

Though it was written 140 years ago, Mark Twain's popular novel *The Prince and the Pauper* has stood the test of time. First, the story was adapted for the stage, even appearing on Broadway in the 1920's. In the years since, the general story has been adapted for comic books, television, even video games. It's also hit the big screen a number of times. When I first learned the tale of *The Prince and the Pauper*, it was presented by Micky Mouse, and I'm sure many young people first heard the story through Micky Mouse or any of the other for-children adaptations.

The enduring appeal of *The Prince and the Pauper* is understandable. A prince is tired of the restrictions of royal life, longing for the freedom to live as a commoner. When he finds a pauper who looks just like him, it is the perfect opportunity to switch places! And that's agreeable to the pauper as well, since he's just an ordinary peasant. He longs to enjoy the privileged life of a prince. It's the classic story of "the grass is always greener on the other side." The story speaks to all of us because we all have longed to switch places with another whom we deem to be living the good life.

Now, the high and the low switching places—even Mary has that on her mind. And yet it is delivered a bit differently in her *Magnificat*. She speaks about how the mighty are cast down from their thrones, the rich go away empty. All the while, the lowly are exalted. That appeals to our sense of justice. Let the rich see what it's like! Let the poor have it easy! But that's not what the Lord has in mind. He is interested in a far grander exchange. In the Lord's exchange, He has Christ Jesus exchanging places with you, taking your worst and giving you His best.

And this is a far greater exchange than *The Prince and the Pauper*, because Jesus is far more than a prince. He is the very Lord whom Mary magnifies. Everything that she names as reason to magnify the Lord is true of Jesus.

- For instance, Mary says of the Lord, **"Holy is His name."**
 - And Jesus' name is so holy that it is the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved! (cf. Acts 4:12)
- Mary says that the Lord is to be feared.
 - And when Jesus healed a paralytic, when He raised a widows' son, when He cast out a legion of demons from a man, in each case, those watching on were "filled with great fear and praised the Lord." (cf. Luke 5:26, 7:16, 8:37)
- Mary says that the Lord humbles the mighty.
 - And Jesus would regularly stop the mouths of those whose pride led them to believe they could get the better of Him.
 - Whether that was the Devil when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, or the Scribes and Pharisees when they tried to trap Jesus in His words, or when the Sadducees debated with Him about the resurrection. (cf. Luke 4:1-13; 20:1-8, 19-26; 20:27-40)
 - In each case, Jesus silenced them all, even so that **"The no longer dared to ask Him any question."** (Luke 20:40) Jesus humbled the mighty!

Yes, clearly Jesus is far more than a prince. He is God Himself. And this one whose name is holy, who is greatly to be feared, who humbles the mighty—He himself comes so humbly. As Mary speaks these words, she is in her first trimester. There's no cute baby bump to give witness to His presence. He is small and vulnerable, even though He is greatest of all and Lord *over* all. We see then that His greatness is not what we expect. His greatness is found in His weakness. Jesus is great enough to take on flesh so that He might take His place among us and take our place. His greatness is manifest when

He appears at His weakest, hanging upon the cross. Yet there He also is at His greatest, His mightiest—mighty to save—for that is what we need.

So this is a far greater exchange than any *Prince and the Pauper* type scenario, because Jesus is much more than a prince. And it's also a far greater exchange, because we are far less than paupers! A pauper is defined by his empty hands, his poverty. And that is all of us. We have nothing to offer the Lord. Impoverished though we are, we can rejoice with Mary that though we are humble, yet, the Lord looks upon us. In that humility, we recognize our dependence upon the Lord for everything.

When Martin Luther died, he held a scrap of paper in his hand that is regarded as his last words. Translated into English, it said, "We are beggars. This is true." That is a humble statement and certainly true of us all. As the Prophet Isaiah writes, "***We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.***" (Isaiah 64:6) Even the best we may think we have to offer is still nothing. We are beggars, this is true. And yet empty hands before the Lord are quickly filled. Just as Mary testifies, "***The Lord fills the hungry with good things.***"

So the picture is that we are hungry beggars, paupers with our hands open before the Lord. Yet, in reality, our hands aren't empty. We also bring something with us that make us far less than paupers. We bring our sin with us. And as Jesus humbles Himself to become human, He further humbles Himself to take that sin upon Himself. And with our sin, He takes its death, even death on a cross.

Greater than a prince, less than a pauper. And a third reason this is a far greater exchange than any old *Prince and the Pauper* type story, is that Jesus now identifies with you. In the story, both prince and pauper find out that the other's life is not as enviable as they first expected, and in the end, both are ready to go back to their given place in life. It's not so with Jesus. There are no delusions about what He was getting into. He knew what we were like when He chose to identify with sinful humanity. He knew that it would lead Him to a cross. On the other side of the coin, we find out that His place—a place of righteousness and peace with the Father—is an unimaginably great thing. It is that good thing with which He fills us. And the even better thing is that we don't have to go back to the way things were before. Even after His death and resurrection, Jesus retains His human nature in His glorified, sinless body. That means that Jesus is ever *for you*. He knows what you face because He has faced it in His own body. So, He draws near to strengthen you when you face temptation and when you are humiliated by sin. Even at your lowest, He is there with His strength and grace and forgiveness. He is *for you*.

And finally, this is a far greater exchange because in Christ, you are more than a prince. You are a child of God who dwells with the Father for eternity. Remember, Mary says that He fills the hungry with good things. In Christ, you are full of the Lord's good things—His righteousness, His mercy, His promises, His eternal life, His sonship with the Father. He became weak so that you are strong—strong in the face of sins condemnation because you have received God's mercy. Strong in the face of death because you have received His eternal life.

So in this great exchange, God Himself takes up residence in Mary's womb so that He might rob you of your sin and replace it with His righteousness and mercy. Hearing that news, Mary rejoices. And we can rejoice with her, for this is a great exchange that exceeds all others.

We just sang those words, "Sing with Mary, virgin mother." Do you ever have reason to sin! For "the Savior came in meekness for you, for you, to bear your flesh in weakness." Yes, "God's own Son is born a child. . . God the Father is reconciled." Amen.