "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy." We praise God for His holiness.

Third, God is merciful, verse 50. "And His mercy is on those who fear..." or "reverence" "...Him from generation to generation." We want our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren, our great-great-grandchildren and down through the generations to be blessed by God, so we "fear Him."

What is "mercy"? Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Aren't you glad that God does not give you what you deserve? If God did give us what we deserved, we'd all be in hell. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). So if you're saved, God showed you mercy. God came to you, revealed Himself to you, showed you His mercy and saved you by His grace.

And God's mercy "is on those who fear Him." What does "fear Him" mean? It means to reverence God. It means to love God so much that you don't want to do anything to hurt God, offend God, displease God or grieve God. You don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit is grieved when we sin or disobey Him. So we want to fear God and experience God's mercy.

Where the Bible speaks of the mercy of God, it says that His mercy is great, rich, abundant, everlasting and "They are new every morning." "Through the Lord's mercies we are not

consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). So when you get up every morning say, "Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness. I'm unfaithful but You are faithful." And every morning His mercies are new. Great is God's faithfulness!

God has never failed. You may think He's failed you. You may think He's let you down. You may wonder, "Where was God?!" But God never fails. God never forsakes us. God keeps His promises.

So worship is to ascribe to God worth, to magnify Him for who He is and that He is worthy of our praise.

The third way Mary magnified the Lord was prophetically, verses 51-56. She personally, powerfully, poetically and prophetically worshiped God. "He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty." It's funny that I've never heard any health-and-wealth prosperity preacher preach that verse. "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." God made promises to Abraham. "And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house."

Mary's song uses here beautiful parallelism. She speaks in the prophetic past tense. That means she speaks of things that haven't happened as though they have already happened. She speaks of things that will happen as though they are already a done deal in God's economy. She uses the past tense to describe future events. And she moves from personal reasons for magnifying the Lord to prophetic reasons for magnifying the Lord.

I want to break this down. What has God done in the past? "He has scattered the proud....He has put down the mighty....The rich He has sent away empty." He didn't send them away because they're rich; it's because of their riches, they don't see their need for God. They think they are sufficient within themselves. This is classic, Hebrew parallelism, saying one thing in different ways; God has put down the proud.

I have been listening lately to the news about the overthrow of Assad in Syria. That has greatly destabilized the Middle East. Israel flew in and bombed their weapons, so they wouldn't get into the wrong hands. As you see the people touring the palace and see it was ransacked, you think, How the mighty have fallen!

It reminds me of Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar, in Daniel 4:30, strolled along the walls of his palace, looked over the city of Babylon and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" And what did God do? He struck him with insanity. His hair grew long like a wild beast's, his fingernails grew long and he went into the fields and ate grass for seven years. If you don't like eating grass, stay humble. It wasn't until Nebuchadnezzar looked to heaven that his sanity came back, and he

began to magnify and worship God. He was then restored to his palace.

So God has done these things in the past, and God, in the future when Jesus Christ comes back in His Second Coming, will scatter the proud, humble the mighty and send the rich away empty. How marvelous!

Notice what God has also done, verse 50. "His mercy is on those who fear Him." If you fear the Lord, He'll show you mercy. He has exalted them of low degree. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

God has also "filled the hungry with good things," verse 53. God is so good. Here Mary is speaking spiritually about all God has done and all God will do. Psalm 107:9 says, "He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." And James 4:6 says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Do you fear God? Do you respect Him? Do you reverence Him? Do you want to please Him? Do you want to make Him smile? Do you want the applause of heaven? If you do, He'll show you mercy; God will not give you what you deserve. Are you low? Are you broken? Are you humble? The Bible says that He knows those who have "a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). He will lift you up. Are you hungry? He will fill you with good things. Do you want to be forgiven? Do you want to know God? Do you want a relationship with Christ? He will forgive your sin.

How do I know God will do this? Look at verses 54-55. "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy." That means that God always keeps His promises. Have you ever made a promise and had to break it? You didn't know it would rain. You didn't know the car would blow up. "Hey kids, Saturday we're going to Disneyland."

"Yay!" Then you turn the key on in the car, and the engine blows up.

"Kids, we're not going to Disneyland."

"But you promised!" And smoke was pouring out of the car.

"I know I promised, but I don't have control over this."

We are limited in our ability; we don't know the future, we don't control the circumstances and we're limited in our power. But God has no limits. He knows the future. He knows "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). He controls everything, so what God has spoken, what God has promised, cannot be broken.

So Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). "You believe in God, believe also in Me." Then He made a promise: "In My Father's house..." referring to heaven "...are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you..." here's His promise "...I will

come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14: 1-3). That's one of the most precious promises in the Bible.

You can rest assured that God will forgive your sins, He will give you everlasting life if you repent and believe in Jesus Christ, He is preparing a place for you in heaven and He will come again to receive you to Himself, that where He is, you will be also.

You say, "Well, what do I have to do?" Believe in Him. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him..." or "trusts or relies on or puts their faith in Him" "...should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). That's a promise. Salvation is a free gift purchased by Christ on the Cross. But you must believe in and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. How marvelous!

And when your sins are forgiven and He gives you a new heart, you have something to sing about. You want to magnify the Lord at Christmas. You want to magnify the Lord every day in your thoughts and in your mind, with your lips, with your soul and with your heart. Christmas is all about God coming to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Let's magnify the Lord.