



PONDERING A
TREASURE

2ND WEEK OF
ADVENT

LUKE 1:39-55

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

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.”

DAY 1

LUKE 1:39-45

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

One of the lessons our world has learned in the midst of the COVID pandemic is just how important community is. Numerous studies have arisen over the last couple years of social distancing and isolation that cite high rates of depression, anxiety, and the overall hit our well-being has taken. Scripturally, this doesn't surprise us as we are called to engage one another repeatedly in the Scriptures and to not forsake the assembling together of the saints for, after all, we are all members of one body.

Mary's movements after Gabriel announces to her what her place will be in the unfolding of God's plan is to put this community into practice. She goes to see her cousin Elizabeth. It is in that community that she receives confirmation of the angel's words through Elizabeth's own pregnancy. She hears external confirmation of her own place in the story as Elizabeth calls her blessed among women. In short, being with Elizabeth helps Mary SEE the truth of what she was told. We experience much of the same as we gather together. We receive encouragement in our struggles. We hear testimony of what God is doing in others' lives, and we SEE the truth of what God is about.

But notice it doesn't stop with Mary's SEEING; this coming together erupts in SINGING. I think the order is significant here: annunciation, visit to Elizabeth, then the Magnificat. As the Scripture lays it out, the Magnificat, one of the great testimonies of praise we have, does not happen without community. It is with her sister in the Lord that Mary gives voice to what God has done, is doing, and will do. It is seeing and being seen that leads her to erupt in SINGING. What an invitation this is for us! We are invited to come together and make music that erupts in praise to the Lord and the encouragement of the church!

PRAYER

Father, thank you for the communities that you place us in. Help us to trust those around us to bring our hopes, fears, and faith in you into focus. Help us to see ways to come alongside others for their encouragement and edification. In all, may your name be magnified and our faith be strengthened. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

~ Andrew VanderMaas

DAY 2

LUKE 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
⁴⁷ “My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁸ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
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,
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⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
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and exalted those of humble estate;
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in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Unrehearsed responses to unexpected occurrences often reveal the position of our hearts. What could have been more unexpected for a young peasant girl from a back-water village than to be greeted by a heavenly messenger announcing that she would be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah! He told her not to be afraid, for God had favored her, and he encouraged her with the news that an older relative would experience a miracle of her own, proving “nothing is impossible with God.”

Mary’s unrehearsed response was: “I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1:38)

Mary’s unaffected faith is a shining light. She didn’t stumble over her lack of qualifications, shrink from asking honest questions, or contrive a response. Her genuine faith meant that she looked away from herself and remembered her God.

Though faith is certainly a gift of God, it is nurtured in a community. Mary knew God by belonging to the people of God. She did not think individualistically, but saw herself in a procession of flawed but faithful saints who were creating a holy highway for those who followed. Elizabeth was one of those saints. The Holy Spirit in her witnessed to that same Spirit in Mary as she blessed and affirmed Mary's faith in what God had said. From her spirit, that deepest center that is occupied either by our own self or God, Mary recognized her Savior and rejoiced. Because God occupied that space, his word penetrated and opened her soul—her mind, heart, and will. With her mind, Mary pondered and meditated on the words the angel had spoken; with her heart, she desired whatever God had for her; with her will, she chose to donate herself to his purpose. Extravagant praise flowed from Mary's soul!

We get to share Mary's joy and her faith by naming and claiming God's character and ways through her song:

vs.48—he sees and blesses

vs.49—he is mighty and holy

vs.50—he is merciful and faithful

vs.51—he is strong and brings down the proud

vs.52—he exalts the humble

vs.53—he generously fills the hungry

vs.54—he remembers his covenant

As we celebrate the gift of our Savior this year, can we let this song of Mary fill our souls—our minds, our hearts, our will? Mary knew Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. 2:1-10). She must have meditated on it many times, and every time something new happened in her life, she understood Hannah's words and her God in a deeper way until she was prepared for this moment. Can we let Mary's words prepare us for whatever God has for us?

PRAYER

Our souls in stillness wait for you, O God. Surely our hope is in you! Waiting can be so hard for us. So often we do not understand your ways. But Lord, you have often disappointed our wishes in order to open us to your hope. There is no other hope but you, Jesus. Come, Savior of the world. Amen

~ Judy Vander Ark

DAY 3

LUKE 1:46-47

⁴⁶ And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s joyful statements burst from her with passion, clarity, and an understanding of God’s justice. We have an amazing look at what Mary’s pondering, treasuring, and trying-to-discerning nature was yielding, even at this very early stage of her pregnancy and life. For the remainder of this week, we will be looking closely at this exclamation of Mary, known as the Magnificat. She opens with the gripping parallelism printed above.

In comparing Mary’s Magnificat with the prayer of Hannah, we see that Mary was definitely familiar with her words:

And Hannah prayed and said,

*“My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.”* I Samuel 2:1

Mary’s opening phrase is *my soul magnifies* the Lord. Consider a magnifying glass. The glass doesn’t change the size of the object, but it helps the viewer see the object more clearly—more detail can be discerned. Here’s a little video to ponder: Understanding Binoculars. <https://youtu.be/PLAHZiasObw> The knowledge Mary had of scripture, the words of the angel Gabriel swirling in her heart, and her cousin Elizabeth by her side speaking of wonderful things, all worked together to turn Mary’s soul into a magnifier. Her filled-up soul was focused on the Lord, and she shared what she discerned with Elizabeth and us.

In the parallel phrase, soul is replaced with *spirit*. This is a mystery to me if there is a difference, but it calls to mind Hebrews 4:12.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So whatever the difference is between soul and spirit, it is something the word of God can divide, and it is located very deep within us.

Next, *magnifies* turns into *rejoices*, which is a more active word. From her increased insight into God's character and what he was using her to bring about, she praises him. It's a response that wells up from her spirit.

Finally, she turns from addressing God as *the Lord* to *God my Savior*. She uses a name for God that is more personal--her Savior. She saw that not only was God her Lord, but that he was the one who would save her from all darkness and sin.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Magnificat "the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary hymn ever sung." Here is an image of Mary by artist Ben Wildflower that's a bit different than the norm. <https://benwildflower.com/collections/prints-1/products/magnificat-print>

Do you know the God that Mary saw and shared with us? Let's rejoice in him.

PRAYER

God, our Savior, fill us up with your word so our souls, too, can magnify you. Give us a community with whom we can ponder your word. May we remember the humble and cast down. We praise you for your mercy. Amen.

~Susan Guerra

DAY 4

LUKE 1:48-53

- 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;
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and exalted those of humble estate;
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and the rich he has sent away empty.

Oftentimes, we talk about the gospel as introducing the upside-down kingdom. What do we mean by that? In our world, we expect the powerful to rule, the rich to have everything, and the proud to be the most noticed. Yet the upside-down kingdom doesn't work that way. Instead, the effects of the gospel show us that the mighty will be brought down from their thrones, the rulers will be humbled, the rich will be empty, and the proud will be wayward. The script is flipped.

The Israelite people returned from exile with the expectation that their nation would rule the world, as others had. Jerusalem would be the capital, a descendant of David would be on the throne, Israel would be the world powerhouse. Yet as time would go on, they would be ruled by many empires and never see the kingdom they expected. Jesus comes on the scene talking about the Kingdom of God. This was it, they thought. This was their time, the kingdom they had been waiting for. Yet Jesus's kingdom was an upside-down kingdom—where the King came to serve and to suffer (Is. 52:13-53:12), where winning would come through dying (Col 2:13-15), and the least would be the greatest (Matt. 23:11-12).

Mary recognized this reality in her song. She realized that God was doing something unexpected through this baby she was carrying. The world would be flipped up on its head. The nature of the Kingdom of God is radically different from any other kingdom. This is because of Jesus, the one we wait for.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, thank you for your promises, the hope you give your people. This is the hope that Mary saw and Jesus fulfills. It's the hope that brings about your kingdom in a backward sort of way, one filled with mercy, grace, truth, and love. Give us eyes this season to see your kingdom for what it truly is. Humble us as we wait for our Savior's return and carry out the work of this kingdom until that day. In Jesus' name, our King, we pray. Amen.

~ Addison Hawkins

DAY 5

LUKE 1:50, 54-55

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

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.”

First, God promised Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan in Genesis 12:7. Then in Genesis 18:17-19, the Lord promised Abraham that he would become a mighty nation and that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. Then Isaac reminded Jacob of this same promise in Genesis 28. The promise was part of the deeply understood heritage that shaped Israel throughout its whole history.

It is this promise that Mary references in Luke 1:55. Israel had been looking forward to its fulfillment for 2,000 years through the captivity and escape from Egypt and during the chaotic period of the Judges. They thought they had fulfillment with the kingdoms of David and Solomon, but then it all fell apart. So for the last 800 years or so before Christ's first coming, Israel's longing for restoration was deeply felt by the whole nation.

Then, at long last, this little girl from Nazareth is visited by an angel, and she recognizes that through her God is going to fulfill that promise. Relationships with God will be what they should be. Israel will be that nation that serves and worships God the way its people learned to do in the desert. God's mercy would overcome all the failures of the false prophets and sinful kings and all the people who followed them. Mercy would overcome the shame of captivity in Babylon and being ground under foot by the power of the Roman Empire.

Mary knew this coming change wasn't going to be a temporary uprising. She saw that what God was doing in her was the central part of the plan that would produce the permanent change and restoration that all of Israel wanted. Finally, their nation, Israel, was going to be blessed even beyond their imaginations.

She had yet to learn that it was going to look different than the way most of the nation expected it to look. There would be no short-lived political or military victory. The victory would be bigger and longer-lasting. In fact, it would last forever. Sins would be forgiven. Hearts would be changed. Her son would be a new kind of king with a different kind of kingdom.

PRAYER

Father, help us to grasp the enormity of this Good News. Help us not to take your coming for granted but see it with the same excitement that we see in Mary and Elizabeth. Help us to always see the comprehensiveness of your plan and the benefits that we receive from your fulfilled promises. We are richly blessed. Thank You, Lord!

~ Richard Malone