

Title: My Soul Magnifies the Lord
Text: Luke 1.46-55
Theme: Praising God for what he has done
Series: Advent 2025, #1
Aim: I aim to call my people to take time this week to specifically write out and pray a prayer of praise to God.

Christie's Auction House in London is going to be auctioning a work by Michelangelo, the painter of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. This work being auctioned was never intended to be a stand-alone work. In fact, the esteemed perfectionistic painter ordered his assistant to destroy everything that wasn't a completed work because he did not want anything less than perfectly complete to be leaked out. Apparently, this one didn't get destroyed. This work is actually a 5" red-chalk sketch of a foot and possibly his drawing of his foot. He was practicing drawing a foot for one of his paintings in the east end of the Sistine Chapel ceiling. So, if you want to spend (I'm guessing) a couple million dollars on a practice sketch of a foot by Michelangelo, you have your chance. You won't actually get a painting, but you will get something that points you to one. This morning, however, you get to look at a piece of historical artwork that is significantly more valuable, though less expensive than anything the Old Masters ever created. This work is not a painting, though it gives us a picture. It is a prayer, a song, a psalm of thanksgiving, composed by a woman, actually a girl whose life was painted into the scene of the incarnation in such a way that while she is not, nor ever intended to be the object of worship, she points to the One who is.

For the 4 Sundays of Advent, I am addressing the 4 prayers that Luke records in his first 2 chapters. These prayers are all part of the account of the birth of Christ, and are evidence of the fact that the birth of Christ (Incarnation) is an event that is to be celebrated by giving praise to God. Giving praise to God must be a priority for us this season. Stopping to give praise to God is way more important than setting up trains around the tree, putting up outdoor lights, purchasing the perfect gifts, getting the family together, etc. If we don't stop and intentionally give praise to God, we are wasting and missing the significance of commemorating this event. So, my aim in addressing these prayers is to challenge and encourage you to take time each week before Christmas and write out a prayer to God. I know that if you intentionally and personally set aside some time to praise God, your heart, joy, satisfaction, and delight in God will expand. When your heart for God expands, your heart for all that is good and beautiful expands. Since this first prayer is a prayer of praise, I am asking you to write out a prayer of praise to God that you can pray this week to him.

Read Text:

It is common for students in higher education to take a course on writing in their first semester of graduate school in order to understand exactly how the institution wants them to format their papers. Formal papers have to be written in accordance with the accepted format. This concept has been in play for well over 2,000 years. Luke's gospel account is actually written some of the same stylistic features as other ancient historians such as, Josephus and Gaius. This

book is a not a random collection of odds and ends. There is a deliberate structure and argument that Luke puts together based on his careful research. Luke was not one of the disciples, but he was an early believer. He, most likely interviewed all sorts of people who were able to give him firsthand accounts of the life of Christ. When I read this account, I not only think of the scene that Luke is writing about, but I also think of how Luke got this information. My guess (The Bible does not record this) is that Luke met with Mary and she was the one who told him everything that had happened, all the way down to telling him, perhaps even retrieving from a locked box a piece of parchment, showing him the words of this prayer that she wrote in response to being told by the angel Gabriel that she was going to be motherly means by which the Son of God was going to enter the world.

1. The Setting (1.26-45)

The setting is Nazareth of Galilee in the northern portion of Israel. Nazareth was not a city of destination. No one dreamed of growing up and moving there. There were likely many who dreamed of leaving there. It was not a cool city with a chill vibe. Here was a young woman, likely 14-16 years of age, who was betrothed (engaged) to be married. This was acceptable and expected. Life expectancy was so much shorter, and waiting til your middle 20's to be married meant that your life was basically half over, already. The average life expectancy was between 30-45 due to high infant mortality rates. If you made it to adulthood then you one could reasonably hope to hit 60 or even 70. Mary is young, but she is assuming an adult role as a young woman about to be married.

The angel Gabriel shows up and just about gives her a stroke. His introduction and announcement to her in verses 26-33 is absolutely overwhelming. 1) An angel appeared to a single young girl in Nazareth. 2) He greets her and tells her that the Lord is with her. 3) He assures her that she has found favor with God. God delights in her. 4) The bomb! She, a virgin, is going to conceive a son who will be named Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. She is going to be the mother of the Son of God on earth. He will inherit the throne of his father (ancestor) David and he will be the king who will reign forever and ever over a kingdom that has no end. It seems that younger people tend to be a bit more idealistic and concrete in their faith. I don't know if that plays into this, but Mary believes him. Her response is faith. The only question she has is how, not if. She is not challenging Gabriel's grasp on biology, just wondering how this is going to happen since she is a virgin.. He tells her and then tells her about Zechariah and Elizabeth and her response is (v.38), "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it me according to your word."

Don't you love this! If you have been reading your Bible, you are accustomed to these sorts of encounters. God shows up and tells Abraham that he is going to have a son, and he says, "you sure about that?" God shows up and tells Moses to go back to Egypt and rescue the children of Israel and he says, "you sure about that?" Gideon? Uh, uh, uh, can you repeat that, like 3 times with a fleece? Samson's parents, and more. Before Luke tells us about this announcement of Gabriel's to Mary, he told us about Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth were going to have a son. And, once again, Zechariah responds with, "you sure about that?"

Gabriel seems to me to be apoplectic. He says (1.19) “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.” (i.e. what is wrong with you man?) I don’t know if he goes back to heaven and gives a report, but if he does, perhaps God told him that his next mission was going to be better, and it was. There is no hesitation on the part of Mary. Finally, here is someone who hears God’s Word and believes it and is a willing participant in his plan, no matter the cost. She sees it for what it is, an incredible privilege to be known by God. And she is all in! Don’t you love her! This is what faith looks like!

So, the setting is Israel, Roman occupation, Nazareth, poverty, youth and “no standing.” Mary’s parents are never named, neither are her siblings. But her faith is remarkable. The setting of this prayer, this psalm is a response of an unshakeable faith to an overwhelming promise. For thousands of years, God has been promising a Messiah and now the time has come. It is “go-time” and this otherwise, non-descript girl from nowhere-ville is a key player in the plan. And there is no hesitation in her response. She bows into her calling showing a forged resolve in God’s Word. Mary believes what Gabriel said and heads south to Judah to Elizabeth’s home. In response to all that God has said to her, and all that is happening to her and around her, Mary crafts this prayer. It is a prayer or psalm of thanksgiving.

2. The Psalm (1.46-55)

This prayer is deliberately crafted to make much of God. Mary’s aim is established in the first line. “My soul magnifies the Lord.” The second line parallels the first. It underscores the aim by repeating the same idea: “and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Mary is declaring praise, trust, love and joy from the depth of her being in response to the glory and grace of the Highest being. She is doing what we have been created for. She is worshiping God. Worship is ALL that I am responding to ALL that God is and has done. We have been made in the image of God. Why? Because God is glorious! He is worth imaging. He is the greatest delight and joy and by imaging him, we show this and we experience this. Our creation to worship was marred by our sin. We’ve all worshiped ourselves instead of God, and so, our new creation (salvation) is the only means by which our original purpose of worshiping and imaging God can be recovered and restored. Mary knows this. She refers to God as her Savior. Mary is not sinless. Like you, she needed a Savior. She needed to be saved from her sin and she knows that her salvation is not in herself, nor in her goodness, but in God. Our praise, our ability to praise, our motivation to praise, and our grounding of praise comes from the salvation from sin that God provides for us in Christ. 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 now gives us 3 reasons why we magnify and rejoice in God.

A. See 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 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 she is part of a game-changer. Life is never going to be the same. Her little obscure and “insignificant” life has just been interrupted and hijacked. This humble country girl is going to be the object of scorn, rumors, and blessing. She will be 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 minimize the Lord? It is one or the other. You can only magnify the Lord if you are intentional about it, because our 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 God 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 pray. Your prayers, both amount and content are a reflection of your true theology. This is why I want us to write a prayer of praise this week that we pray all week so that we are deliberately responding to God’s Word with a humble faith.

Mary recognizes that she is at ground zero of this event, yet her response makes it clear that she knows 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 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 is not a co-redeemer. She could not save herself. And she is not a co-mediator. She is the recipient of God’s grace and she knows that God’s plan involves her and so many others as well.

B. See what he has done for others (like me). (50-53)

God uses his mercy to care for his own. (50) I love this verse. God will never run out of mercy. We live with so much hype, that we are immune to the noise. But, you cannot over-hype God’s mercy. It never runs out. When we sing songs of praise or pray prayers of praise, we speak of who God is and what he has done. Mary does that. She speaks of the holiness and mercy of God and how 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 are wondering what is going to happen and how it will happen, and 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.

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 and uses his strength to crush the proud, but he uses his strength to lift up the humble.

C. See 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 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, overwhelming and at times, terrifying 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 everything 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. But if you study Mary's prayer you will see that it is full of references and phrases from the OT. Mary's prayer became part of the Bible because what she prayed was already part of the Bible. This girl hid God's Word in her heart. She did not have a Bible in her home. And I would love to find out how she was so personally influenced by God's Word. Did she benefit from faithful teachers in her synagogue? Did her parents sing the psalms to her and tell her about Zephaniah, Daniel and Job? The Spirit who conceived Christ in her directed her mind and heart to take God's Word and craft a prayer that showcases her faith and gives us an example as well. 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. Her circumstance just revealed it. Your circumstances do not make you what you are; they simply reveal what you believe.

3. Your Prayer

I am asking you to write out a prayer of praise to God today that you will pray all week. It does not need to be long. Mary's prayer is not wordy and can be prayed in less than a minute. But it is deliberate and rich. Using this prayer as a guide, write out a prayer whose aim is to magnify God. This is how Jesus taught us to pray, didn't he? Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Then after stating your aim, write out what God has done for you. Then write out what he has done for others, like you. Then write out how God has kept his promises. Now, two more things: 1) Pray it every day. 2) Share it with someone else. (Mary did)