



# FROM THE PASTOR

## The Magnificat Luke 1:46-55

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their  
inmost thoughts.  
<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.  
<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.  
<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful  
<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors."

Today we are going to do something different. We are not going to read a Psalm. Instead, we are going to read the words of Mary, the mother our Lord when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth while both were with child; Mary, of course, with our Lord Jesus and Elizabeth with John the Baptist. When the preborn John encountered the preborn Jesus he leapt in Elizabeth's womb. Now I have never felt a baby leap in my womb—nor will I—but it must have been a remarkable thing. It is one of the very few stories that was preserved for us about Jesus before he was baptized by that same John who leapt.

It seems to me, that as Christmas approaches, this is a fitting time to look at Mary's beautiful description of God's presence in our midst through the baby she would have. Mary was, you will remember, the first human being in the Bible to be told of the Savior's birth explicitly. St. Luke tells us in the first chapter of his Gospel:

**<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The**

**virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." <sup>34</sup> "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup> The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called <sup>[b]</sup> the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For no word from God will ever fail." <sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.**



Notice that Mary's response to this angelic announcement was one of humility, love and acquiescence. Perhaps Mary had been mulling over the Magnificat—these wonderful words of praise—as she travelled to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Or, perhaps, the words came to her all at once in a wonderful moment of inspiration. Either way, Mary's words ring throughout the centuries. Mary's hymn of praise has three different focuses to it.

The first is how Jesus' birth affects her personally. ***"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name."*** Aware of her lowly estate in the world, Mary is equally aware of the honor God has done her within His Kingdom. Indeed it has been so. Mary is more beloved by Christians of every denomination and tradition than any other except for the Lord.

The second focus of Mary's beautiful song is upon the blessing that the Christ event will have on humankind. ***"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm, he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts."*** The birth of this baby, though it will be in a simple stable, a long way from the family home, will impact the world and every person in it. And so, Mary makes you and I part of her song of praise. We may join in, for in doing great things for Mary, God has done great things for you and me as well, God's mercy is made real in our world. God's love is made real in our world. And God's presence is made real in our world. Mary's song lifts us all up so that out of the depths of sin we may have a vision of God's glory and, even more, we may have a promise of God's glory.

The third focus of Mary's song of praise is a warning to those worldly forces and people who would resist God's presence in His creation and of promise to those who hope. ***"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."*** Because of the birth of Jesus, things are and will be different. God's relationship with each of us has entered a new and different phase—a phase we can call redemption, if not fulfillment. No longer need we speak of the Messiah, or of what the kingdom the Messiah is to bring as in the future. He is here in our midst. We join with him in Baptism. We feast upon him in Holy Communion. And we bring him to the world whenever we gather and serve in His name.

**THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US—HOLY IS HIS NAME. AMEN.**

In Christ's service,

*Pastor Brian Shirey*



### *Post Scripts:*

- † Our lessons for this Sunday, December 20, 2020, The Fourth Sunday of Advent, are:
  - First Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
  - Psalm 89:1-5, 19-29
  - Second Reading: Romans 16:25-27
  - Gospel: Luke 1:26-38
- † Every day the news worsens about the present intensity of COVID-19. I am thankful that there are vaccines becoming available, but know this will take time. If, as it appears they will, the vaccines will bring the dawn of healing and release from this illness, we must remind ourselves that we are still very much living in the darkness before the dawn. Dangerous moments continue to lie ahead. Please be careful and be prudent in all you do.
- † To that end it has been decided not to hold in-person worship at St. Luke's through the end of Advent which is this Sunday. We will, of course, livestream worship at 8:15 a.m. Sunday morning. This will be then be available for you to use at 10:45 or whenever is best for you. Both the livestreaming and the recorded service is available on our web site. I certainly wish this were not necessary, but I am convinced that it is. Please be patient and supportive during this difficult time. I hope very much and expect that we will be able to worship in person on Christmas Eve.
- † I will be writing another of my little meditations on the Psalms next week before Christmas. I will not be writing one the week after Christmas. I am just taking a little break. To those who take time to read my meditations I am grateful.
- † Thank you for all who watched last Sunday's worship on the website. Please spread the word. It is one more tool for living out our life together at St. Luke's. Feel free to ask friends and family members unable to worship somewhere in person to join us online.