

“My Soul Magnifies the Lord”

Luke 1:46-49

This Advent Season, during these three evening services, we are going to take a close look at a portion of Scripture that has been given what is for us a strange name – the Magnificat.

The name Magnificat comes from the Latin translation of the first line of Mary’s Song: “Magnificat anima mea Dominum,” “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

Luther says that these words express the exuberant joy with which all her mind and life are inwardly exalted in the Spirit. Therefore she does not say, “I exalt the Lord,” but, “My soul exalts Him.” Much like what we heard in Hannah’s prayer in our Old Testament reading after the birth of Samuel. It is as if she cannot find the words to express the joy she feels having been so blessed by the Lord.

From a literary standpoint, the Magnificat is like an aria in an opera (for all of you opera fans). In an aria, the action almost stops so that the situation may be savored more deeply (Just, 80). The historic event of the mothers of John the Baptist, the prophet who would prepare the way for the Lord, and Jesus, the Son of God promised to Adam and Abraham, of whom Moses, David, and the prophets spoke, they come together and Mary sums up her place in salvation history. It is not surprising that it is as if she cannot find the words to express the joy she feels having been so blessed by the Lord.

God cannot be magnified through her simple voice or mouth, through the work of her hands, the thoughts of her mind, or the strength of her will. God is unchangeable. There is nothing that even the mother of our Lord could do to magnify and expand God's glory and honor [LW 21:307]. That was Luther's take on her situation.

Mary's words, like our feeble words of praise and glory, are but a humble response to the gift of salvation we have received from God.

It is as King David sang in Psalm 34: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him" [Ps. 34:8]. Tasting is put before seeing,

because this sweetness of the Gospel, this sweetness of the Good News of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through Jesus Christ, cannot be known unless the person has experienced it for himself.

This is why believers can't understand how unbelievers can even get out of bed in the morning given the hopelessness and despair of an unknown or empty future – which has the distinct possibility of being really terrible. Likewise, this is why unbelievers can't understand how intelligent, rational people like us can devote our lives to and place our trust in something we have not seen. Trust in Christ is a realization experienced through the hearing of the Word, by the grace of God. It is not an intellectual exercise. Trust is not in seeing. Our Lord said, "Blessed is he who has not seen and yet believes."

In singing the Magnificat, this song of praise to the Lord, inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself, we see this young Hebrew girl (probably not more than 14 years old.) And she has experienced the sweetness of the Gospel – that she will forever be called blessed, not because of what she has done, but because of what God has done through her.

She admits that she is of a humble, lowly estate. She is nothing in this world. She has no claim on any honor or exalted high place. She is the Lord's servant. She is also the Lord's child.

We too are called to humble service for the Lord, and we too are more than servants – He has adopted us as His true children. Therefore, when we sing the Magnificat – the Song of Mary – we do so not just as a remembrance of her being chosen to bear the Christ child, but we sing these words with ourselves in mind: “My soul magnifies the Lord...For He who is mighty has done great things **for me.**”

It is as if you and I cannot find the words to rightfully and fully express the joy we feel having been so blessed by the Lord to be counted among the righteous. As we will see next Wednesday, our response to God is born out of two words Mary uses: mercy and fear. My soul magnifies the Lord because I do not have the words to express the fear and awe of the Almighty God coming into my presence, nor do I have the words to properly give thanks for the mercy He has shown me. “My soul magnifies the Lord...For He who is mighty has done great things **for me.**” Amen.