

MIMIC MARY'S MAGNIFICAT

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ November 30, 2016

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, even as he said to our fathers.” (Luke 1:46-55)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us walk in the light of the Lord,

In 1974, Elton John released a tribute song to Marilyn Monroe entitled, “Candle in the Wind.” While a popular song, it was only after he re-wrote the song in 1997 as a tribute to Princess Diana of Wales that it sailed to the top of the music charts, only eclipsed by Bing Crosby’s “White Christmas.” It was during my formative years in Africa that the tragic death of Princess Diana happened, and subsequently the rewritten song of “Candle in the Wind.” The song itself describes the sadness of a life cut short, a life not fully lived. It had meaning behind it, and it applied both to Marilyn Monroe, and Princess Diana. And now, whenever I hear that song played on the radio, I am taken back to 1997 and recall those events.

“Candle in the Wind” is just one of many examples of a song that was written for a specific purpose, a song that had passion behind it. The same can be said about songs written in the Bible. If you look through the book of Psalms, you will find purpose and emotion behind each Psalm. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas this Advent season, we will take a look at three songs written about the birth of our Savior. And these songs, like the rest of those written in the Bible, like many songs written today, had purpose, they had passion.

The specific song our attention is drawn to today is the song of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It is a familiar song to many of you, a song that we will sing after the sermon. It’s a song that has been titled Mary’s Magnificat. It is from this Latin word (magnificat) that we derive our English word “magnify.” And that’s what Mary’s song is all about, it’s about magnifying, or lifting someone up. It could have been very easy for Mary to think highly of herself, but in this beautiful song, we see a common thread of humility being brought out again and again. She makes less of herself, and more of God. It is the humble attitude of Mary that we want to emulate. Let us MIMIC MARY’S MAGNIFICAT

1. Magnifying God
2. Magnifying his mercy
3. Magnifying his promise

(1)

As many of you know, God sent the angel Gabriel to give the wonderful and miraculous news to Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah. She would give birth to the Savior promised long ago. And sometimes we might get the impression that immediately after the angel appeared to Mary, she busts out this wonderful song we have before us today. But that isn’t the case. Instead, Mary had time to turn over

in her mind what all of this meant as she made a journey to the home of one of her relatives - Elizabeth and Zechariah. Elizabeth at this time was pregnant with John the Baptist. And it was only after arriving at the house of Elizabeth and Zechariah that Mary declared this wonderful song that we call the Magnificat.

And immediately before she said the words of the Magnificat it was Elizabeth who declared, **“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”** How easy it could have been for Mary to let all of this go to her head. To think that there was something special in her that would have led God to pick her to bear the Savior. But with the first words she spoke, she showed this not to be true. Her very first words were, **“My soul glorifies (or magnifies) the Lord.”** Mary was magnifying the Lord, not herself. In fact, Mary realized her very humble position in life with the words, **“he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.”**

Mary did not take pride in her humility, but was merely confessing the truth. She came from a humble station in life, she was going to marry a poor carpenter, there was nothing special about her. She was giving all glory to God, as it should be. For God not only deserves all glory for the big things he has done, but he deserves all glory for everything that he has accomplished with us or without us. He gets credit for everything.

How true a reminder that is for me. How true a reminder that is for me who already knows the Christmas story and the lead up to it. It's a true reminder for me because of the effect which sin has on my perspective. It is the sinful nature that lies within me, it is the sinful nature that is a very part of me to do the exact opposite of magnifying God. Instead, it's the sinful nature inside of me that wants to magnify me, and minimize God. It wants to magnify how busy I am and minimize the value of the birth of God's Son. It is the sinful nature inside of me that wants to take credit for all of the good things that have gone on in my life - my family, my job, my wealth, and it wants to blame God for all of the bad things that have happened in my life - money problems, anger issues, unfortunate circumstances.

It is my sinful nature that wants to think there's something special about me, that God would be lucky to have me on his team, that God should be thankful when I give my offerings and come to church, that at the very least, God should give me some say in how I can live my life. My sinful nature doesn't see the need to magnify God. I don't have to look out that the world to learn that lesson, I only need to look at myself.

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Because as much as I look to blame God or others for the problems in my life, they're still my problems. Because as much as I want to deny that any of the problems in my life are my fault, I still have to deal with them. And as much as I try to be good, I know that I'm not perfect. And when I honestly take a look at God's Word, it confirms everything that is wrong with me. **“There is no one perfect, not even one, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” “The wages of sin is death.”** We can fight this as much as we want, but it is a fight we are going to lose - because we are going to die.

Which leads to second important attitude behind MIMICING MARY'S MAGNIFICAT, and that is to magnify his mercy. Sometimes our solution to our problems is to try and explain to God why we did a particular bad thing, or why we feel we have reason to get revenge, or we try to convince him God that I'm super-tight with him because we come to church and read our Bibles. It's almost as if we feel by doing these things that we deserve God's mercy as Christians. But that is against the very idea of mercy. God's mercy is undeserved, and he has no reason to give it to us, just as he had no reason to give it to Mary.

Yet Mary sang, **“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”** When we magnify his mercy, we get rid of any idea that there is something good in us that God should show us mercy. We magnify his mercy when we realize God’s need for mercy, not only for the times where we have outright defied him, but we need his mercy all the time, even for the times when we’re trying to follow him. And it is God’s mercy that we can be sure is with us at all times - both good and bad. It is a mercy that is rooted in his love for us, not our love for him. And this love can be traced all the way back to the beginning of the world, in fact, even before the creation of the world, **“For he chose us before the creation of the world,”** Ephesians 1:4 states.

It’s a mercy that he showered upon Adam and Eve, our first parents not only in the Garden of Eden, but even when they fell from grace. He showed mercy by not incinerating them on the spot, but by promising a Savior. Over the centuries that followed God continued to show his mercy on the just and the wicked alike. Just as he continues to show mercy to all those who walk upon the earth today. But this mercy is all tied back to the promise that he first gave to Adam and Eve, a promise that Mary believed in, and a promise that we see realized.

It is God’s promise of a Savior that magnifies God’s mercy. That even though all people have God’s mercy to a certain extent, he also extends a special mercy upon his chosen people. This special mercy is not rooted in a lack of hardship or pain, but in the peace with God. When we MIMIC MARY’S MAGNIFICAT, we understand and realize this peace. Just as he was merciful to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac and the children of Israel, he has been, is and will be merciful to us.

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Nowhere is God’s mercy more tangible than in his plan to send a Savior for our salvation. And so when we MIMIC MARY’S MAGNIFICAT we magnify his promise. Mary closes her song with these words, **“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.”** Not only did God choose Israel out all of all the nations of the ancient world to be his chosen people, but he made a promise to them. He made a promise to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. That promise was not only that a Savior would come, but that a Savior would come through his line. It was this promise that Mary would have heard growing up as a little girl, that one day God would send a Savior into this world. What a stunning turn of events when she found out that she would be the one to bear this Savior! And yet, she was overjoyed. **“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

When we MIMIC MARY’S MAGNIFICAT, our spirit rejoices too! Because as Christians we celebrate so much more than just a little Jewish boy born in a manger, born of a young maiden. We rejoice that God kept his promise after so many years to send this child. We rejoice in what that child would do. Jesus’ birth is the first bookend of his life that would accomplish our salvation. We rejoice in looking for opportunities to tell other people this good news, we rejoice in looking for people to invite to church to hear the good news. It is completely contrary for a Christian not to be looking for opportunities to share what they believe and why they believe it.

Mary’s Magnificat was about so much more than her, it was about so much more than just a singular person. Mary’s Magnificat was about a great and merciful God and how he showed mercy not only upon Mary, but upon the whole human race. May the mercy of God be with you as you MIMIC MARY’S MAGNIFICAT this Advent season. Amen.