

Luke 1:46-55

Magnifying the Lord

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord – v. 46.

This portion of Scripture we've just read is given a title by many commentators. It's called Mary's Magnificat. The word *Magnificat* is a Latin word, which in the Latin manuscripts is the very first word in the verse. It's not hard to make a connection between *magnificat* with our English word *magnificent*. The word *magnificent* is defined as *splendid in appearance — grand or noble in thought or accomplishment; exalted: outstanding of its kind*. What fitting descriptions of that babe in Mary's womb who would be called, according to the angel *the Son of God* (1:35).

And if you were to express the noun *magnificent* by a verb, you could do no better than the word in our text: *magnify – My soul doth magnify the Lord*. I deliberately chose a text from the Psalms for our call to worship that calls on us to magnify the Lord. Psalm 69:30 *I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving*. Another verse that I've used often as a call to worship is found in Psalm 34:3 *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*. This is a very appropriate call to worship because it's a call for the corporate magnifying of God's name *Let us exalt his name together*. We do this corporately as we sing His praises, lift our hearts to Him in prayer as well as read and preach His word.

That's what we're here for this morning – to magnify the name of Christ. I fear at times that not many Christians see this as their primary reason for going to church. Church is often thought of in a therapeutic sense – I go there to have the needs of my soul met. And there's no denying that the Lord tends to His flock when they come together in His name but what's often overlooked is the simple truth that the best way to have the needs of your soul met is to be able to forget about yourself and devote yourself to magnifying that name which is above every name, the name of Christ to which every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

By being taken up with Him, and finding your soul's delight in Him and being reminded of His promises and His faithfulness and His greatness in salvation so that His peace and joy fill and thrill your soul, you'll discover that the needs of your heart are met as your faith in Him grows and your confidence in Him increases.

There are, of course, different ways that we magnify the Lord. We magnify Him by our worship – that's what we find Mary doing here even though it's only Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth in this setting. Spurgeon makes a good observation here:

When we meet with our kinsfolk and acquaintance, let it be our prayer to God that our communion may be not only pleasant, but profitable; that we may not merely pass away time and spend a pleasant hour, but may advance a day's march nearer to heaven, and acquire greater fitness for our eternal rest.

Simply put – let’s aim to magnify the Lord when we meet together in social settings. Let’s pray that the Lord will fill us with His Spirit, as those women were filled, in whatever settings we find ourselves in.

So we magnify the Lord in our worship – but then again we can also magnify Him by our lives. Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5:16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* Do you think that way when you get up in the morning and go to work? Do you make it your prayer that your conduct and countenance that day will cause others to think well of your God and Savior?

Your light shines when you keep close and regular communion with Christ. As you spend time in His word, basking in His goodness and love and grace and mercy, delighting in His promises and delighting in Christ Himself, then it will show by the way you aim for His glory in all you do and in all you say, as well as all you abstain from doing.

So you could say that Elizabeth and Mary magnified the Lord on that day when Mary went to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. And John the Baptist, at that time in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, leaped for joy at the sense he had even as a babe in the womb that he was in the presence of Christ, who at that time was in Mary’s womb.

What I’d like to focus on this morning is how we, like Mary, can magnify the Lord. There were certain factors, you see, that contributed to her magnifying the Lord. And if we can take note of these contributing factors we should be able to utilize them ourselves when it comes to us magnifying the Lord. Magnifying the Lord, then, is my theme this morning:

We Must Magnify the Lord

My soul doth magnify the Lord, Mary says in our text. And the question I want to raise and answer in connection with this theme is how – how can we magnify the Lord? Consider with me first of all that we can magnify the Lord:

I. By Believing the Lord will do as He Said

Mary’s Magnificat is in response to the words of her cousin, Elizabeth in the verses that precede Mary’s song. These were words according to v. 41 that Elizabeth spoke when she was filled with the Spirit. They’re also words that v. 42 tells us that she spoke with a loud voice. There was obviously no doubt or hesitation about what she said. Notice now the last statement she makes found in v. 45: *And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

There’s a very clear description of true faith – believing that what the Lord said, He will do. This is the kind of faith that Paul describes as belonging to Abraham in Rom. 4:21. Listen to how Paul describes Abraham’s faith there: *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

The same kind of faith is demonstrated by David. Call to mind the things God said to David when he entered into covenant with David back in 2Sam. 7. David had the desire on his heart of building a house for the Lord, but the Lord said to David that he would build David's house and that he would be established on his throne and that his mercy wouldn't depart from him. David's kingdom would be established forever, the prophet tells him in 2Sam. 7:16.

And when the prophet concluded his speech to David, David was blown away. I can picture him entering the tent he had put up where the ark of the covenant was housed. So we read in 2Sam. 7:18 *Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And in his prayer to the Lord he concludes his worship by saying in v. 25: And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.*

Doesn't that reflect the same spirit found in Abraham, as described by Paul? *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform — do as thou hast said*, David says. And in the next verse in 2Sam. 7 we can make the connection to David's faith with the faith of his great, great, great grandson's wife, Mary when he says in v. 26 *And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.* It's not hard to tell, is it, that in the case of David and the case of Mary their hearts were full. That's what's needed, you know, in order to magnify the Lord. I hope your heart is full today and in the coming days.

Mary stands in contrast to Elizabeth's husband, Zacharias. Back in 1:18ff we read of Zacharias and his encounter with the angel: *And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. 19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. 20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.*

I've often thought on the action the angel took in striking Zacharias with dumbness or the inability to speak. It's better for us as Christians not to speak when unbelief holds sway over us. We run the risk of appearing as hypocrites if unbelief grips us. In the case of Mary – she had questions too, but her question sprang from the fact that she was not yet married and not yet, therefore, intimate with her husband. Once the angel told her that the child in her womb would be conceived miraculously, then her submissive response of faith is given in v. 38 *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

There's the faith that takes God (or in this case the angel sent from God) at His word. We should note as well the angel's word to Mary in v. 37. These are good words to ever keep in mind: *For with God nothing shall be impossible.* Do you believe that this morning? I

wonder what impossible circumstances you're facing in life? I wonder what things you consider to be above and beyond you? Could it be a loved one that you've been praying for? Could it be an obstinate son or daughter, or a lost parent? Isn't it good to know that our God does the impossible?

How that should govern your praying. If you truly believe that God can do the impossible then you'll pray for impossible things. And it should be noted here that you can't possibly magnify God if you don't believe that with Him all things are possible. How, then, do we magnify the Lord? We magnify Him by believing in His word. We affirm with Elizabeth that *there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

But let's move on now to the next factor that's involved in magnifying the Lord. We see that in order to magnify the Lord we must believe He will do as He says. Let's think next that we magnify the Lord:

II. By Rejoicing in God Our Savior

I'm going to read v. 46 again and this time add v. 47 to it: *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

I never looked at this text closely enough to realize that what you find in Mary's words could be viewed as evidence for the tripartite view of man as opposed to the dipartite view. The tripartite view sees man made up of body, soul, and spirit, while the dipartite view sees man made of body and soul. The challenge to the tripartite view has always been distinguishing between the soul and the spirit of man. A careful study of the words for soul and spirit reveals that properties that are ascribed to the soul are in other instances ascribed to the spirit and vice-versa.

It's generally thought by those who hold to a tripartite view of man that while there a distinction between soul and spirit, the difference is a mysterious and indefinable one. Perhaps the clearest statement to suggest that there is some kind of distinction between soul and spirit is given to us by Paul in 1Th 5:23 *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and [I pray God] your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Certainly Mary's use of the word *soul* in v. 46 and *spirit* in v. 47 indicates that she was whole-heartedly engaged in magnifying the Lord and rejoicing in God, her Savior. And the thing to note in these opening words of her song is that the two ideas are very closely linked. In other words, you cannot magnify the Lord apart from rejoicing in Him. And the basis for that joy is given in the same statement. We do well to ask – why did Mary rejoice on this particular occasion? – and the answer would be because she saw God as her Savior.

This pretty well does away with the Roman Catholic view of the immaculate conception or the sinlessness of Mary. Sinless people don't need Saviors. Mary sees her need of a Savior. She did not know at that time what all would be needed for her salvation but she certainly saw God as her Savior and since the angel told her that the holy thing in her

womb would be called *the son of God* (1:35), she would have seen that baby she was carrying as her Savior.

Indeed when Christ was born and was taken to the temple following the days of Mary's purification (Lk. 2:22), a man by the name of Simeon would take up Mary's baby in his arms and would say beginning in v. 29: *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

Mary, of course, would have known from Joseph that an angel had appeared to him as well as to Mary. She would have known from Jesus via the angel what name they were to give to the child and why they were to give Him that name. This is found in Mt. 1:21 Listen to the words of Mt. 1:20,21: *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

Now this angelic message was conveyed to Joseph obviously before Christ was born. I think it's safe to say that Joseph would have shared with Mary the angel's message to him and in sharing that message it would have been clear to Mary just what kind of a Savior Christ would be. He would not be a political Savior to deliver Israel from the Roman Empire – no, this child would be much more than that – He would be such a Savior that would save his people from their sins.

This is why Simeon could hold that child in his arms and say *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* When a man has seen God's salvation then that man is ready to depart from this world. Only by seeing such a Savior can a sinner depart in peace with assurance that all will be well between him and God when once he dies.

After her declaration that her soul magnifies God and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior, Mary could then go on in her song to express how she was and would be blessed by her God. Look at the words of v. 48 *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

There is, of course, a unique sense in which Mary was blessed. This lowly handmaiden had been chosen by God Himself to bring forth the Messiah. That's a blessing that could ever only be given to one person and that person was Mary. It's for good reason, then, that Mary could say that all generations would call her blessed. But on the other hand, Mary's expression in another, spiritual sense, can be utilized by all those that have seen by faith the Christ child and have called upon Christ to be their Savior.

Can you picture yourself in glory today? Think upon that time when time has run its' course so that time is no more. And you're in that assembly which the author of Hebrews calls: *the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven* (Heb.

12:23). You've been glorified and have been perfectly conformed to Christ because you've seen Him as He is (1Jn. 3:2). You've been openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment and you've been perfectly blessed to the full enjoying of God forever.

And in that condition you see others – others from your family, and others from your church family, and other Christians that you've known during your days in this world. You will see me there (by the grace of God) and I'll see you. And what do you suppose we'll say to each other? Will it not be something like this – *Dear brother, are we blessed or what?!* Here we are in the presence of Christ our Savior. Here we are worshipping Christ with all our soul and spirit. Isn't our Savior glorious? And isn't He kind and loving? Oh what great mercy He's shown us. Our sins are washed away and everything He's promised has come to pass. Like the disciples who saw that stormy sea stilled we'll exclaim between ourselves – *what manner of man is this?*

And this consummated salvation will never end. It will be forever and the saints of all generations will be there and I can't help but think that we'll call each other blessed. So in a unique sense Mary could say that all generations would call her blessed – and in a spiritual sense all the saints will see at last that they're truly blessed.

Now when John says in his first epistle that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is – he goes on to say in the very next verse that thoughts of glory have a very present day application to our lives. Let me read 1John 3:2,3: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* Now comes the present day application in v. 3: *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

Do you see the sanctifying influence that thoughts of glory has on our present day lives? We purify ourselves by reflecting on this blessed hope. And by thinking on that glorious day to come, and what was involved on Christ's part to bring about that day to come – as such things fill our minds and our hearts then we begin to say – *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.*

We know, don't we, and we hear this every year during the Christmas season that there's so much to distract us. So much shopping to be done, so many meals to plan and prepare, and so many family and friends to visit. My wife showed me a Face book Meme which said only one more day until men begin to do their shopping. And these are good things. We love this time of year and all that it brings. I'm glad that Lord willing I'll be able to make it to Wisconsin on time to see the lights at Riverside park – millions of them that light up the place. So there are many good and enjoyable things about this season even though it can become so busy that when it's over we heave a sigh of relief when we're able to go back to our usual routines.

All I'm saying to you now is that you should remember Christ, or to use the words of our text – remember God your Savior. Remember that He's come and remember why He's come. He's come to die. He's come to make atonement for your sins. He's come that you

might believe in Him and that believing you might have everlasting life. He's come that you might be saved from sin's guilt and sin's dominion. He's come that you might gain the sure hope of heaven and everlasting life. And as you think on these things and your heart becomes full, you will magnify the Lord and your spirit will rejoice in Christ your Savior. Oh may He indeed be magnified in your soul even this day.

Now up to v. 49 Mary has thought about her blessings on a very personal level. Look at what v. 49 says: *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.* Beginning in v. 50 she expands the scope of the blessings she's contemplating way beyond herself. And this leads to my final point this morning.

If you would magnify the Lord then you must believe that the Lord will do as He said and you must rejoice in God your Savior, and then finally you magnify the Lord:

III. By Seeing the Big Picture

Look at what Mary says in v. 50 *His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.* Do you see how she's broadening the scope in her song way beyond herself now? One of the blessings I've been enjoying in recent days is the blessing of proctoring a couple of students in our Seminary's Hermeneutics class. I may have another student coming down the pipe in the new year as a young man from our church in Orlando has applied to come under care of Presbytery in order to prepare for the ministry.

Proctoring this class has given me occasion to read some works on Hermeneutics and one book in particular addressed the phenomenon of what may be called historical prophecy. Let me read to you a quote from this book that describes this phenomenon and then I'll show you why I'm quoting this.

Few features in prophecy are more common than the expression of the future in terms that have been borrowed from Israel's historic past. If the writer and his audience have not experienced the future, how can they meaningfully communicate about it unless they talk about it in analogical terms from the past? Furthermore, if God's methods of operation have a consistency and a pattern about them borrowing from the past in order to help us conceptualize the future is an eminently logical and natural way of proceeding.

I quote this paragraph on hermeneutics because in our text, in Mary's song this is exactly what she does beginning in v. 51. Her words are prophetic but they're expressed in terms of history. Look at her prophetic song now beginning in v. 51:

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. 54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; 55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

We could spend an entire study tracing the historic fulfillment of her words. Israel's deliverance from Egypt certainly comes to mind. David's ascendancy to the throne comes to mind as well. The Abrahamic covenant is mentioned specifically in v. 55 – etc.

I don't believe, however, that Mary's intention here is simply to recount history. I mean think about it – the Savior of the world is in her womb. The Christ-child would soon be born. And it would be His task to show His strength and put down the mighty and exalt them of low degree. And the Savior has come and He lived and He died and He's ascended into heaven and today He's building His church and it will be His kingdom that prevails in the end. Just as we're taught to pray *thy kingdom come* – so His kingdom has come and His kingdom will advance and His kingdom will triumph and He will come again.

Mary gives us the big picture in her Song. And it makes it pretty easy to say that what Christ has done, He will do in terms of advancing His cause. Some things, to be sure, won't be done again. There will be no need for Him to ever die again. In His atoning death He laid the foundation for everything that had been done and would be done.

So while you magnify God by reflecting on how highly He's favored you in salvation, don't ever forget that you're a part of something that goes way beyond you. And when you see your life in that broader context of redemption it will help you to understand things that on the surface of them might not seem to make sense to you at the time they occur. Simeon predicted of Mary that her soul would be pierced. *Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also* – 2:35.

And when Mary would stand at the foot of the cross and see this child she brought forth nailed to that cross, who can possibly imagine how sharp and how deep that piercing to her soul went. Yet, in the bigger picture it was part of God's plan – indeed it was foundational to God's plan. So by keeping the bigger picture in view, you will be equipped to say, even when it seems hard – *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior*.

I've posted articles in recent days from persecuted Christians in China. Their worship services are being interrupted and the church members have been subjected to cruel and humiliating forms of persecution. The Pastor reports that his people are magnifying Christ in small groups in hiding, and from police cars and from prison cells. They're demonstrating these days in parts of China that magnifying the Lord is not contingent on smooth sailing with life being easy. We must keep the big picture ever in view so that we may magnify the Lord, no matter what kind of circumstances the Lord sees fit to put us through.

So let's magnify the Lord this day and in the days ahead. Again the words of Psalm 34:3 *O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together*. As long as you can believe that God will do as He has said and as long as you can rejoice in God your Savior and as long as you can keep the big picture in view, these factors will contribute to you being able to magnify the Lord indeed.