

Title: The Magnificat
Text: Luke 1.26-55
Theme: The Might and Mercy of God
Series: Advent 2013 #1
Prop Stmtnt: The might of God is truly to be embraced because he pours it out in such merciful ways.

We love to hear our children sing. Even more, we love to hear our children sing about Christ. It is, however, a tendency on our part to be so focused on the fact that they sang, and that they sang well, and completely miss the message of what they were singing. In fact, one of the truths that they were seeking to impress upon us is our need to wait in faith upon the Lord. I know that Christmas has been hijacked by frenzy. I want us to fight for faith in the midst of frenzy. Frenzy means that you have to do it NOW. You have to have it NOW. There is no time to lose, no time to rest, no time to wait, no time to worship, time to perform, time to do, time get here, get there, get this and get that. So, for the 4 Sundays before Christmas, we are gathering together and together, we are collectively hitting the pause button, by opening the Word, and getting our bearings, remembering our calling, remembering our identity, remembering our purpose, remembering the gospel, remembering God's promises, so that throughout the week, we have a footing that keeps us grounded in the midst of everything.

Luke 2 gets a great deal of playing time around Christmas. But Luke 2 has a setting. Do you remember how it begins? "In those days..." What days were those? That question is answered by Luke chapter 1. For the 4 Sundays of Advent, I am going to take a break from our series in Matthew and preach from Luke 1 and 2. I am calling this mini-series, the praise of Christmas because in these two chapters there are 4 songs of praise. Mary's, Zechariah's, the Angels and Simeon's. These 4 songs are declarations of amazement and wonder that focus primarily upon the soul-satisfying, heart-gripping, life-resting and eternity-securing truth that God always keeps his promises. He does not always do it in the way that we imagined, but he does it. That is very clear from our text.

Read Text: Luke 1.26-55

I. The appearance of Gabriel.

This is the second appearance by Gabriel that Luke records. We will look at the first one next week when we study Zechariah's song and we will see that Zechariah is in the middle of a very public worship gathering at the Temple in the city of Jerusalem. That is not the case here. Gabriel shows up in the town of Nazareth. Luke tells his readers that it is located in Galilee because; otherwise people may have not even known where this place was. If we are paying attention to the details (like God does) we see that from the very outset of the announcement itself, God is not playing by our rules. The entire context of the appearance by Gabriel is consistent with the ministry of Christ, whose birth he has come to announce. In other words, here is a simple girl, living in a simple, out-of-the-way, little-known place. Her family is so insignificant; her parents are not even mentioned.

When we read this story, most of us, read it with an attitude that says, “Oh yea, that’s Mary.” But that is not how the story is written and that is not how the initial readers would have responded. Again, this is in significant contrast to the first appearance of an angel in Luke’s gospel. Earlier in this chapter, the angel appears to Zechariah who is identified as being from the division of Abijah (line of Levi) and his wife is from the line of Aaron, not just the line of Levi. There is no formal genealogical record for Mary, although we can guess that since she is a relative of Elizabeth, that Mary is from the line of Levi as well. (Priestly line from Mary, kingly line from Joseph) Luke records a genealogical account of Joseph in chapter 3, but the way that Luke presents Mary at this point, is as a nobody. So, the reader would go, “Who is this?” What is an angel of God, Gabriel, none the less, doing in a place like this, talking to a girl like this?

We know about Gabriel because he showed up in the book of Daniel and was involved in revealing to Daniel some very amazing prophecies about the coming Messiah. This same Gabriel told Zechariah (Luke 1.19), when Zechariah doubted his word, that “I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God...” I am assuming that Gabriel is one of the seven angels that John sees in Revelation 8.2 who are described as “the seven angels who stand in the presence of God” and are given the seven trumpets of judgment. As you can see, this is one seriously powerful and impressive messenger and he is talking to Mary. No wonder she is terrified! The stunning and sudden appearance of Gabriel is one thing. His message is even more amazing.

II. The announcement of Gabriel.

This announcement has three components:

A. Here is what the Lord thinks of you.

1. The Lord is with you.

We want the Lord to be with us because we need the Lord to be with us. We look for evidences that the Lord is with us, and here Mary finds out, that indeed He is. The Lord knows her. Not only that, but...

2. You have found favor.

This is repeated (28, 30). Mary is told that she is the recipient of God’s grace. That is the greatest news that any individual could ever hear. People have given their lives, their futures, their fortunes, their affections, in an attempt to find this. We are desperate to know if we are in a favorable relationship with God and here Mary is told by a messenger directly from God. She is the object of; she is the recipient of God’s favor. She can rest assured. Is that not deliriously freeing and thrilling? You would think so, but grace is hard to accept and Mary is troubled by what Gabriel says and tries to discern what exactly he means by it. Gabriel is gentle and assures her that she has nothing to fear. She has found favor with God.

B. Here is what the Lord is doing through you.

1. You are going to conceive a son.

The details of this are pretty overwhelming. By the way, the opening phrase of v.28 (“And he came to her”) is a phrase that is used almost exclusively of going into a building or a room. So, I am assuming that Gabriel has come into a room where Mary is, probably the simple home she lives in. All of this had to be astonishing. Her head had to be swimming, not only because of the fact that she is going to conceive a son, but the name of this son, is not up to her. God has not only pre-determined the gender, but he has pre-determined the name. You shall call his name Jesus (salvation). And if this isn’t astounding enough, Gabriel then drops the bomb!

2. He is the Messiah (32-33)

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” And then, here it is. “the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” This language is loaded! This description is absolutely stunning. How do you think Luke found out the details of this conversation? Luke makes it clear from the opening verses that he has had conversations with the people who witnessed these things first hand. Luke probably received this account directly from Mary, who obviously never forgot a thing that Gabriel told her.

This is a game-changer. Mary, from this point on, your life is never going to be the same. Having the favor of God comes with a calling. Mary, whatever plans you had for your life, set them aside. You have a mission because the Son who is going to be conceived in you and born by you is the King of Creation.

3. His conception is going to be miraculous. (35)

Mary understands that Gabriel is not talking about something that is going to happen to her after she is married to Joseph. Mary correctly understands that Gabriel is talking about something that is going to happen immediately. The Lord is with you. You have already found favor with God. There is an immediacy to Gabriel’s words. So, Mary asks the obvious: How will this be, since I am a virgin? Gabriel says, the conception of this child is going to be directly caused by God. The Holy Spirit (power of the Most High) will be the agent of cause which will mean that this child will not inherit Adam’s sin, but instead will be called “holy-the Son of God.”

C. Here is some evidence and encouragement. (36-37)

1. Your relative Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age.

It appears that Mary did not know about Elizabeth’s pregnancy, though she certainly knew that Elizabeth and Zechariah had been childless. So, this work of God in Elizabeth,

is not only to bring about the birth of the forerunner of the Messiah in the person of John the Baptist, but Elizabeth's condition would be reassuring to Mary that God was doing something amazing! The Messiah was not only coming, he was coming in a way that no one imagined. And then, the final word from Gabriel...

2. Nothing is impossible with God.

People read this today and think that this is ridiculous. It was no different then. This statement reveals the crux of the entire matter. God is God and He does incredible things. Either you believe Him and get on board with his plan, or you scoff at him and get run over by it. Mary's response is simple, heart-felt and beautiful.

III. The response of Faith.

A. Humble submission (38)

She says "behold" to Gabriel! Here is her declaration. "I am the servant of the Lord." That means that I will do whatever he asks of me. Is this a great honor? Yes, but this honor is going to come at great cost. She does not need much time to think about it. Her heart is already prepared to do what God calls her to do. "Let it be done to me according to your word."

B. Immediate action (39)

Mary then left for the hill country, to a town in Judah. This region is about 80-100 miles away from Nazareth. Mary obviously believed what Gabriel told her about Elizabeth and she goes to be with her. Their meeting only re-affirms what both of them already know. But, what I want to focus the remainder of our time on is Mary's song of praise. It has been called "The Magnificat." It is not only a wonderful hymn of praise, but it is part of Mary's response of faith to the astounding and life-changing news of Gabriel. Given the fact that she had at least 4-5 days of traveling in order to get to Elizabeth, Mary had some time to seriously consider all that Gabriel said to her and what this could mean.

C. Soul-full praise (46-55)

My whole being praises God. This song begins with a double statement of praise. The opening lines are poetic parallelism, that is, they are describing and repeating Mary's response to what God is doing. My soul magnifies the Lord. That, right there, is the very reason why God created us. God, who is the greatest good, the highest joy and the deepest love has from eternity past been pouring out his love and his life into the Son and the Spirit. The Son is the perfect reflection of the Father. He is the exact representation of his being. And this, gives the Father so much pleasure. Since God is so outgoing and giving (that is what love does), it does not surprise us that God created people IN HIS IMAGE because his image is the greatest good, the highest joy and the deepest love. There is nothing better to be put on display and there is no relationship that is more satisfying and exhilarating than the relationship that God enjoys as God. So, God made

people in order for there to be more expressions of Him and for there to be more persons who will enjoy Him, reflect Him, and love Him. So, when Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” she is declaring praise, trust, love and joy from the depth of her being in response to the glory and grace of the Highest being. The only thing that can top what Mary is doing here is to worship God with others, perfectly, in the presence of God in glory. This worship psalm gives us reasons why we magnify the Lord.

1. Look at what he has done for me. (46-49)

Note the three occurrences of “for”. (48a, 48b, 49) Mary is explaining why she is making so much of God. A) “He has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” (48a) The God of the universe has taken notice of me! And Mary acknowledges that she is a handmaiden, a servant (doulos – slave). Who is Mary that God would notice her? That’s the point! Who are you that God should notice you? But he does, unless of course you think that you are pretty impressive, and then God does not give you the time of day. B) “For behold **from now on** all generations will call me blessed.” (48b) “From now on”, Mary knows that what she is part of is a game-changer. Life is never going to be the same. Her little life has just been interrupted and hijacked. This humble country girl is going to be the object of scorn, the focus of rumors, analyzed and discussed for centuries. Her life is being thrust on to the largest stage of the world. But she knows that those who love the Lord will see her as the recipient of God’s grace. We will say, that she is blessed. C) “For he who is mighty, has done great things for me.” (49)

Here is a good question for you to ponder. Do you magnify or do you minimize the Lord? It is one or the other. You can only magnify the Lord if you are intentional about it, because your default setting in life is to minimize the Lord. How do you magnify the Lord? This song shows us. We tell others, with amazement and humility of what the Lord has done for us. You minimize the Lord when with self-sufficiency and arrogance you seek to display to others what you have done for yourself, or for them. You magnify the Lord when, from your soul and spirit you declare God’s glory. You minimize the Lord when you choose not to sing with all you have and you choose not to speak up and defend his name and honor because your dignity as a humble slave is more glorious than the majesty of the King of Creation. Are you stinkin’ kidding me?!

You know what I am saying here, right? Mary would make some of you uncomfortable, like David did with his exuberant and expressive worship, like Mary Magdalene with her extravagant offering of perfume on the feet of Jesus.

But, even though Mary recognizes that she is at ground zero of this event, her response makes it clear that she knows that this is not all about her. It involves her, but it is not all about her. Do you see what she is doing here? She has written and is expressing her worship of God. She would be absolutely appalled and grieved at how she is an object of worship by some. She is a servant; she is not divine. She is the grateful, humble recipient of God’s grace; she is not the source of it. She knows that God’s plan involves her but it involves so many others as well.

2. Look at what he has done for others (like me). (50-53)

a) God uses his mercy to care for his own. (50)

I love this verse. God will never run out of mercy. Perhaps some of you in a fit of temporary insanity decided to go shopping early Friday morning. You were lured by the commercials that showed happy people buying gifts at ridiculously low prices. What they did not show you is the utter chaos in the parking lots, the rage of customers breathing fire, the cash register lines that wove for miles and miles through the store, and worst of all, they did not tell you that the awesome 124" plasma, LCD, surround sound TV that comes with a built in microwave and vacuum cleaner for 49.99 was already sold to one of the salesmen before the doors were opened. Sorry, they ran out of stock. But you could order one on-line for \$3,999.00. Shopping is so over-hyped! But, you cannot over-hype God's mercy. It never runs out.

b) God uses his might to accomplish his purposes through the weak. (51a, 52b-53a)

God loves to use his strength to protect and provide for the weak. Mary knows this now, firsthand. Here she is with Elizabeth. Both of them are wondering not only what all is going to happen and how it is going to happen, but they are wondering – why. Why them? Why did God choose them? God uses his might to accomplish his purposes through the weak. But there is another side to this.

c) God uses his might to humble the proud. (51b-52a, 53b)

Mary's song contrasts the humble versus the proud. God is mighty to both. To the proud, God overpowers their arrogance with his might. God uses his strength to crush the proud, but he uses his strength to lift up the humble.

3. Look at how he keeps his Word. (54-55)

Mary's song goes from looking at God's faithfulness to her and to others who fear him, to now widening the lens and connecting the fact that God's promise to her to bring the Messiah to the earth is the fulfillment of a promise that God made thousands of years before. Did Mary understand it all? No. Not only that but Mary's faith was imperfect. At times she misunderstood what Christ had come to do, but later she would see.

It is a thrilling, at times overwhelming and at other times, terrifying truth to realize that your life is known by God and that God is working out his eternal plan through you. God calls you, in the midst of your ordinary life to have an extraordinary faith because you realize that everything that you do matters for eternity. Beloved, I can only encourage you to live ready for what God asks you to do.

How did Mary do this? After all, she was so young. She was a no-namer. She was a country girl from a poor family. What's your excuse? You can't do anything much for God can you? You are too old, too weak, too frail, too poor, too ___what? Mary responded with faith because even at her young age, she already knew the promises of the prophets and believed that God would act as He promised. She responded with humility and submission to this news just as she would respond with faith and obedience, even in crisis. The promises of God were already in her heart. The circumstance just revealed it. Your circumstances do not make you what you are; they simply reveal what you believe.

We can all look back at the people who were right there during the birth of Christ and the life of Christ and see how so many of them wanted salvation from their circumstances, instead of salvation from their sin. It is obvious to us. What is not so obvious is that we tend to be the exact same way. We want God to fix my circumstances, right now! Wait! Wait in faith. Perseverance is a long faith-driven obedience in the same direction. And as you wait, plead with God that he changes you; that he humbles you.

Conclusion:

- 1) As soon as you think you are something, you just became "nothing."
- 2) God shows his might through the weak.
- 3) God shows his mercy to and through the humble.
- 4) God always keeps his promises