

MIMIC MARY'S MAGNIFICAT – LUKE 1:39-55

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³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" 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."



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

How do you celebrate Christmas? It seems that everyone has their traditions of how they celebrate Christmas. Do you open up presents on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day? Do you get together with family, friends or both? Do you prepare a special meal for Christmas? There are all sorts of ways that people celebrate Christmas, and what's tradition for one family may not be for another. One of the more recent traditions in my family was one we developed when we were in Africa. On Christmas Day our special meal would be chicken curry.

I also think that in addition to these other traditions, you have a religious tradition as well. I think you realize a big part of Christmas should always be celebrating the birth of our Savior as well. That can be done by attending one of the Christmas worship services – whether that's here at Grace-Vail on Christmas Eve, or when we have an opportunity to gather together as one congregation on Christmas Day. That can be done at home, as you review with your family the Christmas Story, singing your favorite Christmas carols which recall the Savior's birth, maybe you even have your own personal Advent wreath and you read from a devotion book.

This morning in our gospel, we heard how Mary celebrated the news of the birth of the Savior, which would come from her own womb. It was when she went to visit her relative Elizabeth who also celebrated the impending arrival of the Messiah. Mary's words are recorded for us and they compose a wonderful song, a song that we often refer to as the *Magnificat*. As we prepare for the arrival of Christmas, which is only a few days away, this song gives us good words to keep in mind. And it would be good for us to MIMIC MARY'S MAGNIFICAT:

1. Giving glory to God
2. Praising his mercy and
3. Rejoicing in his salvation

(1)

Even though Mary's song receives the most attention in our gospel, she was not the only one who was giving praise to the impending arrival of the Messiah. Like I mentioned a little earlier, Mary had just heard the news herself that she was to be the mother of the Savior. The angel Gabriel came and announced to her this wonderful news. Gabriel also let Mary know that her relative Elizabeth was pregnant too. Just think about it from Mary's perspective – who better to go to in this time of turbulent emotions than another relative who would understand the miraculous nature of what was happening? So this is what Mary did, she went to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It was the mother of the "Preparer" meeting with the mother of the one for whom he would prepare.

When Mary arrived in the house and greeted Elizabeth, John the Baptist leapt for joy. The only thing was, he was still in his mother's womb. And this was not just a normal "baby's moving" type of leap, but a leap that God revealed to be a leap of joy upon knowing the arrival of the Messiah is near. Elizabeth too was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke a prophecy of sorts, something that could have only been revealed by God – **"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."** So we see and hear Elizabeth too giving praise to the impending arrival of the Messiah.

These were high words of praise that were being given not only to the coming Messiah, but also to Mary, the mother of the Messiah, the mother of God. How easy it would have been for those words to go to her head? How easy it would have been for her to forget her humble station and bask in the limelight? And yet, through Mary's Magnificat we know that not to be true. In fact, in the very first words, Mary shows this. **"My soul glorifies the Lord."** It is from that word "glorify" that the song takes its name. A synonym of "glorify" is "magnify," from the Latin "Magnificat." Mary was magnifying the Lord, not herself. Mary was making the Lord greater, not herself. MARY'S MAGNIFICAT gave glory to God.

Mary realized that she had nothing to draw God's attention. Not only does she say, **"My soul glorifies the Lord"** but also, **"he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."** Mary was not taking pride in her humility, but was merely confessing the truth. She came from a humble station in life, she was marrying a poor carpenter, there was nothing special about her. Mary gave glory to God not only in the general sense, but also in the very specific sense, giving glory for all God had done to her and for her.

It might seem like something we know already, it may seem like something we hear on a constant basis, but it's true and it's important to be reminded of it – to give all glory to God. Not only does God deserve all glory for everything that he has done in the world, for all of the big things, but God deserves all glory for everything that he has accomplished with us and through us. Compared to God we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing that he would want. Then you couple in the fact that we are sinful and he is holy – there's so much reason to glorify God.

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The second attitude reminder we gather in MIMICKING MARY'S MAGNIFICAT is praising God's mercy. **"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."** Why should God have mercy? No matter what reasons Mary could possibly come up with, there is no legitimate reason for God to show us mercy. At least not on our end. Not only do people bicker and quarrel with one another, not only do they lie steal and cheat, but they turn their noses up towards God and his Word. The people of Israel are the prime example in Scripture. And who are we to say we are any better.

We could try and explain to God why we did a particular bad thing, or why we feel we have reason to get revenge, we could try and convince God that I'm "super tight" with him, coming to church and reading our Bibles. It's almost as if we feel like we deserve God's mercy because we're Christians. But in fact the Bible tells us what we do deserve – **"the wages of sin is death."** Instead of thinking ourselves as more than we ought, we should take Mary's approach, and realize we deserve nothing good from God, and anything more that we do is nothing more than our duty to God, not something we deserve a reward for. We don't deserve God's mercy because we're Christians, we're Christians, because we've already received God's mercy.

Now what exactly is this mercy that God is talking about? We could rightly say sending Jesus as our Savior, but what came before that? (And besides, rejoicing in his salvation is the third part of the sermon) The reason why God sent Jesus was because he loved us. If we go all the way back to the beginning of the world, God created Adam and Eve in his own image, he placed them over all other creatures, he made them the crown of creation. But even after Adam and Eve fell, and their children after them, that did not dissuade God from his love. He still loved his creation enough to give them a promise of a Savior. He still loved them enough to let them live. This is God's grace, this is God's mercy.

While God extends mercy upon all mankind in a general way – rain falls upon the just and the wicked alike, he also extends a special mercy upon his chosen people – believers. It is not done in a purely physical way, although it can happen like that. God doesn't promise no hardship or pain. But he does promise us his peace. To those who fear and respect God, God works wonders in their lives, he fills them up, if we let him. Just as he was merciful to Abraham and the children of Israel, he has been, is and will be merciful to us.

(3)

It is only because of God's mercy and grace that he decided to make and keep his promise to send a Savior. The Jews had been waiting for this for several thousand years. After such a long time you can see why the Jews were becoming impatient, saying that God is slow in keeping his promises. But Mary knew, and by God's grace she believed that the child growing within her belly was the chosen Messiah. And so MARY'S MAGNIFICAT rejoiced in God's salvation which was coming to fruition in this child.

Sometimes we think like the Jews did, that because God is love, because we are Christians, God just has to love us, God just has to let us into heaven. But that simply is not the case. If it wasn't for this plan of salvation, none of us ever would be able to go to heaven. Because in addition to being a loving God, he is also a just God. And just like we would complain if a judge let off a convicted criminal, so God cannot allow crimes against him to go unpunished.

To what extent Mary understood at this time is debatable. The popular Christmas song, "Mary did you know?" encapsulates the story of salvation for what Jesus would have to go through. But it doesn't matter how much Mary knew about what her Son would have to go through, she knew her Son was the Messiah, the very Son of God, and he was coming to save his people from their sins. **"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."**

If we are to MIMIC MARY'S MAGNIFICAT, then we do well to rejoice in God's salvation this Christmas time of year. 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.

But our rejoicing should not just be limited to this particular time of the year, but rather we should give glory to God, praise his mercy, and rejoice in his salvation all the year through. I think we would all agree that this news that we find in the Bible, this gospel is good news! If it is good news then why would we not want to share it? If you really believed what you believe is true, how is that going to affect the way you live your life? We rejoice in sharing this message with others. Now for some people that will mean they will shout it from the mountain tops and take every chance they get to talk about Jesus. For others, that may come in quiet conversation with a friend or a classmate. But it's completely contrary for a Christian not to be looking for opportunities to share what they believe and why they believe it.

This week you have a great opportunity to share what you believe, to invite someone to hear more about their Savior. At Christmas time, for whatever reason, people are more willing to come to churches. We have a number of invite cards left at the back table to let people know about our Christmas Eve service. Make this a new tradition this time of year, to invite someone to church. It is true that only God can bring someone to faith, but you don't know who he is going to affect through you. May the grace of God be with you as you MIMIC MARY'S MAGNIFICAT this Christmas season. Amen.