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**Opening**

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 1:26 - 45 **Prayer**

**Sing: Hymn 16 : 1, 3, 4, 5**

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel.
And ransom captive Israel,

That mourns in lonely exile here,

Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

3 O come, Thou Dayspring from on high And comfort us by drawing nigh;

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,

And death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

2. O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's stem,

Regard Thine own and rescue them;

 From depths of hell Thy people save,

 And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

 Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

 Shall come to thee, O Israel.

4. O come, Thou who hast David's key,

Save us that we eternally

In paradise regained may dwell;

Forever shut the gates of hell.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

**Reading of Meditation:**

**My Soul Magnifies the Lord**

**A Christmas meditation on the Song of Mary**

Rev Leo de Vos is the
Minister of the Reformed Church
Of Wainuiomata (Reformed
Churches of New Zealand)

And Mary said:My *soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the might from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.* Luke 1:46-55

Some of you have heard this beautiful song of praise described as The Magnifica. This is because the Latin Vulgate begins Mary's Song with the words Magnificat — to magnify. Some have compared this sang to Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2, but closer examination shows that it is saturated with portions of the Psalms. Boys and girls might wonder why they should memorize Scripture and Catechism, but her we see the rich results of memorization in Mary's life. You cannot memorize too much from God's Word.

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| **Sing Psalm 103 : 1 and 4***0 bless the Lord, my soul bless your preserver;* *Let all within me praise His name with fervour.* *Do not forget his deeds of love and grace.**0 bless the LORD, who pardons your transgression,* *Who heals your illnesses in His compassion,**And Who redeems your life from death’s abyss.**And who redeems your life from death’s abyss.* | *The LORD has dealt with us in great compassion,* *Not punished us according to transgression.* *High as the vault of heaven, without end,**So great His mercy is to those who fear Him,* *He sweeps the sins of all those who revere Him* *As far away as east from west extends.* |

**The occasion of Mary's praise**

If we want to understand this beautiful song, we must understand the circumstances when Mary expressed these words. The angel Gabriel had already visited Mary with words of wonder. What amazing news: "you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:31-32)! Mary has been chosen by God to give birth to the Son of the Highest, the Messiah.

Now we also know that Mary had difficulty with Gabriel's revelation. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones brings to our attention the stages of Mary's faith: At first Mary is sceptical, staggering at this great revelation — "How will this be ... since I am a virgin?" (v. 34) And we thank God for Gabriel's ready answer "No word from God will ever fail" (v. 37). Then Mary moves to the second stage: "I am the Lord's servant may your word to me be fulfilled" (v. 38). Mary says, "I don't' understand but I leave it in God's hands." Can we not identify with this stage — well, I don't understand, but I will submit? Shortly after, Mary hurries to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, and Elizabeth, speaking by the Holy Spirit confirms the words of the angel Gabriel (see verses 42­45). And God used these words to speak to Mary and give her a full assurance of faith, for she immediately breaks forth into praise!

The Bible's description of Mary's stages of faith is helpful to us. We can identify with her stages of faith and also with her weakness of faith. We also identify with the assurance of faith God gives us in his Word, just as the words of Gabriel and Elizabeth gave assurance to Mary. And when the wonderful truth of the birth of Christ penetrates our hearts, we are led to join Mary in a song of praise. How wonderful that God has not left us in our sin, but sent such a Saviour?

Sing Hymn 17 : 1

My *soul does magnify*

*The Lord, for He most high*

*Has shown to me His favour.*

*I praise Him with my voice;*

*My spirit does rejoice*

*In Him, my God and Saviour.*

**The depth of Mary's praise**

Mary used two expressions: my soul and my spirit to say that she is moved within the very depths of her being. Her joy is not superficial, but a response of everything within her to God's revelation. Does the gospel ever move you and send shivers of delight into the very core of your being? Is it not true that sometimes we are too cold and clinical in our confession of faith? If we really understand what happened when the Son of God left the courts of heaven and came into the world in this way and manner; if we grasp something of its eternal significance, of its profundity, its amazing character, how can it fail to move us, especially in our souls and in our spirits (Lloyd-Jones, *Magnificat,* p. 11)?

Christmas is not just having a warm, nice feeling of being surrounded with friends and family. But for us, it should move us to the depths that God loved sinners so much that, at the right moment, Christ died for the ungodly. We should be deeply moved that there is a bright light burning like a lighthouse in this dark world, a Saviour who we confess as Christ the Lord!

What do Mary's words to magnify the Lord mean? The verb to magnify means to make great, to enlarge. But, you might ask, how can God be made greater? Is he not altogether great and unchangeable? We must understand that, in this passage, the verb magnify means to glorify, praise, extol. Think of when a young man falls in love and marries — he puts his bride on a pedestal, he magnifies her! Initially, at least, he cannot make her any different than she already is, but she becomes the centre of all his thoughts and affections. Mary in this song focuses on the Lord and his mercy to sinners. In her mind and heart, God is on a pedestal! Mary's passion is that all the world would see the greatness and mercy of God. Her song is an invitation that all sinners may come to know, love, and praise Jesus Christ. "Glorify the LORD with me, let us exalt his name together" (Psalm 34:3). This Christmas season let us should the name to our family, our neighbours and our work-mates — 0, magnify the Lord with me, 0, that all may know and love Jesus Christ. 0, that Christ would be lifted up as a pedestal in our minds!

**The object of Mary's praise**

The Roman Church lifts Mary up to a high pedestal, but Mary, while humbling herself, lifts up the name of God. Notice the words by which her song addresses God: he is the LORD, Jehovah, and shines in greatness and glory! The name LORD, or Jehovah, emphasizes that God is our covenant God who keeps his promises. Mary also makes it clear that she is but a sinner in need of the Saviour as well. Notice that she exalts the Saviour, while confessing her won submission and weakness: "For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed" (v. 48).

Sometimes in reaction to the Roman Catholic veneration of Mary, we have slighted Mary's role in giving birth to the Saviour. We must honour Mary not for anything she is in herself, but for her wonderful role in redemptive history. Mary reminds us that, because she has been chosen by God to give birth to the Messiah, all generations will call her blessed. However, in her song, it is crystal clear that she, too, is a sinner who needs and loves her Saviour!

**Sing Hymn 17 : 2**

*The LORD, so good and great,*

*looked on my lowly state.*

*Now will all generations*

*from age to age attest*

*how richly I am blest.*

*Great is my exaltation!*

Notice that Mary also praises God's great power! "For the Mighty One has done great things for me" (v. 49), "He has performed might deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts" (v. 51). Oh, how weak and hopeless is our situation in this world. Thank God for the power of his salvation\_ When we feel overwhelmed surrounded by the secularism and unbelief of our culture, we must remind ourselves of God's great power to destroy the haughty imaginations of men who are wise in their own eyes.

Mary praises God for his holiness: "Holy is his name" (v. 49). Why does Mary mention the holiness of God here? We can answer this question with another question — why did Christ have to come into this world? The answer is because God is holy and hates sin. Christ came to satisfy the justice of a holy God, so that we could be his children. Without a clear idea of God's holiness, the righteousness work and life of Christ would not be understandable.

She praises God for his mercy! "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (v. 50). While grace takes into account our guilt, mercy takes into account our misery due to our fallen nature and sin. What do we see in hospitals, in rest homes, in the streets, on TV news? Whether we see people broken physically or spiritually, we see misery. We see people lost and groaning under increasing burdens of the consequences of sin. Christmas is the message that Christ has come to show mercy to poor but penitent sinners.

**Sing Hymn 17 : 3**

*How holy is His Name!*

*The Mighty One, he came*

*and showed me his great favour.*

*With mercy he is near*

*to all who him revere;*

*His love endures forever.*

Mary also praises God for his faithfulness! "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors" (v. 54-55). When we look at the Christmas story it is essential that we remember that God had promised to send the Saviour in the Old Testament. We can scarcely read a chapter in the Old Testament without encountering God's covenant promises time and again. God made the promise of a Saviour to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 and then repeated this promise to Abraham and to his seed. Mary has long thought of these promises and now that God is showing his faithfulness to them by fulfilling them, she breaks out in praise\_ Christmas means that God keeps his promises! And these promises are still valid for us and for our covenant children. When we read the Bible at home, preach the Bible at home, church, and school, we can never speak enough about God's faithfulness. This faithfulness is never more clearly seen that when God sent his Son to be our Saviour.

Ryle reminds us: Let us lay hold of this woman's example, to lay firm hold on the Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We see not yet **all** things put under us. We see not Christ, and heaven, and the book of life, and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith and this faith leans on the promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like the virgin Mary, that God keeps his word, and that what He has spoken, so he will always in due time perform.

**Singing:**  Hymn 17 : 4 - 6

*His arm revealed his might,*

*for he has put to flight*

*all those who are proud-hearted,*

*and he pulled haughty ones*

*down from their lofty thrones;*

*the lowly he supported.*

*Abundant gifts the LORD*

*has on the hungry poured;*

*their suff’ring he has ended.*

*The rich he sent away;*

*He, much to their dismay,*

*Let them go empty-handed.*

*The LORD is merciful;*

*His servant Israel,*

*He graciously delivered, Rememb’ring evermore*

*what He to Abra’m swore*

*and to his seed forever.*

**Possible Discussion Questions**

What reasons does Mary give for singing praise? How can we relate these reasons to our lives today?

Who are the hungry? What other Bible references are there to hunger and how do these relate to the Song of Mary?

Is Mary speaking about the past, prophesying about the future, or both?

How is Mary's question "how will this be since I am a virgin?" different to Zechariah's question "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

What does the song of Mary tell us about Jesus' role/work?

Do you agree with the statement "does the gospel ever move you, is it not true that sometimes we are too cold and clinical in our confession of faith?" If so, what can we do about that?

"From now on all generations will call me blessed" what does that mean for us? (Rev de Vos

acknowledges that we should not venerate Mary like Roman Catholics do, but asks "have we slighted Mary's role?") Is there anyone else in the Bible we would call blessed in a similar vein?

**Singing: O Little Town of Bethlehem**

1.O little town of Bethlehem

 How still we see Thee lie

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by;

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting light,

The hopes and fears of all the years,

Are met in Thee tonight.

3. How silently, how silently,

The wondrous gift is given;

So God imparts to human hearts

The blessing of His heaven.

No ear may hear His coming,

But in this world of sin,

Where meek souls will receive Him still The dear Christ enters in.

2.For Christ is born of Mary
And gathered all above,

While mortals sleep, the angels keep

Their watch of wondering love.

O morning stars, together

Proclaim the holy birth,

And praises sing to God the King,

And peace to men on earth.

4.O 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,

The great glad tidings tell

O come to us, abide with us,

Our Lord Emmanuel.

**Reading: Luke 2 : 1 – 21**



**Singing: O Come All Ye Faithful**

O come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem,

Come and behold Him born the king of angels;

O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation,

Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above:

Glory to God, glory in the highest;

O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, Born this happy morning;

Jesus to Thee be glory given,

Word of the Father now in flesh appearing;

O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

**Sing: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing**

Hark the herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King;

Peace on earth and mercy mild,

God and sinners reconciled!" Joyful, all ye nations rise,

Join the triumph of the skies; With the angelic host proclaim: "Christ is born in Bethlehem" Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

Christ by highest heav'n adored; Christ the everlasting Lord;

Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity,

Pleased as man with man to dwell; Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Hark! The herald angels sing "Glory to the newborn King!"

Mild He lays His glory by,

Born that man no more may die;

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth.

Ris'n with healing in His wings,

Light and life to all He brings,

Hail the Son of Righteousness!

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!

 Hark! The herald angels sing

"Glory to the newborn King!"

**Sing: Glory to God**

Glory to God, Glory to God

In the highest, in the highest, in the highest.



Peace be forever, peace on earth forever

And to people goodwill forever more.

Glory to God in the highest,

Glory to God in the highest.

Peace on earth forever, Peace on earth forever,

Peace be forever, Peace on earth forever,

And to people, and to people, goodwill forever,

And to people, goodwill forever, goodwill forever more. Glory to God, Glory to God

In the highest, in the highest, in the highest.

Peace be forever, peace on earth forever And to people goodwill forever more.

A-men, A-men

**Closing Prayer**