



Luke 1:46-55 *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."*

When you think about music, a lot has changed over the years. Just in the lifetimes of those who are here today, we went from the crates full of vinyl LP's to the shoeboxes full of cassettes and 8-tracks, then came the stacks of CD's. Now of course, most music is consumed digitally, without taking up any physical footprint at all. But regardless of how the format changes, one thing remains the same: that's the power of music.

Throughout human history, every generation has found it to be true, that when you want to express something deep and profound the best way to do so is through music. Music lifts up the soul and causes words to resonate in a way that they just wouldn't if they were merely spoken. It should be no surprise then that love is a common subject of many songs. I read a study that analyzed every song that had landed in the Top-40 Singles charts over the past 60 years, and they discovered that 67% of those songs had love as their primary focus. Love is one of those deep, profound topics for which it's difficult to verbalize how you feel when just talking but putting your words to music really helps express those feelings in a more powerful way.

As Mary greeted her relative Elizabeth, some profound and powerful truths were upon her heart, and it's fitting then that they burst forth from her lips in a song. Perhaps you know this song to be called, "The Magnificat," it's one of the very well-known songs of Scripture. And as we study this song, the theme becomes very obvious: it's all about love—the love of the Lord—not just for Mary, but for all people of all ages including us. All of us—Mary, saints past, saints present—all of us are totally unworthy recipients of God's love, yet we receive it anyway. The theme we'll be considering today is:

A Song of God's Generational Grace

- I. As God had done for many, He'd done for Mary
- II. As God has done for Mary, He's done for Me

We don't know what type of reception Mary was expecting when she entered the home of her relatives, Zechariah and Elizabeth, but she likely wasn't expecting the welcome she received. If you remember from our sermon last week, Mary had just crossed the threshold with a simple, "Hello," when Elizabeth exclaimed, "**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!**" And again, I don't imagine she was expecting this type of treatment, after all, we know she was mighty confused when the angel Gabriel appeared and said, "**Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is**

with you; blessed are you among women.” (Luke 1:28) In Mary’s mind, she was simply not anyone special; she didn’t deserve such treatment from anyone, much less from a messenger of God.

Now, if I can speak for Mary today, I’d also go so far as to say she certainly didn’t expect, or want, the type of treatment that her memory receives today. Of course, we know that many people in our world credit Mary with playing a role in their salvation, many pray to her, many trust in her as a sort of co-redeemer. And Mary would have been mortified if she had known that this would become a norm. I feel comfortable saying this, because the words of the song before us today express the attitude of a humble Christian who understands her rightful place before the Lord and is rejoicing *only* because of the grace of God.

Let’s look at her words: ***“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”*** Clearly, Mary thought of herself as rather insignificant. And certainly by every worldly standard, she was a nobody. Based on the marriage practices of the day, she was probably rather young, not old enough to make a name for herself in any way. She was from the sleepy backwater town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee. We know that the Jews down in Judea didn’t think much of Galilee in general, but Nazareth? Maybe you can recall the disciple Nathanael’s words when he was first told about Jesus, ***“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*** (John 1:46) It was a town full of uneducated people in a rather worthless part of the country, and certainly a long ways away from the bright lights of Jerusalem, which was the place to be.

And Mary had no hope of any social climbing. She was betrothed to be married to Joseph, a humble carpenter—a simple laborer. Later, when they would go to offer a sacrifice in the temple after the birth of their first Son, Jesus, they would bring two turtledoves for the sacrifice (Luke 2:24), which was the designated offering for poor people. So, there was nothing to set Mary apart from the sea of uneducated impoverished commoners that she called neighbors, and yet here God has set her apart. It’s all very remarkable, and that’s clearly not lost on Mary.

She doesn’t exalt herself, she doesn’t do the Disney Princess thing of saying, “I always knew I was destined for something greater!” She also doesn’t say that she used to be a nobody, but now that’s all changed and she’s important! She simply says that God has done great things for her. ***“He has looked upon the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”*** The word the Holy Spirit uses in that phrase for ***“blessed,”*** it’s only used one other place in all of Scripture, it’s in the book of James. There James is describing Christians who remain steadfast in the faith until death, he says such a person is ***“blessed.”*** But the credit belongs to God there as well. Because then James points to Job as just one such blessed individual, whom he says steadfastly persevered in the faith, because ***“the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”*** Again, all the credit belongs to God and His good grace.

That’s Mary’s point in her song. There was no reason for God to choose her to be the mother of the Savior; she recognized that in addition to her social status, her spiritual status was that she was a sinful woman, you can tell she knew that because she calls God her Savior. There was no reason at all for this treatment, other than that God is gracious and merciful and chooses to show love to whomever He chooses to show love. And in this regard, Mary also recognized that she was just the latest in a long line of people who didn’t deserve God’s love yet had received it anyways. ***“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation,”*** she says.

One common refrain we see throughout all generations is that the Lord often chooses those people that don't make a ton of sense from a worldly standpoint to be the chosen vessels of His grace. Paul writes about that to the Corinthians, he says, ***“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”*** Therefore, ***“Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:26ff)

If you think about the progress of the Gospel in the various CLC Mission Fields around the world, do you notice a theme among those locations? We generally see the most spiritual growth in the most impoverished areas of the planet. We have sister synods in Nepal, Kenya, Zambia, Togo, Myanmar—not a one of them ranks in the top 60 nations by any measure of wealth. India ranks rather highly, and yet so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ in India make up the lower castes of the social system, even being considered “untouchable” by the more affluent.

Maybe the world thinks “untouchable” as it looks at these places, maybe that's what our fellow Americans think about devout Christians—“they're the untouchables, the social outcasts,”—maybe that's what her fellow Jews thought of that poor peasant girl from Nazareth. But that's not how God thinks. There's no minimal level of requirements that you have to meet in order to be chosen by God for His gracious purposes. In fact, as that passage from 1 Corinthians indicated, the Lord wants to make sure that we know that none of us have any room to stand on our own, we are not loved by God because we deserve it, but instead we are totally dependent on God's grace.

It's just as Mary said, God scatters the proud, He puts down the mighty, He exalts the lowly, He fills the hungry, He sends the rich away empty. God had shown His grace to generations of people who simply did not deserve it by any measure. When Mary was going through these descriptions, perhaps she was thinking of Abraham, who was a 75-year-old man with a barren wife—yet God chose him to be the Father of the nation of Israel. Maybe she was thinking of King David, who had at one time been the youngest of eight sons whose father was a shepherd in the small town of Bethlehem—and yet God chose him to be King over Israel.

God had done great things for many throughout history, and now He was doing the same for Mary. But wasn't the best show of love given to Mary? Wouldn't you say that she was the most blessed of all, after all, she was the mother of the Lord! Think about what that means! Any other Christian might struggle with the question, “Does God really love me?” Not Mary! Of course God loved her, God was her baby boy! Any other Christian might struggle with the question, “Does God really answer my prayers?” Not Mary! Of course God answered her prayers, when she tucked Jesus in at night, she could ask Him whatever she wanted! And after Jesus ascended into heaven, do you think Mary ever had any doubt that Jesus was preparing an eternal home for her?

No doubt those ideas are behind some of the calculus in elevating Mary to such a prominent status in some churches. And yet, Jesus Himself downplays these ideas. Later on in His ministry, there was an occasion when Jesus was traveling from town to town preaching and healing, as He would often do, and a few members of His own family had come to see Him. It was Mary and Jesus' brothers. (cf. Luke 8:19ff) And we're told in that account that they couldn't get near enough to even see Him because

the crowds were so dense, and a couple people told Jesus that His mom and His brothers had come to see Him. Certainly, He'd want to see them, they're His family, shouldn't they receive preferential treatment? But Jesus responded, **"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it."** (Luke 8:21) There was a similar sort of exchange in our Gospel reading, when a woman in the crowd shouted out, **"Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"** Mary was in a position of highest privilege, and yet Jesus replied, **"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"** (Luke 11:27-28)

He wasn't saying that He didn't love Mary, but rather His point to you and to me is that we have been given the same privilege that Mary had been given. Just as God has done for Mary, so He's done for you and for me. No, we aren't blood relatives of Jesus, but just like Mary, there is nothing at all that should set us apart from the rest of the world in the eyes of God. By our very nature, we are enemies of God! We do struggle with pride, and we do often want to boast in ourselves! We do overrate ourselves in our reckoning of why God should love us.

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) To make us great, God made Himself lowly. He has taken us of low estate and exalted us to the status of saints before God. Not only have we been given the same status as Mary, we've been given the same privileges as Mary.

We too can be certain that Jesus loves us, for through the Holy Spirit's working through the Word of God in our hearts Jesus calls us his brothers. And God even declares in the book of Hebrews, **"He is not ashamed to call [us] brothers."** (Hebrews 2:11) Nothing can now separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39) That same guarantee of everlasting love that Mary had, it's your guarantee too.

Just like Mary, we too can pray and know for a fact that God is listening. When Jesus taught us how to pray with the words of the Lord's Prayer, he taught us to pray, **"Our Father..."** That same sort of familial privilege that we might presume that Mary had because she was Jesus' mother, Jesus would have us realize that we've been blessed the same way. We have been brought into the family too. And just as a child is comfortable asking his father whatever is bothering him, Jesus instructs us to go to God in the same way, knowing that He will hear us.

And just as Mary no doubt knew that Jesus would return for her, we have been assured of the same. This Advent, as we prepare for Christ's coming, we focus not just on Christmas but also on Christ's return. That is a day we can wait for with the same sort of Christmas joy, because Jesus has told us exactly what He's doing. He's preparing a place for us, to dwell before our Father's throne. Jesus promises, **"Because I live, you shall live also."**

These promises are all made to us, the members of God's family. For God did not despise our humble estates but has shown us great grace and mercy. You know what this means, don't you? It means that you can make a personal claim on Christ the Savior as our very own, just as easily as Mary could. This Advent can be a season of song for you, singing along with Mary, **"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."** Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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