

Pastor Matthew Ude
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Third Sunday In Advent

His Mighty Works Cause Us To Sing

Luke 1:46-56 ⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy *is* His name. ⁵⁰ And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him From generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, And exalted *the* lowly. ⁵³ He has filled *the* hungry with good things, And *the* rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy, ⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever." ⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Psalms 118:1-5 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever. ² Let Israel now say, "His mercy *endures* forever." ³ Let the house of Aaron now say, "His mercy *endures* forever." ⁴ Let those who fear the LORD now say, "His mercy *endures* forever." ⁵ I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a broad place.

This is one of my favorite Psalms. It has this constant building of praise to the Lord for the wonderful things he has done. It gradually calls more and more people into the song of joy. It reminds of the stereotypical Baptist pastor's repetitive cry of "Can I get an Amen." It's not a bad thing asking the whole congregation to join in a cry, an exclamation of wonder at the great things God has done for us.

It's what we do. The Lord comes down from heaven to bestow His gifts upon us and we in amazement at what he has done exclaim with songs of great joy the wonders of our God.

Mary is in a sense the first Christian. She is the first one to hear the news that the Savior has come and to believe it. She sets the tone for the entire history of the Church.

God comes down to us and bestows his blessing upon us and we respond with songs of praise. To some of us God has given the gifts so that songs actually sound good. But for the rest of us, who cares it's not about how good we are. It's about how good God is to us.

That is one of the things that Luther brought back to the church. In his day the church had gotten to a place where it cared more about the quality of the singing. The common people didn't join in. It was just the choirs singing. Luther said, "Forget that let all the people of God sing, 'His mercy endures forever.'"

Of course nobody had to tell Mary to respond to the Lord with song. She can't help but do anything else.

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

In Matthew 23:5 the Pharisees make themselves large, they do all kinds of things to be seen by men. They puff themselves up; look at me, look at me.

Matthew 23:5 ⁵ "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

Mary does not call attention to herself or what she has done but only to the Lord. She magnifies, makes large, puffs up Jesus.

This reminds me of the beautiful hymn attributed to Saint Patrick.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

If we meet some stranger on the road and talk to them all day and they walk away and later they say, "I can't remember anything about him, what his name was, what kind of ice cream he liked, but man he sure had a lot to say about Christ." That would be a successful conversation

I think that would make a good tombstone, "He wouldn't stop talking about Jesus." And then maybe even ". . . and still hasn't."

That is exactly Mary's sentiment here. I'm going to hold up God who is my savior so that everyone can clearly see what an amazing God He is. I'm going to sing his praise.

⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

Why is he such a great God?

Because he has "regarded the lowly state" or you could paraphrase that "He has taken pity on me despite my unworthiness."

Mary is not attempting to say, "God has lifted me up because I am so good at being humble."

As we just saw she is not drawing any attention to herself or implying that there is anything good about herself. Just the opposite "the lowly state of His maidservant." I am truly unworthy. Not just I'm going to say I'm unworthy so that I can actually appear to be worthy. No, but just straight out, "I am unworthy."

Why then does she continue “all generations will call me blessed?” That phrase is once again all about what God is doing not what Mary is doing. To be blessed means to receive gifts from God. That is exactly what Mary means. God has given to her such an amazing gift that all generation will marvel at what God did for her.

Like if someone wins the lottery. We would all talk about how lucky that person is. Mary knows that all generations will discuss what a marvelous gift it is that she has received.

Notice the careful comparison that Mary makes, “He is mighty, I am lowly.” “He is holy, I am blessed.” That is, “He is the giver, I am the receiver.”

These first three verses are Mary’s introduction, “Why am I going to sing songs to my God.” Now the rest of the verses are the song Mary sings explaining what wonderful thing God has done. These last verses form what we call a poetical chiasm. That means that the first and the last phrase go together. The second and the second to last phrase go together, the third and third to last, and so on.

⁵⁰ **And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him From generation to generation**

^{54b} **In remembrance of *His* mercy, ⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever."**

The first image is mercy to those who fear him and then the mercy he promised to Abraham, the man who did fear the Lord.

The fear of the Lord that Mary talks about here is not the fear we would have if we walked into a cave and there was a grizzly bear standing up on its hind legs. It’s not the fear we would have if we suddenly found a gun in our face. That is the fear of the helpless in the face of evil.

No the fear of the Lord is the fear we have of our parents or of the police men. What do you do whenever you see a police vehicle on the road? You immediately look down at your speedometer? Am I going too fast? As a kid you are not afraid of your parents unless you do something wrong and then oh boy you better watch out.

So it is with the Lord, we know that He will punish sin.

And then if the cop does pull us over we respect him enough that we don't try and lie but admit yes I was speeding.

Thus we act towards God as well. When we come into his presence we immediately check our speedometer and find out, opps I was speeding. But we don't try to make excuses no we confess that we are sinful. This is the first thing we do every Sunday as we begin church.

And God responds to this attitude of confession with mercy. The same mercy that he promised to Abraham.

^{51a} He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts.

^{54a} He has helped His servant Israel,

We fear him because when he does show His power it is not for our destruction but for our salvation. It is the proud that are put down and scattered by his strength but those who serve him receive His help.

Notice it is those who are proud in their own thinking, in their hearts. It isn't a matter of outward appearances. It isn't those who are rich or who are rulers or judges or mighty or celebrities. It is not the outward circumstances that is the problem but the attitude of the heart.

I can tell you I have certainly seen many who lived in grass huts and still had an attitude or great pride in themselves and others who had many houses and servants and guards who nevertheless serve the Lord and their fellow men humbly and faithfully.

This humility and fear of the Lord is not something that comes from ourselves but is a gift which the Holy Spirit creates with us. And this creation of the Holy Spirit responds to God in songs of praise.

⁵² He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, And exalted *the* lowly.

⁵³ He has filled *the* hungry with good things, And *the* rich He has sent away empty.

The Pharisee and Publican, the Good Samaritan, over and over again Luke's gospel emphasizes this reversal which God brings. Those whom we by nature think, "yeah that's who I want to be." Those are the ones that God brings down. His thoughts are not our thoughts. He doesn't favor someone just because they are a famous TV actor.

Notice that the culmination is not on those whom He has put down, but rather those whom He has lifted up. Both the center of the song and the base or beginning and ending is on His mercy and the good He has done.

Sometime the thing that matters is not what you have done but which thing is the overriding consideration. In football sometimes your team gets a penalty. But then the other team gets a worse penalty, and so it doesn't matter. Maybe their penalty over rides yours or at least cancels it out.

God's mercy and forgiveness trumps Man's sin.

You might be thinking which of these two camps do I belong in? I know I'm a sinner and don't deserve God's mercy but I also know I've often been pretty arrogant with other people? I know I'm a sinner but I also know that I am God's

child through baptism. Am I a lowly one who God lifts up or a proud one who God will bring down?

God's mercy trumps man's sin. Repentance trumps pride. Where there is repentance and fear of God, that fear that admits that I have done wrong, there is a hungry soul to be filled with God's grace. God forgives me and lifts me up despite my sin because of His great mercy. This is the heart of Mary's magnificat.

“For all of this it is my duty to thank praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.”

Because God has done this I will sing His praise.

Amen