

December 13, 2020

Third Sunday of Advent (B)

The Magnificent

Luke 1:46-55

**Opening words:** According to the Revised Common Lectionary, this is the Third Sunday of Advent. The main character in our story is Mary, the mother of Jesus. This is my observation about Mary. As Protestants we are not comfortable talking about her. My mother had a great heart, but she was uncomfortable talking about Mary. She said, talking about Mary made us look too Catholic. She also said she refused to eat stuffed pepper, stuffed cabbage, pierogi's, or haluski, because she considered them ethnic food. However, I could survive on those four dishes. I also think we do not talk about Mary enough, because she has something to offer our frustrated world. Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274) once said, "*Men do not fear a powerful hostile army, as the powers of hell fear the name and protection of Mary.*" The time has come to spend some time with Mary. Our scripture reading for today is Luke 1:46-55. Let me call this message *The Magnificat*.

**Luke 1:46-55**      **46** And Mary said: "My soul glorifies 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 first two chapters of Luke are sacred to us. For it is in these chapters we find the divine events surrounding the birth of Jesus. Those familiar words comfort us at the most challenging of times. Within those stories are four songs. There is Zechariah's songs, Luke 1:67-79, at the birth of his son, John the Baptist. There is the song the angels sang to the shepherds, Luke 2:13-14, when Jesus was born. There is Simeon's song, Luke 2:29-32, when he cast his eyes on the infant Jesus. There is Mary's song, Luke 1:46-56, when she is told she is going to be the mother of the long-awaited Messiah. That song is called *The Magnificat*. It comes from the translates from the Latin translation for Glorify. It is Mary's song that grabs our attention today. This is the question you must answer.

Who is Mary? Through the eyes of the world, she is nothing special. Prior to our reading we are told, she lived in the town of Nazareth. As the crow flies, it is about sixty miles north of Jerusalem. At the time, Nazareth was a small town with a population of only several hundred people. We also learned from the prior reading she is betrothed to a man named Joseph. There is no reason to believe their marriage was not arranged. He is from the town of Bethlehem, located several miles south of Nazareth. They are not just engaged, they are betrothed, which means they are legally bound. The only thing Mary desired for her life was to be a respectable Jewish wife and mother. Her story was not much different than many young Jewish women of that time. Through the eyes of the world, Mary is nothing special.

Through the eyes of God, however, she is quite spectacular. Have you ever wondered how many women have been born in the history of the world? I am not just talking about Mary's generation. I am talking about the beginning of the world. According to the United Nations, there were 7.8 billion people in the world today. 49.6% of the world's population are women. That means, approximately 3.9 billion women in the world today. There are some outstanding women in the world. I have known some and I married one. Yet, 3.9 billion is tiny next to all the women who have ever lived. I have no clue, how many women have ever lived, but I do know God chose one to be the mother of the Messiah, Mary. She was nothing special through the eyes of this world. However, she was spectacle through the eyes of God. If you can agree with that say, **"Amen!"**

Who is Mary? If you close your eyes and picture Mary, using your sanctified imagination, what do you see? If you imagine Mary to in her mid-thirties with blond hair and blue eyes with a master's degree and a bright future, then you could not be more wrong. Mary was fourteen or fifteen. Life began early at that time because life ended early. Yet, God chose this teenage girl and God chose correctly. The Magnificat shows us Mary was advanced for her years. She both trusted God and understood God. Her trust in the Almighty is obvious. Her understanding is hidden.

The words of Mary's song remind us of Mary's understanding. It is her understanding that grabs our attention. At a young age she understands God and gives us six attributes or characteristics of God in the Magnificat. Today, I will look at those six attributes. I will be brief with the first five and take my time with the last one. After all, this is Advent. It is the time to marvel at the incarnation of God. These points are not original. They came from P.G. Matthew, who is the Senior Minister at the Grace Valley Christian Center in Davis, California. If you are ready to begin looking at the six attributes of God found in the Magnificat say, **"Amen!"**

**God is mighty!** The first attribute Mary speaks of is the might and power of God. In Luke 1:49 she sings, *"For the Mighty One has done great things for me."* Mary's God was a God Almighty, the Creator of the universe. There is no one mightier than her God. He alone is able, and with him alone nothing is impossible. Here is are questions

you must answer. How mighty is your God? How weak are you? Like Mary, there is no need to fear our mighty God because we are his people. Never forget, God is mighty. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

**God is holy!** The second attribute Mary speaks of is the holiness of God. In verse 49, Mary declared, *"For the mighty one has done great things for me - holy is his name."* This is not an isolated piece of scripture. The Bible tells us repeatedly that God is holy." For example, in Exodus 19 God says to Moses, "Be holy, as I am holy." In Isaiah 6:1-5, the great prophet finds himself in heaven and sees two winged creatures covering God. They are calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty." Let me state the obvious. We are not like God. God is holy, but we are sinners. Never forget, God is holy. If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

**God is judge!** The third attribute Mary speaks is the judgement of God. In verse 52 and 53, Mary proclaims, *"He has brought down the mighty rulers from their thrones. He has sent the rich empty away."* God hates arrogance. Someday you will stand before God and be judged. God will not be looking for innocence, because each one of us is guilty. God will be looking humility. Are you open to God's leading in your life? Never forget, God is judge. If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

**God is merciful!** The fourth attribute Mary speaks is mercy. Verse 54 says, *"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful."* That verse reminds us how God's Chosen People were enslaved in Egypt. They cried to God for help and God heard their prays. He had mercy on them and sent them a liberator, Moses. God hears our cries for help because God is a God of mercy. Never forget, God is merciful. If you are thankful God is merciful say, **"Amen!"**

**God is Faithful!** The fifth attribute of Mary speaks is faithfulness. Verse 55 says, *"To Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised his ancestors."* In other words, God keeps his promises, but it may take some time. Mary lived 2,000 after Abraham. God does things in God's time, so you better be patient. Do you consider yourself a patient person? I hope you are. Never forget, God is faithful. If you would like to tell God to hurry up say, **"Amen!"**

**God is Our Savior!** The sixth, and final, attribute of Mary speaks of being our Savior. The Magnificat begins in verse 47. Mary says, *"My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* I saved this attribute for last, because during this time of years, we ponder the incarnation of God. In other words, God left the perfection of heaven to slum it with us. It is hard to fathom. It has been said, the incarnation is beyond all human understanding.

Several weeks ago, I attended an Emmaus event. It is a group that is committed to their spiritual development. Each time they gather, they sing a few songs, pray, and someone stands up and shares something for their heart. On that night, the person

who led the group grabbed my attention. I really was not surprised because I have a great deal of respect for him as a disciple. I knew, he would not waste my time, and he did not. I think about the story he told often during the month of December. The story widens both my understanding and appreciation of the incarnation. I hope it does the same for you. This is the story.

There was once a man who did not believe in the incarnation or the spiritual meaning of Christmas. The truth be told, he was skeptical about God. He and his family lived in a farming community. His wife was a devout believer and diligently raised their children in her faith. He mocked her religious observance of Christmas. One snowy Christmas Eve she was taking the kids to the Christmas Eve service at church. She pleaded with him to come, but he steadfastly refused. He ridiculed the idea of the incarnation and dismissed it as nonsense. *"Why would God lower himself and become a human like us?! It's such a ridiculous story!"* he said. So, she and the children left for church while he stayed home.

After they had left, the winds grew stronger and the snow turned into a blinding snowstorm. He sat down to relax before the fire for the evening. Then he heard a loud thump, something hitting against the window. And another thump. He looked outside but could not see. So, he ventured outside to see. In the field near his house he saw, of all the strangest things, a flock of geese! They were apparently flying to look for a warmer area down south, but they had been caught in the snowstorm. The storm had become too blinding and violent for the geese to fly or see their way. They were stranded on his farm, with no food or shelter, unable to do more than flutter their wings and fly in aimless circles.

He had compassion for them and wanted to help them. He thought to himself, "The barn would be a great place for them to stay! It's warm and safe; surely they could spend the night and wait out the storm." So, he opened the barn doors for them. He waited, watching them, hoping they would notice the open barn and go inside. But they did not notice the barn or realize what it could mean for them.

He moved closer toward them to get their attention, but they just moved away from him out of fear. He went into the house and came back out with some bread, broke it up, and made a bread trail to the barn. They still did not catch on. Starting to get frustrated, he went over and tried to shoo them toward the barn. They panicked and scattered into every direction except toward the barn. Nothing he did could get them to go into the barn where there was warmth, safety, and shelter.

Feeling totally frustrated, he exclaimed, "Why don't they follow me? Can't they see this is the only place where they can survive the storm? How can I possibly get them into the one place to save them?" He thought for a moment and realized that they just would not follow a human. He said to himself, "How can I possibly save them? The only

way would be for me to become like those geese. If only I could become like one of them! Then I could save them! They would follow me, and I would lead them to safety."

At that moment, he stopped and considered what he had said. The words reverberated in his mind: "If only I could become like one of them- then I could save them." And then, at last, he understood God's heart towards mankind, and he fell on his knees in the snow and worshipped Him.

Mankind is like the geese -- blind, gone astray, perishing. God became like us so He could show us the way and make a way available to save us. That is the meaning of Christmas, he realized in his heart. As the winds and blinding snow abated, his heart became quiet and pondered this epiphany. He understood what Christmas was all about. He knew why Christ had to come. Suddenly the years of doubt and disbelief were shattered, as he humbly and tearfully bowed down in the snow, and he embraced the true meaning of Christmas. Mary was not wrong. Never forget, God is mighty, holy, our judge, merciful, faithful, and our Savior. If you are thankful Jesus came to save you say, **"Amen!"**