

Summit Presbyterian Church
Preached by Rev. Sue Cyre
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Text: Luke 1:39-56
Title: The Songs of Christmas: Mary's Song

On this first Sunday in Advent, I'm beginning a series on the songs of Christmas from the Gospel of Luke. Luke was a musician. Luke's Gospel is a singing Gospel. It resounds with the music of praise to God. Mary's Magnificat, the Benedictus by Zachariah, the Nunc Dimittis or the Song of Simeon and the Gloria when the angels announce Jesus' birth, are all songs.

Mary begins her song, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The verb "rejoice" is found in Luke more than in any other book in the NT. Likewise "joy" occurs repeatedly.

.....There is joy in Zacchaeus' receiving Jesus. There is joy on earth in the finding of the lost sheep and the lost coin, and there is joy in heaven when lost sinners are found. The Gospel of Luke ends just as it began—with rejoicing when the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, praising God."

One author wrote, "Luke the historian will make you certain about the Gospel. Luke the theologian will touch you with God's love and grace. Luke the physician will help you to love people. Luke the musician will set your heart to singing."

The Song of Mary is often referred to as the "Magnificat" which comes from the first line of the song in the Latin Vulgate translation. The NRSV that you have in the pews translates it as, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Magnificat comes from the same word that we get magnify. A magnifying glass is a lens that makes things larger and brings them into focus. That's what Mary's song does—it's a lens that magnifies who God is and brings him into focus.

Mary magnifies the Lord God. Isn't that what we want to do with our lives? In this Christmas season, don't we want our lives to magnify the Lord? We've been looking at what it means to Walk with God. But, doesn't it all come down to "magnifying the Lord." Shouldn't our walk with God magnify God and bring him glory?

Mary is often called the first disciple. She willingly submitted to God's call on her life. When Gabriel said that she would give birth to a son and her response was, "I am the Lord's servant," everything in her life changed. She was a young, unmarried woman.

Her reputation was at stake; she would be shunned by her friends. In fact according to OT law, the penalty for adultery was stoning so when she said Yes to God, her life was

threatened. Her plans for the future were at risk—likely Joseph would not marry an adulterous woman. Yet, her immediate response was, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

She listened, she obeyed, she worshiped, she followed, she submitted and in doing so, she magnified the Lord.

Mary’s song begins with adoration of God, “My soul glorifies or magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

She magnifies God because she knows who he is. He is Lord—he rules over all. He rules over Mary. She praises God for his rule in her life.

She praises God because he alone is her Savior. Mary is also acknowledging who Jesus is. Elizabeth confesses a few verses earlier that Mary is the mother of her Lord. Mary and Elizabeth recognize that this child in Mary’s womb is the Lord God. The one that Mary magnifies is the one she now carries in her womb.

And earlier the angel Gabriel had told Mary that she was to name this child, Jesus, which means “God saves.”

God is the Lord and Mary’s Savior. Jesus, the child in Mary’s womb is the incarnate Lord God—he is the Lord and Savior. Clearly, Luke is acknowledging that this child of Mary’s is both fully human—born of a woman. And the child is fully God as vs. 32 tells us—this child that Mary carries is also “the Son of the Most High.”

This is the earliest Christian confession—to confess that Jesus Christ is both Savior and Lord. A disciple confesses both—joyfully. To confess Jesus is Savior and deny his Lordship over our lives is to live in rebellion. To confess Jesus is Lord and deny his salvation is to call God a liar.

Jesus is both Savior and Lord, sent by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary magnifies God by confessing who he is—he is Lord and Savior.

Then Mary gives the “because”—the NIV has “for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.” The RSV translates that line, “for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” which is the more familiar language.

—How does Mary know he is both Savior and Lord, “because” or “for” he has been mindful of the humble state of his handmaiden, his servant.” He is Lord and Savior because he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden—Mary. That’s the second way that Mary magnifies God—she trusts that he is mindful of her.

This God is personal. He is not off in some far away galaxy, or disinterested in his creation, or unloving and uncaring. This God is personal. He is mindful of the humble state of his servant—Mary. He is aware of what the rich and famous are up to. But, Mary tells us

that he cares about this young, humble, poor servant girl. He knows the number of hairs on her head, he formed her in the womb, he knows when she stands up and sits down. He knows what she is going through in carrying God's Son.

God cares about her daily life, her problems, her struggles, her circumstances.

God gave the precious gift of his only Son—Son of the Most High to this teenage, servant girl. Imagine trusting your child—your baby-- the Savior of the world, the Lord of the universe to a poor, unmarried, teenage girl.

It's not even clear that Mary has much extended family—she may have been alone. Because as soon as she hears the news, she goes to Elizabeth who the text says is a relative. There is no mention of Mary's mother or father. Elizabeth seems to be her only human comfort and strength.

God knew that and so Gabriel directed Mary to Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Zechariah were experiencing their own miraculous birth from the hand of God—this old, childless couple were also going to have a baby.

Elizabeth understands what Mary is feeling: her trust and her concerns. God is so concerned about his humble servant Mary that he gives her Elizabeth to encourage her and hold her.

When Mary arrives, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately acknowledges that this child of Mary's is God—Elizabeth confesses that Mary's child is her Lord when she says, "Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me."

Remember that Elizabeth and Zechariah had been told by Gabriel that their child would be the one to bring back the people of Israel to the Lord their God. This baby of Elizabeth and Zechariah, John the Baptist, would, like the OT prophet Elijah, turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" —this Lord that Mary carries.

And John begins his ministry while he's in Elizabeth's womb. He leaps for joy at the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb. What a blessing for Mary to have confirmation that indeed this child of hers is as the angel said, the Son of the Most High, the Savior of the world, the king that would sit on David's throne.

What a compassionate God that would give not only the angelic witness, but human affirmation and encouragement and arms to hold Mary and strengthen her.

The angel also spoke to Joseph, this righteous man that would raise the Son of God as his own son. God was indeed mindful of the humble estate of his servant, Mary. God intervened and touched Joseph's heart, so that Mary and Joseph's marriage could proceed. The child would have a human step-father. Mary would have a husband to love and care for her and help her raise this child.

God was mindful of the humble estate of his servant. Parenting is never easy, and Mary had some difficult days ahead:

- the journey to Bethlehem when she was 9 months pregnant.
- The birth in the stable because there was no room in the inn for the creator of the universe and Lord of All.
- Simeon's message when Jesus was only a few weeks old that Mary's heart would be pierced.
- The 3 Kings brought myrrh—a burial spice.
- The flight to Egypt because Herod wanted to kill the child.

But, through it all, Mary magnified her Lord and Savior who was mindful of the humble state of his servant. God protected, led, watched over, provided for. Was it easy? No. But, Mary knew that God was mindful of her—God was there with them. He was Lord and Savior—Ruler and redeemer and this child is his Son.

Mary magnified the Lord because she believed he was Lord and Savior. Second, she magnified the Lord because she trusted that he was mindful of her—his humble servant.

Thirdly, Mary magnified the Lord because of his mighty deeds, his faithfulness, and his care throughout the generations. Look at all “He has dones” in the text.

He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

Beginning in vs 51, He has performed mighty deeds with his arm
...He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
...He has brought down rulers from their thrones
...He has lifted up the humble
...He has filled the hungry with good things,
...He has sent the rich away empty.
...He has helped his servant Israel.

He has, he has, he has....

God has been at work in the world, in Israel, in Mary. The birth of Jesus isn't God's first arrival in the world. He has been at work. He has acted. He has performed mighty deeds, he has scattered, he has brought down, he has lifted up, he has filled the hungry, he has sent away, he has helped.

God has always watched over and ruled and cared for those who humble themselves before him. The rich, and the proud, who think they can live life apart from God, God humbles by sending them away empty, scattering them, and bringing them down from their thrones of power. God humbles the proud and self-sufficient and he exalts the humble who bow before him.

Mary magnifies the Lord by recounting his mighty deeds, his care, his power, his fulfillment of promises to all those who humble themselves before him and ask for his mercy.

When Mary refers to Abraham and his descendents she is reminding listeners of God's covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would bless him to be a blessing.

Now, through Mary, God is fulfilling his ancient promise to Abraham. Mary is of the lineage of Abraham. The angel told Mary, You will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give them the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Jacob was Abraham's grandson-- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This child will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

Through the God-child that Mary is carrying, God is fulfilling the promise he made to Abraham 2000 years before. Mary magnifies the Lord by witnessing to his faithfulness in fulfilling all of his promises.

First, Mary magnifies the Lord in her song by praising who he is as Lord and Savior. Second, she magnifies the Lord by declaring that this God cares about his humble servant— He is mindful of her, the least of the least.

Third, Mary magnifies the Lord by recounting all of his past deeds on behalf of his people— throughout the ages, he has fulfilled his promises, he has cared for his people. He is mindful of all those who humble themselves before him.

Fourth, Mary magnifies the Lord by joyfully proclaiming that in vs 50, "His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. Eugene Peterson's Message paraphrases that verse saying, "His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him."

As we gather at the Lord's table next Sunday receiving his forgiveness through his blood, and beginning nourished by his own body, we are announcing and rejoicing at the truth that "God's mercy in Christ flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him."

We accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We know and attest to his care for us his servants. We remember his mighty deeds and eternal promises, everyone of which will be fulfilled and we announce to the world that God's mercy in Christ flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him."

And as we gathered before the baptismal font this morning we are magnifying the Lord. For we are acknowledging that God is Kaitlyn's Lord and Savior. We are acknowledging that this God has claimed Kaitlyn as his own: he is mindful of the low estate of this small

child. Kaitlyn is being claimed by God even before she is aware of him. God is mindful of her. God reaches out and claims her for his own.

And God will fulfill all of the promises he is making here this morning. He has... He will. All the promises in Scripture belong to Kaitlyn because God is mindful of her.

God's mercy in Christ flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him." That's what Jeff and Kristin have to tell Kaitlyn. God has been mindful of her. God has exalted her. That's what we her grandparents have to tell her. And the congregation of the church have to tell her.

All the promises belong to her. God has been mindful of her... a lowly child; born in humble surroundings of ordinary parents. God has been mindful of her.

"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."

God has done this. To Mary; to Kaitlyn, to all who are in awe before him. God's mercy in Christ flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him. May we realize this in our own lives and remind one another of who we are in Christ.

God has been mindful of us. Praise his name!

May we like Mary, sing our songs of truth and joy and awe this Advent season, that magnify the Lord. Amen