

Advent Magnification
Luke 1:46-55
December 11, 2023 (3rd Sunday in Advent)

Our scripture passage this morning is very famous. It is called Mary's Song or The Magnificat. It is called The Magnificat because in the Latin version of the Bible, the first word is "magnify."

The Magnificat or Mary's Song is within a story, so here is what leads up to our scripture passage. Elizabeth and Zechariah are an elderly, childless couple. The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah as he is serving in the temple as a priest, and tells Zechariah that his elderly, barren wife will be with child. The baby will become known as John the Baptist, the One to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Next, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her she will bear the Messiah, and informs her that her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant, too. Being a very busy angel, Gabriel appears to Joseph and tells him that Mary's pregnancy is from God.

Mary took action. She left town. The passage says she made haste or hurried to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Did she leave town because she and Joseph thought it better for her to leave town for a while being pregnant and not married? Or, did she visit Elizabeth so they could encourage one another?

Whatever the reason, the women meet, and the child in Elizabeth's womb jumps for joy in the presence of the Messiah in Mary. And Mary bursts into song. This is where we pick up our passage.

As we prepare to read Mary's song, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

it is the custom in one African tribe that when a woman decides to have a child, she goes and sits alone under a tree, and she listens. She listens until she hears a song.

Once she hears the song, she returns to the man who will be the child’s father and teaches the song to him that they sing together. When the woman is pregnant, she teaches the child’s song to the midwives and old women of the village so that when the birth time arrives, the people surrounding the mother sing the song to welcome the child.

Then as the child grows up, the other villagers learn the song. If the child falls, someone picks the child up and sings the song. When the child does something wonderful, the people of the village sing this song. When the child goes through the rites of puberty and becomes an adult, the villagers sing the song.

It goes this way through life. At a wedding, the songs of husband and wife are sung together. Finally, when this child grows old, and lies in bed ready to die, all the villagers know the song, and they sing it for the last time. (From *How, Then, Shall We Live?* by Jack Kornfield)

Isn't that beautiful? A community coming together through song. We know how a song can bring people together. Think of a football game where people break out into song when their team scores. Last Sunday, the Valley Ringers and Joyful Spirit gave a Christmas concert inviting people from care facilities. People were encouraged to sing Christmas carols, and as people left the concert, their faces were filled with joy. Songs can move in our hearts and souls. That's why we sing in worship.

There is a lot of singing in Luke's birth narrative of Jesus. Zechariah sings. Mary sings. I think the angels that appeared to the shepherds sing. Simeon may have crooned a little tune as he took the 8-day Jesus into his arms and praised God.

Down through the ages, many voices, composers, musicians have joined with Mary in singing her song. We are going to join in her song at the end of this message.

Mary's song announces that God scatters the proud, dethrones the powerful, drives away the rich. This God lifts up the lowly and provides a feast for the destitute. God's kingdom is one of reversals.

This God of reversals shows up where we least expect it – a young womb, a manger, a cross, in suffering – in order to scatter the proud, exalt the lowly, satisfy the hungry, send the rich away empty.

There are many beautiful thoughts in Mary's song, many reversals, and it all begins with one word: magnify. "My soul magnifies the Lord," Mary sang. The word magnify has various meanings. The most common meaning is to enlarge or increase the size of an object. I talked about this with the children.

Another meaning is to make something more exciting or intensify. An additional meaning is to praise, which is probably Mary's meaning. Another Bible translation says, "My soul glorifies the Lord." This use of magnify is an archaic term in our culture today. When we want to praise someone for a job well done, we do not say, "I magnify you for that great meal." But Mary is using this meaning as she rejoices in God her savior.

But what if did use the more common meaning of magnify, to enlarge something? What would it look like if we enlarged Christ during this Advent season?

We can start by looking at the life of Jesus. Think of the beatitudes, which is quite similar to Mary's song. Jesus was hard on the rich. He was high on the poor. He required his followers to be servants. He was on the side of the unfortunates.

That's why we celebrate Advent and Christmas. It is a time for us to focus our attention on God's work in this broken world. It is a time of looking for the salvation that God has promised, and a time of singing for joy over what God has done, is already doing among us, and will do. As followers of Jesus, we are called to join that work. And by joining Jesus' work, we magnify the Lord.

Mary was able to magnify God because she said to the angel, "Let it be to me as you have said." She said yes to God.

Don't you think we magnified God when we said yes and walked one Saturday morning to raise over \$12,000 for ALS? Didn't we magnify God when we bought (number) of turkeys for Crossroads to feed a Thanksgiving meal to people coming over the border? Didn't we magnify God when we gave \$8000 to St Andrews Clinic so they could continue their work of helping children with cleft palates?

Didn't we magnify God when people of our church made Thanksgiving dinner for 140 right here in our building for people who needed a place to go for Thanksgiving. We do this not to magnify us (although it is tempting to do so). We are magnifying God by saying yes. We are taking seriously the call of Christ to be the hands and feet of Jesus, and upholding the reversal of God's kingdom.

I spoke with the children about the difference between a magnifying glass and a telescope. A magnifying makes a small thing look bigger than it is. A telescope makes a big thing begin to look as big as it really is.

Several years ago, along with Eloise Fredrickson, we went to the night program at Kitt Peak. Kitt Peak is west of Tucson, and has over twenty telescopes. One of the highlights of the program was being able to look through several of their telescopes. We saw a star being born and two galaxies on a collision course.

But the highlight for me was Saturn. I have seen pictures of Saturn with its famous rings, but as I looked through that telescope and saw Saturn “live,” I was completely overcome. I gasped and said something out loud like, “Oh, how beautiful.” This telescope was showing us how big and beautiful Saturn already is.

As I said to the children, we are called to be telescopes – to make God’s greatness look as great and beautiful as it really is.

That’s why we exist, as Peter says in I Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, *that you may declare the praises* of God who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

This is what it means to be a followers of Christ: to feel, think, and act in a way that will make God look as great as God really is. Be a telescope for the world that proclaims the glory and magnificence of God. We do it every Sunday, and when we become the hands and feet of Jesus.

How is God’s Spirit moving in your soul to ever more magnify God?

Psalm 34: “Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.”

Psalm 69: I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify God with thanksgiving.

Let’s begin right now by joining in Mary’s song. Turn to hymn number 100, and together with Mary, cry out with a Joyful Shout to magnify God. Please stand.