Advent 3 - My Soul Magnifies the Lord

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Preacher: John Winter

[0:00] Definitely on. I like singing. I'm not very good at singing. But I always think that I sound better than I do when I'm singing on my own.

And if I had to pick a song, I mean, there's some great songs, aren't there? Like Fog on the Tine. Big River by Jimmy Nail, that's a great one. Moved me to tears once in Scarborough.
It was cold, mind. But I guess for a song that really kind of gets me in my heart, it probably would be Eva Cassidy singing Songbird.
That's a beautiful song. And it's a very moving song. And then we sang O Holy Night, Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
Singing has a way of bringing out something very special in us. Songs have a way of moving us.
[1:06] But I could never sing like Eva Cassidy. And I could then never feel the emotion of the song in the way that she obviously did. And I think it's the same when I read Mary's song in Luke chapter 1.

We've been looking at our Advent series. And the point about Advent, remember, is that Advent is about increasing light. So the candles lit one week after another in succession.
It's meant to represent the growing light, the growing awareness and insight that we have as to the true meaning of Christmas. And to get into Mary's song, we have to kind of understand Mary's faith.
So we're just going to read together Luke chapter 1 from verse 28. Actually, it's not.
It's verse 35, I think. At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.
[2:25] When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. I like that. It's kind of one of those great insights you get.

And remember, Luke wasn't an eyewitness, Dr. Luke. He was a reporter of what Mary told him. So the Gospel of Luke, certainly in the early parts, is really the Gospel of Mary, the mother of Jesus.
And she remembered that vividly. How the baby, how she was told by Elizabeth that John the Baptist became, as it were, the first worshipper of Jesus in the womb.
Remarkable. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favored with the mother of my Lord that might the mother of my Lord to come to me?
As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.
[3:36] And Mary said, my soul praises 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. His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. He scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He's brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever and ever, even as he said to our fathers.
Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. So this is Mary's song. To feel its worth, it would require us to enter into her experience so we can only hear echoes of its worth as we hear it read to us today.
[4:52] We think very little, really, of Mary's background. We don't know very much about her. We know that she was a descendant from the tribe of Judah.

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We know that she lived in northern Israel, in Galilee, so far from her ancestral home. And we know that she was a very young woman, probably only a young teenage girl.
And then all of a sudden, her life is turned upside down, quite amazingly, as the angel appears to her and tells her she's going to have a child.
We're going to sing the song, Mary, Did You Know? And it's a lovely song because it asks lots of very interesting questions.
Like, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? That your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? That your baby boy has come to make you new?
[5:52] The child that you delivered will soon deliver you. Well, she probably knew that because she talks in the song about God being her savior. Mary is not a co-redemptrix.

She's not somebody we should pray to. She's not somebody who will save us or act as a mediator between God and man. That was the role of her son. As much as we respect our Roman Catholic friends, that is not the teaching of Scripture.
Mary is a sinner who needs a savior just like you and I. And as a sinner, she is so grateful to God that God will use her womb to give birth to the deliverer of Israel.
Luke's theme is, Luke chapter 19, verse 10, the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke is very interested in the story of salvation.
He's interested in lost things being found. She was a lost thing that was found by her own son. Can't begin to imagine what that feels like.
[7:00] I can't enter into the song in quite the way that she did, but you can imagine how her heart just overflowed with praise. The psalmist says, O magnify the Lord with me.

Let us rejoice in his name together. And this song is called the Magnificat, the Latin word for magnify. And magnify means, next slide, to make God bigger.
Next slide, please. Make God bigger. Mary in her song makes God bigger in her heart. O come all ye faithful, joyful, and triumphant.
You know, we get to the chorus and we sing, O come let us adore him. And it gets a bit louder. Then it gets a bit louder, doesn't it? If you can get that loud. Because what you're doing is just like you're breathing, you're opening up your lungs to magnify the Lord.
You're saying, let's make God bigger. This God who is so faithful to us, let us make him bigger in our hearts. There was lots that Mary did not know about how things would turn out.
[8:10] She was going to have a child outside of marriage. That would take some explaining. It could even require her to defend herself against the possibility of being stoned to death for adultery.

Her life hung in the balance, but she chose to sing. She chose to give thanks to God. Her heart got bigger and bigger, just like the Grinch.
Her heart got bigger and bigger. It grew that day at the thought of Christmas. Next slide, please.
And so the lesson to learn in the first part of this song is that it's okay not to know every detail of how or what God will do in your life.
Or how God will fulfill all his promises that are made to you. But the important thing is to believe, just like Mary did, that with God nothing is impossible.
All kinds of impossible things were being suggested to Mary. You're going to have a child, even though you've not known a man, and this child is conceived by the Holy Spirit.
[9:26] She said, how can these things be? Well, it's okay not to know. Mary, did you know? Actually, it's okay not to know. It's okay for all of this to be unfolded.

There's a lovely moment in the Mel Gibson film about Jesus where Mary has a flashback to watch the young boy Jesus run down some steps, falls over and hurts his knee, and she, like a natural mother, runs to comfort him.
It's hard to think of Jesus as vulnerable, isn't it? As a child, in need of mother's milk, as a child who got sick, or did he get sick?
I don't suppose he did, but a child who cried, yes. It's hard to think of Jesus like that. It's hard to imagine what it was like for her to raise him through his teenage years.
A miracle not to have a difficult teenager, eh? But one who would, nobody's looking at Eve, one who would act independently, who had to be about his father's business, and although he respected his mom and dad, he did not always do exactly what they wanted him to do.
[10:49] What did she know as she was growing up trying to think back to those days, and seeing him develop, and hearing his words, and then he was on his way, upsetting crowds, inevitably going

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toward the cross.

She was tempted from time to time to take him home, to protect him, even as an adult male, remember? to protect him from himself for fear that he'd gone mad.
So much she did not know, but she magnified the Lord in her heart. It's okay not to know. And maybe you're going through an experience at the moment where there is lots that you do not know. There are lots of things that worry you and make you sad, and make you think that God is not in control, or make you wonder, about how things are going to turn out for you, or for somebody you love.
At such times, we need to remember to exalt the Lord our God, to make our hearts bigger in praise, to know that with God nothing is impossible, and whatever shall befall you, he'll work it out.
[12:09] I listened the other day to a podcast of Dr. Alice McCready. She's 102 years old, the oldest living doctor in America. She was talking to a Hindu doctor about the secret of her long life, and it became very apparent that the secret of her long life was her faith in Jesus.

She kept quoting scriptures of this Hindu doctor, and it was just one of those remarkable moments. But she said, the most important secret I discovered as a doctor in life is not, what is the best diet to keep me alive the longest, or what's the best form of exercise I can take, or the best meditative practices in order that I might relax more.
The most important thing in life is to have a reason for living, to have a purpose. And Mary's purpose was to magnify God, to glorify Him with her life, to be all that she could be in the purposes of God.
And so, I'd encourage you to learn from Mary. Make your heart bigger by giving thanks to God for all that He's given you, for your circumstances, for where you are now.
Learn not to worry. Learn just to trust Him. However things are going to happen, whatever way they'll turn out, whether it'll be good or bad, light or dark, with God, nothing is impossible.
[13:36] The next thing, secondly, oh, there's the Grinch. You have to have the Grinch. Mary made God bigger in the world.

In Mary's song, she sings about the revolutionary difference that Jesus is going to make. She talks about Jesus as her Savior who will rescue her from her humble state.
But then she says, His mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He's brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful.
to Abraham and his descendants forever and ever, even as He said to our fathers. She says, Jesus, my Son, is going to turn the world upside down.
[14:40] Turn everything on its head so that the natural order of things will be overturned. The poor will be fed. The rich will go hungry.

The great and powerful will be brought down. And those who are of a humble estate will be exalted. It's going to be a revolutionary change.
Do you know that Nicaragua once banned the public reading of the Magnificat because the socialist government was worried about the revolutionary impulses that it would create.
Sorry, not the right-wing government were worried about it. There were political reasons for it. Kind of nonsense, really, isn't it? But nonetheless, it's hard not to read the political overtones here. Except I wouldn't trust politicians to bring it about. I don't know if any of you watch The Hunger Games. I love The Hunger Games.
[15:41] It's kind of amazing to watch. They're quite brutal in places. But there's a moment when, sorry to spoiler here, in the final film, not the new one, but the final one.

There's a moment when the rebels win and then they're going to replace the dictator with the president who decides that she's going to cancel elections because you can't trust the people to rule properly.
You replace one dictator with another. Even though they may give their fine sounding words, in the end, there's something very selfish in the human heart that wants to take control, have power, and rule others.

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But when Jesus comes, the whole landscape will be different. The poor will be provided for. The insignificant will be exalted.
Paul said, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise or noble. Many of you were rich or powerful.
[16:51] Look around, there's not many of us in that category. You know, we are not the go-to people, the oracles in our society. And the church is not generally full of such people.

But, that doesn't matter to Paul. What matters is that you were washed. You were justified. You were sanctified by the blood of Jesus.
That's what matters. That you have entered into God's kingdom by grace and faith in Jesus Christ. And are a citizen of heaven and a child of God.
There is no greater privilege in the world than this. You come under God's rule. And when you're under God's rule, all of the things that naturally divide human beings are taken away.
And we are, as Andy started today, brought together in a way that humans would not kind of envisage yet. We become family.
[17:51] We become citizens of the kingdom of God. Subjects of King Jesus. And we're happy to be of humble estate. The Lord's handmaiden.

The Lord's doula, her slave. His slave, rather. Ready to do the master's will. And that's what's beautiful about Mary's song.
It is the song sung by a simple northern bumpkin country girl who has been so wonderfully privileged to be the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Beautiful. In my heart now, it feels like I'm listening to Songbird by Eva Castey. Mary's song has magnified my heart because Mary made God bigger in the world.
God didn't need her help to do that. He never does. but God delights to make himself known through the praises of his people.
[19:00] And so my message to you today as we just reflect for a few moments on Mary's song is learn to make God bigger in your heart. Next slide, please. I think we are going to sing this one.

It goes to the tune of Cat Stevens' Morning is Broken. Child in a manger, infant of Mary, outcast and stranger, Lord of all, child who inherits all our transgressions, all our demerits, on him fall.
Once the most holy child of salvation, gentle and lowly, lived below, now as our glorious, mighty redeemer, see him victorious all reach for.
Prophets foretold him, infant of wonder. Angels behold him on his throne. Worthy our Savior of all our praises. And this lovely line, happy forever, are his own.
Just think about that. We're just ordinary people with an extraordinary future ahead of us. Happy forever are his own.
[20:11] Like Mary, we can sing, O magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together.
People read Mary's song and they think of Hannah.

Remember Hannah? Singing because she got pregnant. declaring the wonders of God because of the miracle that he performed in this barren woman in her old age, giving birth to Samuel.
Echoes of that song find themselves reworded in Mary's song. The truth is that throughout history, people have sung about the mercy and grace of God.
For thousands of years, we have joined the chorus. We sing the old Christmas carols once a year and we are so grateful to God that the message that they convey is the same message that the world needs today as it did when Mary first sang her song.
And it's a song and a message that we continue to proclaim here in Whitby and we pray that today and this evening people will discover the God of salvation that Mary sang about because happy forever are those who have faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.
[21:39] So what about you today? What song moves you? What tune fills your heart with joy? I trust that you will be able to say what the psalmist last slide not that one next one or magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together.

Amen.

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