

The Psalms of Christmas

Exploring the praise anthems from the Christmas narrative

It is often referred to as “The *Magnificat*” which is Latin for magnify. It is a reference to Mary’s immortal exaltation of God which she declared at her cousin Elizabeth’s house upon hearing Elizabeth’s spirit-filled celebration. As you recall from last Sunday, Elizabeth and her yet-to-be-born baby boy John are filled with the Holy Spirit as soon as they hear Mary’s voice at the door. Elizabeth gives a spirit-filled Psalm of praise and in a litany like response Mary proclaims her *Magnificat*. As we study Mary’s Christmas Psalm this morning we will discover three magnificent truths that can transform how we live and how richly we enjoy God this Christmas.

“Mary’s Psalm”

Luke 1:46-56

^{NIV} **Luke 1:46** And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." ⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Mary’s *magnificat* reveals a great secret of worship.

- “My soul magnifies the Lord”
- ἀγαλλιάω (hagaliao)
- The magnifying concept
- What kind of soul magnifies the Lord?
 - A clean soul (Psalm 51:10; 2 Corinthians 7:1)
 - An uncluttered soul (Psalm 73:25; Mark 4:19; Matthew 6:33)
 - A celebratory soul (Psalm 111:2; Proverbs 8:22-31)
 - Have sin and stuff sapped your soul’s capacity to magnify the Lord?

Mary’s *magnificat* assures us that God sees and God cares.

- “he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant”
- ἐπιβλέπω (epiblepo): to see into something
- “the humble . . . the hungry” (Luke 1:52b-53a)
- Feeling forgotten (Exodus 2:23-25)
- Divine distress (Isaiah 63:9)
- What pain of “forgottenness” scars your soul today?

Mary’s *magnificat* inspires us to face our fears courageously.

- “Mary . . . returned home.” (Luke 1:56)
- To which home did Mary return from Elizabeth’s and when did Joseph take Mary into his home? (Matthew 1:18-25)
- Do you need to take God home today? (Mark 5:18-20)
- Where are you most challenged to see and celebrate the greatness of God?
- “Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”

C.T. Studd, nineteenth century British missionary to Africa

Conclusion: Mary's Psalm, the *Magnificat*, frames for us the glory of Christmas. But in my mind the prelude to the *Magnificat* is the earlier declaration that Mary makes in Luke 1:38 as she responds to God's angelic messenger, Gabriel. Mary says,

"I am the Lord's servant . . .

may it be to me as you have said."

Would you be willing to craft your own Christmas Psalm today? To declare like Mary that you are the Lord's servant and your soul magnifies the Lord!