

## “My Spirit Rejoices in God My Savior”

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 • Luke 1:46b-55 • 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 • John 1:6-8, 19-28

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Third Sunday of Advent

This is going to be a brief meditation today, not a full sermon; you’ve already heard a great message or two already today! I want to briefly turn our attention to the Song of Mary, the song that Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings not long after she learns from the angel Gabriel that she is the one whom God has chosen to bear the Son of God. We don’t know the tune that Mary sang that day, and over the centuries since then numerous composers have offered their own rendition of this song. It’s sometimes called the Magnificat, which is the first word of the song in its traditional Latin translation. Both the hymn we sung earlier, and the hymn we will sing next, are adaptations of Mary’s Song.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,” sings Mary; that word “magnifies” means to “extol” or “proclaim great;” Mary is singing about how incredibly *great* God is. “My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” This is a woman who is *immensely* joyful. She is not holding anything back in her worship. Why? “For he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.” The phrase “lowly state” could be rendered as “humiliation,” as it implies an *incredible* state of lowness or abasement. Mary was a young woman, probably just a teenager, not yet married, now pregnant. In the social world of first-century Judaism, that made her less than respectable. But that word “lowly state” or “humiliation” was also used in the Bible to refer to Mary’s people, the Jews, who were, for the most part, poor, persecuted, and oppressed. We must remember that God did not send his Son to people who were rich, worldly, and powerful, but rather to people who were poor, persecuted, and oppressed. The Savior of the World would be born among what was, at that time, one of the most marginalized, powerless peoples on earth.

“Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,” sings Mary, “for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” Mary was right; here we are, twenty centuries later, and we *still* celebrate how this one woman was blessed by God above all others. No one else, *ever*, had or will have the incredibly important role and responsibility that Mary had. “Indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” This is traditional Jewish teaching; Mary is expressing what her ancestors proclaimed time and time again, but now *she* is experiencing God’s mercy first-hand. “He has shown strength with his arm” – yes, God is powerful, powerful enough to make her conceive without any human help! – “he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.” The “proud,” as the eminent New Testament scholar Raymond Brown once put it, “look down on others because they do not look up to God.” The Bible promises that the proud will get their just desserts, here on earth or in the hereafter, or both; Mary tells us that the child she is carrying has something to do with that. “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” When Mary sang this song, her land was ruled by the brutal tyrant called Herod “the Great” who levied extraordinary taxes on the common people and who executed anyone who got in his way,

including three of his sons and his own wife. Mary's song reminds us that *every* tyrant will eventually have to stand before the judgment of almighty God, and that the coming of Jesus will result in grace, favor, and mercy given to *every* person or group that is treated unjustly, subjugated, or marginalized.

“He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” Those who hoard wealth will find what they have taken from them; those who lack the basic necessities of life will find their deepest needs fulfilled. Today there are *many* people, here in our country and around the globe, who lack the basic necessities of life; the church is at its best when we actively work to bring tangible relief and hope to people who urgently, desperately need it. “He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.” God chose the people of Israel as the place where the Gospel would *begin*. But that's not where it ends. Through the ministry of Jesus, the call of the Holy Spirit, and the ongoing ministry of the church, the Gospel – the *good news* – has extended throughout the world, and it needs to *keep* expanding, until every heart and home, here in Mason and far abroad, knows what it means, what it *feels like*, to experience the grace and mercy of almighty God. This, sings Mary, is all “according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” We read in Genesis that through Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Many of the Jews in Jesus' day forgot that the blessing of God was intended for *all* people; it wasn't just for *them*. That's partly why Jesus was so scandalous; when he stood up in the synagogue in his hometown in Nazareth at the start of his ministry, he boldly proclaimed that the words of the prophet Isaiah were coming true in him, that *he* was the one God had sent to “bring good news to the poor, ... release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,” and, he explained, that meant extending the love of God to people *outside* the walls of the synagogue, *outside* the boundaries of Israel, *beyond* just one religion and one ethnic group. That message generated a *lot* of anger – the folks in Nazareth did not want to hear about God's love and justice for *all*. Anytime faith leaders start talking about justice, people get uncomfortable – which begs the question: what injustices do faith communities willingly condone or perpetuate? But the Gospel demands that the love of God is to be extended, in word *and deed*, to *all* people, *everywhere*. *That* is what makes Jesus not just the Savior of the Jews, or the Christians, but the Savior of the *World*.

Christmas is almost here. Jesus is coming! That is good news for *anybody* who is longing for hope, *anybody* who desperately needs to feel *and experience* the merciful embrace of a loving God.

Go spread some good news. Go right some of those wrongs that Mary sang about. Go do what you can to make this world a better place for *everyone*, in the name of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

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