

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:39-56

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Sunday, December 11, 2016

Christian worship has always been enhanced by sacred music. In the fourth century the church introduced the first known Christmas carols to celebrate the incarnation, God becoming flesh to live among us. However, Luke's Gospel reports the very first recorded Christmas Carol was actually Mary singing praises to God for her son, the long expected Messiah.

Mary is universally honored for accepting the call to be the mother of God. Obviously she had a remarkable faith, but she was just as remarkably ordinary. God singled Mary out from all the women who ever lived to be the mother of God, but just like you and me she struggled with her faith as her son's life unfolded.

The Gospels report as Jesus grew older, Mary didn't fully understand him. Even though she knew from the beginning Jesus was God's son, Mary still had to work through moments of fear and doubt. After Jesus began his ministry, Mary and Jesus' younger brothers went out to fetch him home. The neighbors were saying, "He's gone mad!" because of the things he was saying and doing. Later we read in the Book of Acts that Mary came full circle. She was present with the disciples in the Upper Room on Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit.

Doesn't Mary's journey from doubt to faith make her an authentic and accessible role? Since Mary had to deal with the impact Jesus had on her life as a mother and woman of faith, we can learn from her how to handle our own struggles to submit to God's will and become agents of grace.

Tradition tells us Mary was sixteen years old when Jesus was born, the average age of first time mothers back then. The scriptures say nothing about what are Roman Catholic friends call her "immaculate conception," teaching Mary was born without sin. Why else would the Angel Gabriel's salute her with the greeting, "Hail Mary full of Grace." Grace is a gift and not accomplishment, so we can say with confidence Mary was an ordinary woman who accepted an extraordinary task, to be both the mother and later a disciple of Christ.

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Like Mary, all of us are given our own roles to play as agents of God's kingdom. Maybe Gabriel doesn't coming knocking on our doors, but every day we are asked to do things for God.

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Mary's song isn't meant to be a solo. All of us are invited to sing with along with her.

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God
my Savior.
For he has looked with a favor

on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely from now on all
generations will call me
blessed
For the mighty one has done
great things for me,
and holy is his name.”
(Luke 1:46-56)

Christmas is an opportunity to receive God’s gift of himself and then become active players in salvation history.

What is salvation history?

Salvation history is the story of God entering the lives of ordinary people and blessing them a new vision and purpose. Some of the key players include Abraham, Moses, the prophets and apostles, and of course Mary. But these are only the tip of the iceberg. From Old Testament times, men and women of faith answered the call to love and serve God. Whether their contributions were large or small doesn’t matter.

Of course Mary’s calling was unique because she alone carried the Christ child in her womb. Yet in a wider sense isn’t that what we are all called to do?

The word Christian means, “one who carries Christ.” As Mary carried the seed of Christ in her womb, when we make room in our hearts we carry Christ’s presence in our souls.

Phillips Brooks put it best in the last stanza of carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem.

*“Oh holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray,
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels, their great glad tidings tell,
Oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emanuel.”*

Christmas makes God upfront and personal. Christ lives where you live, Christ loves when you love, Christ serves as you serve. The Christmas story isn’t a solitary event frozen in time. The Christmas miracle is continuously recurring and playing out in the life of anyone who wants to live it. Like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and the wise men and later the disciples, the tax collectors prostitutes and all the other sinners whose lives Christ touched, you and I are invited to take your place in this story by answering the call to discipleship.

The first half of Mary song deals with what God has done for her. The second half of Mary song deals with what God has done for us.

Listen,

“God has stretched out his mighty hand and scatter the proud with all their plans.
God has brought down the mighty and lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things
And sent the rich away with empty hands.
He kept the promises he made to our ancestor and he has remembered to show mercy to
Abraham and all his descendants forever.”

Two thousand years after Christ, the world is still in opposition to God’s kingdom and too often this opposition leads to crimes against humanity.. Sad to say, some of the most devastating famines today are the result of callous political decisions. In many places in the world people are persecuted for their religious and political convictions. In a our country the division between the rich and poor, ethnic groups and political convictions run deeper than ever. The steady erosion of spiritual and moral values are also negatively impacting our quality of life.

Into this mess we made of things, Christ was born to save us from ourselves. Through the miracle of incarnation Christ still comes to quiet the noise in our brains so we can hear the angels singing praises to God for sending his son into the world to help us claim our truest humanity.

At the same time, you also hear other voices. voices crying out for comfort and love: the voice of a lonely child and the mourning widow, the voices of the poor crying out for bread and the oppressed for justice.

Christ hears these voices from his throne in heaven and he wants to hear those voices too. Christmas isn’t just about receiving the Christ. Christmas is also about giving the gift of Christ by loving and serving one another and especially those who could never pay us back.

Mary sang, “God has stretched out his mighty arm.” That stretch arm is most clearly seen on the cross. Christ stretched his arms and try as we might, we can never pay him back for all the suffering he endured to save us.

Christ gave himself for us. All he wants from us is to go and do likewise for others. Is that what Christmas is all about?

The birth of Christ is the beginning of Christianity. Your rebirth in Christ is the beginning of the real you.

Make room in your heart in your heart to receive Christ the Lord. Catch the Christmas spirit and sing out loud, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”