

"The Magnificat" Luke 1:46–55

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[0:00] But first, a bit of an intro. The majority of our dating relationship, Christine, lived in France, about an hour or so north of Paris. She was helping out at a small church plant with a lovely, lovely couple.

I've mentioned David and Catherine in the past. We love them so much. Anyways, I went to visit her. And one of the days, we went to see a movie.

Because why explore the French countryside when we can just sit in front of a screen for two hours? Anyways, we watched The Monuments Men. Maybe you've seen it. It's a George Clooney movie.

And it is about these artists turned soldiers who were tasked to recover and rescue the great art pieces of Europe that were stolen by the Nazis before and during the war.

The key art piece in this movie centered around the Bruges Madonna and Child. Michelangelo's Madonna and Child.

[1:02] Turns out that Bruges was three hours away, so we decided the next day to go on a day trip. So we drove there. We were going to do other things. It wasn't just to see the statue.

But we lined up. I don't know how long we waited, but it was a lineup outside. We paid four euro each or whatever it was. We were filed inside in a queue.

We looked at the statue for a whole 30 seconds. It was like 30, 40 feet away from us behind a fenced off area. And then we were ushered out the side of the church.

In the movie, in The Monuments Men, the men, when they finally discovered the Bruges Madonna, they were mesmerized. It's like it almost glowed in the movie if you've seen it.

It was not my experience. And it's not because the statue wasn't beautiful. It's because I was rushed. I don't know Christine's experience with it.

[2:04] But for me, it felt like that's what we drove to Bruges for. I've never been there before. It was great that we spent the rest of the day there. We had a great time. But I was in.

I was out. I'm not an art connoisseur, but maybe I'd like to look at it for more than 30 seconds to appreciate it, to see it up close. I wasn't going to touch it. I'm a grown adult. I resist such things.

But nevertheless, I wanted to take my time and look at this masterpiece by Michelangelo. This is a bit of an introduction to talk about the Magnificat.

It is the Song of Mary. If you do evening prayer with the Book of Common Prayer, it is something that is familiar to you.

It is quite possibly, apart from the Lord's Prayer, the most famous prayer in the Bible. And it is coming from a woman who longs for God to be close.

[3:06] And then when she finds out he is, and not just close, but is inside of her, she magnifies the Lord. That's where we get the term, the Magnificat, from. But it's important that we consider what led up to Mary praying and really singing this song of praise to the Lord.

By the time the first century came around, there were some thousand years since King David and King Solomon's reign, the high point of Israel, of the kingdom of Israel.

There had been an exile. It was absolutely horrific for the people of God. It stretched across seven centuries and four successive oppressive empires.

And in addition to all of this, it had been 500 years since God had spoken to his people through a prophet. God was silent.

He was far away. Maybe he didn't exist at all. There was nothing to marvel at. There was nothing that would lead the people to magnify the Lord.

[4 : 16] So as we begin this season of Advent, we read and remember the story of God's people and how they yearned for God's salvation, God's fulfilled promises of redemption, but mostly for God to come back to them.

They were longing to once again marvel at their God. And such a longing was not just the longing of the Israelites, but really the longing of all people, of all ethnicities, of all cultures, of all time.

A desire to know God and to be known to him, to be close to God, to marvel at the creator of heaven and earth. So we're going to open our Advent series.

We're going to be looking at four songs for the Savior. And we begin with the Magnificat. In it, we will see how the Lord not only satisfies the yearning of the human soul through the most unexpected way, through the lowliness and humility of a child and of a woman and of an entire nation, but also it will show us how God knows in our heart of hearts that we desire to marvel at something.

In fact, that we desire to marvel at someone and how he is that one and how he provides not just salvation, but he provides himself for us to marvel at.

[5 : 46] So, I mentioned a lowly child, a lowly woman, a lowly nation. We'll jump right into it and look at this lowly child. Mary has no idea, at least from what we can discern from scripture, what Jesus will be like, what he'll look like.

There's no indication that she knows how her son will bring about the promised redemption, only that he is the promised one. And that he will right wrongs, that he will topple thrones, he will lift up the poor, he will feed the hungry.

She herself is a lowly woman from a poor part of a Roman province who has become pregnant before her marriage to her betrothed. First century was not like our century.

It's hard to be a single mom, an unwed mother now. In the first century, in a shame and honor society, it was certainly the very end of one's life.

She would be at a severe disadvantage, and therefore her son was already at a disadvantage. We are used to a good underdog story, so we see the incarnation, we see the virgin birth, this lowly woman who is betrothed but is pregnant.

[7 : 13] And we can imagine that this is just the beginning of a wonderful story whereby the poor and lowly woman, the poor and lowly child will transcend their situation.

We are used to certain stories like that. But we live in a time where social mobility isn't insurmountable. But in the first century, it was almost certainly insurmountable.

You couldn't, almost certainly, you couldn't rise above your station in life. To be born into a family in Nazareth, to an unwed mother, in the first century in Judea was almost certainly an insurmountable thing.

But here's another thing to consider in all of this. We live after, not just the birth of Christ, but after Jesus' life, after his passion, after his death, after his burial, after his resurrection, after his ascension, after the start of the church.

As Christians, we revel in his finished and completed work upon the cross. We glory in his triumph over death, over sin, over the devil. We rejoice that he is seated in heaven, forever making intercession for us.

- [8 : 36] We revel as Christians in what God has done in Christ. Again, I mentioned this already, that a huge aspect of the Advent season is longing for his second coming.
- But here's the thing, Mary is on the other side of Jesus' birth, and his life, and his passion, and his death, and his burial, and his resurrection, and his ascension.
- She's on the other side of it. In Luke 1, she is living a life before the birth of her Savior. She knows full well that she is at a disadvantage, socially speaking.
- That Jesus himself will be at a disadvantage, socially speaking. She knows full well how lowly and pedestrian her life is, and how her son's life will be.
- And yet, in spite of all that, you'll notice that Mary doesn't just declare that when her child will be born, the Messiah will come, and he will right all the wrongs.
- [9 : 41] But as you read through, especially verses 49 to 54, you will see that Mary declares something that has already taken place. Look with me at verses 49 to 54.
- For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
- And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
- He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.
- He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever. He has, he has, he has, he has, he has done, he has looked, he has shown, he has scattered, he has filled, he has brought down, he has exalted.
- [10 : 48] All of it is in the past tense. All of it, even though Jesus is yet to do it, has already become a foregone conclusion. Everything that will come in the life of this lowly child is already certain.
- The victory is certain. The salvation is certain. God will certainly visit his people once again. And we see that even though the child is lowly, born to a lowly mother, all of the activity in salvation that is from God above is through this lowly child.
- And all the yearnings of the human race will be satisfied and will be brought about, not through a strong arm, but a tiny child.
- Consider this for a moment. Think about how this upends human pride and shows us how helpless we are to satisfy our longings to know and be known by God.
- How he, how the best that we can do collectively to get close to God, it utterly falls short. And yet God, who could, I'm assuming so, redeem the world any way he chose to do so.
- [12 : 12] He is God after all. He doesn't choose a mighty ruler. He doesn't choose an incredibly strong army. But instead he chooses a lowly woman so that he puts, takes upon human flesh, goes into her womb, for nine months is born into a small town.
- Remember, later on in the Gospels, it is spoken, Nazareth is spoken as a place where nothing good can come from it. Okay, so it's not like he's coming from high pedigree. But God chooses to show off his salvation in light of human strength by bringing salvation through a lowly woman.
- The economy of redemption is forever changed. The mighty hand of the mightiest man or woman cannot hope to achieve what the Lord has done through the womb of a peasant girl.
- Okay. This is the God that is showing himself, that is revealing himself to us. How does Mary respond?
- Let's look at the lowly recipient, the lowly woman. Look with me at verses 46 to 50. Well, yeah, 46 to 50.

[13:37] And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servants. It's literally, the servant is a slave girl.

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. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

In her song, like the form of many of the songs in our Psalter, she begins with thanksgiving and praise followed by a recalling of what God has done.

Her entire being, her soul and spirit, which is to say every aspect of what makes Mary, Mary, is caught up in praise. She has recognized her lowliness, her inability to transcend her sin, her station in life.

She is blessed because she has responded in faith to the Lord's mercy. Not because she is this grand, strong woman, but because God has given her such an honor as being the bearer of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

[14:48] I'll pause really quickly here for a moment. For those of us brought up in Protestant homes, we are prone to overlook the significance of Mary in redemptive history.

She is not the savior of the world, but she certainly plays quite an important and honorable part in salvation, in the entire biblical story. In fact, I'm not sure that there is somebody, humanly speaking, that has been used by God in such a special way.

She is the mother of our Lord. As those who hold on to scripture as being the ultimate authority, we should rightly call Mary blessed, for she calls herself blessed.

But for those of us who come from a Roman Catholic background, it's important also to recognize that Mary says in verse 47, that God is her savior, which would imply that she needs saving.

Perfect people without sin do not need saving. And yet here Mary is calling God her savior, looking to the child in her womb as the one who would rescue her from her sin.

[16:08] Mary is indeed blessed, but she is not without sin. So back to the text. Mary, she is truly blessed. She understands that those who are weak will be made strong.

Those who are hungry will be fed. Those who are of humble estate will be lifted up. Those who are scattered will be made whole. In short, Mary is exercising faith in God's salvation.

And she recognizes really an important thing for us to see. She is an exemplar of the faith. She recognizes that she is a passive participant in the Lord's activity.

She receives. This is all she does. She receives. She is not the active agent, but she is a humble, passive participant. Even though she is playing a huge part, humanly speaking, she recognizes her lowliness and need for the Lord to do a work that she or anybody else could never do themselves.

She is called to receive with gratitude and praise this gift of salvation. She does such a fine job of it. Proclaiming the goodness of the Lord.

[17:20] Magnifying his holy name. But a really important thing that could get lost and is quick to get lost for us, as we live week by week and month by month and year by year as people that are Christians, decade by decade, Mary's faith that she is proclaiming is not a stiff, unfeeling one.

It is not a response of propriety to a distant God that is 30 or 40 feet behind a fenced area. Rather, she is expressing and proclaiming a love for God, a God who is close and who is near.

Christine and the kids went to see the king this spring, the king and queen, and they were at Lansdowne and they waited a good long while to get a glimpse of the king and queen.

Wonderful thing. The kids still talk about it. But the king was far away. And yes, he was, he's their king. He is our sovereign.

But he was certainly not personable. Okay? And that's not a criticism. He's the king. He's there. He's touring around. He has a very full itinerary. He is far away.

[18:48] He is not personal. We do not get this in the Magnificat. Okay? The king that Mary is magnifying isn't far away but is close.

And not just because he is close in her womb, but because he has visited his people. It is because God has kept his promises.

This brings us to our third and final point. The promises made to a lowly nation. Read verses 54 and 55 with me. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring or seed forever.

Salvation has come to Israel. The reason for this turn of fortune is not that Israel has shown strength, or not even that they've really even turned away from the behavior that caused them to be exiles in the first place.

They were weak. They suffered with unbelief. The constant refrain in the Bible is to remember. Why? Because Israel is constantly forgetting.

[20:01] Israel was not mighty. They were lowly. They were left hungry and scattered and poor and subjugated.

Consider Deuteronomy 7, verses 7 and 8. This is before the exile, but this is God speaking of why he chose Israel. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were fewest of all peoples.

But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the house of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Why did the Lord bring salvation to Israel? And from Israel to the entire world? Simply put, because he remembered the promise that he made to Abraham.

And what was that promise? The promise was that Abraham's seed, his offspring, that through his offspring, the entire world would be blessed, and that his offsprings would not just be of his own, from his own body, but would be so numerous that the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the seashore would not suffice to understand the amount of offsprings, the amount of blessing that would come from him.

[21:30] It is a promise that through the seed of Abraham, the world would be blessed. And that is also a promise that we see in Genesis chapter 3, that the seed of the woman, interesting that in the text, it's the seed of the woman that would crush the serpent.

The first promise of salvation in the entire Bible. And now Mary is picking that up in verses 54 and 55. You see, the promise made to Abraham some 2,000 years earlier was that he would be blessed.

And the promise was long. It took a long time to be fulfilled, but it certainly was. And the promise was greater, far greater, than even Abraham could have imagined, for his descendants transcend his physical body, his physical ethnicity, but became a spiritual reality.

So that all the people, regardless of where they come from, not just Israel, but all people, if they put their faith in the God of Abraham, they are considered recipients of the promise made to Abraham.

They're his spiritual sons and daughters. Mary proclaims the fulfilled promises of God because she knows them.

[22 : 49] She is familiar with them. Which is an important thing for us to consider that maybe we need to continue or to reacquaint ourselves with the scriptures on a more consistent basis.

To read the scriptures, to be formed by the scriptures, to have our minds renewed by the scriptures, to have our hearts shaped by the scriptures, that the scriptures become the lens by which we live out our lives and we consider reality.

Those who recognize and trust in the promises of the Lord are those that know God's word. So back to Mary. She knows that the entirety of the scriptures point to God fulfilling and exacting the promise that he made to Abraham.

The coming of the Messiah in her womb would be the fulfillment of God's remembrance of mercy to his people. The promise that he spoke of salvation that would be everlasting and for all peoples.

It's a remarkable thing that in this Song of Mary, what is envisioned is that the God of Israel, he would visit not just lowly Israel, but lowly Burundi, or lowly Laos, lowly Kazakhstan, the lowly Ottawa Valley, the lowly homes in Stitzville and Canada and parts of Barhaven and all over Ottawa that baked in to this Song of Mary's is this promise that God would redeem all of the lowly.

[24 : 34] And the reality is, is that if we are humble and consider our inability to gain our own salvation, to enjoy the fulfillment of the longings of our heart, that we truly are lowly and that we need the Savior.

You know, this promise that God made to Abraham, really that he made to Adam and Eve, but in this case, you know, the references to Abraham, it can bear the weight of our hope for two big reasons.

Because nothing else can, nothing else can rid us of our sin and shame, of the guilt that we may feel, nothing else can free us from our suffering and loss, or can fulfill us in our desire to love and be loved for all of eternity.

In short, there is nothing that we can hope for on earth that can bring us salvation for something, but also from something.

From sin and shame and death and for ultimate love. And the promise made to Abraham can bear our weight.

[26 : 01] Why? Because it came true. In Christ, it came true. The promise that he made to Abraham came true in the womb of Mary, which is to say that God fulfills his promises even if it takes a long time, even if it seems all is lost, even if there is 700 years of exile and 500 years of silence and a whole family line that might be kind of rotten to the core.

And I'm not talking about family lines 2,000 years ago. I'm talking about it today. Difficulties that we struggle with where we feel like we come from potentially a line of not do-gooders, but no-gooders.

Things that we can't transcend out of. That God will fulfill his promise. In fact, he has. I'll end with this.

God is not far off like the Bruges Madonna and child. 30, 40 feet gated away, but he is close.

And because he is close, we are able to marvel at what we have seen. And like Mary, we begin to realize that we did not travel to God to be in his presence only to fail, but rather that he came to us.

[27 : 35] At our men's gathering this past Monday, we read a short little homily from St. Augustine. where he talked about how the bread of heaven took on human flesh and suckled from the breast that he created.

That he was born the word of God so that he would be a babbling child. That's how close the Lord God came.

That's how face-to-face he was to us when he became incarnate in Mary. Friends, God has looked upon us, upon our humble estate.

We are low in spirit. We were slaves to our appetites, to our vices, to sin without hope. And through the incarnation, the lie that salvation is within has been utterly shattered.

We can put our hope in someone who can be trusted completely and therefore, our hope is not in vain. You'll remember, we just finished up a sermon series in Ecclesiastes.

[28 : 48] Our hope is not in vain. So the appropriate response should be like Mary. Let our soul magnify the Lord.

Let our spirit rejoice in God, our Savior. Let us with the eyes of our hearts gaze upon the beautiful mystery of the incarnation. For in the incarnation, the divine eyes of God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, gaze upon us.