

Luke 1 v26-38 & 46-49

“My soul magnifies the Lord”, said Mary.

This week in our Thursday Early Fellowship, we considered the words of Mary, *my soul magnifies the Lord*.

This is Mary's response to the news that she was carrying the Saviour of the World.

Her soul magnifies the Lord.

What a wonderful response to the good news that she was expecting the Saviour, and it's a response that I would like us to consider for a few moments.

Christmas is all about magnifying the Lord.

In other words, looking closely at God and magnifying his character. We also touched on this at our ZOOM Advent Bible Discussions last Sunday evening, when we looked at a passage in Isaiah of the coming of the Lord and the transformation that would happen, and members of the group started to describe qualities about God that they saw from the passage; generosity, faithfulness, power, and the list went on.

What we were doing, in effect, was magnifying the Lord. We were focusing on Him and we were developing our understanding of who God is and what he might be for us.

I wonder if we can do what Mary did and take the focus from ourselves and magnify the Lord?

Mary describes the new significance of God in her life.

Suddenly, a new world opened up for her, and like Alice as she tumbled down the rabbit hole, Mary began to see things that she hadn't noticed before, a whole new world, and this is what an encounter with God does for us. It takes into another world, a fascinating world, a different dimension, for suddenly we begin to see God in a new light.

For Mary it happened through the birth of a child, and how many parents that I have known over my ministry whose eyes have been opened to God through the birth of a child – a miracle before their very eyes.

She glimpsed God's greatness and goodness as never had before. She recognised that he was actively involved in her life and that he was in fact the life and light of the world.

Mary of course, was special, and she had a special revelation of Christ, and there would be no one as honoured as Mary, for what an honour for any woman to carry the life of God in your womb.

But, God comes to each one of us through His Holy Spirit, and in the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, *you must be born again, God through Christ, is born in us.*

The Holy Spirit, which is God, comes into our lives and this means that we too can taste Mary's joy, and experience a similar sense of wonder.

Advent calls us then to catch the sight of the sovereignty of God. To be amazed at our Creator and Saviour.

Yes, we can get caught up in all the Christmas rush and all the tinsel, but there in the manger, let us take time to magnify God.

There is a beautiful Scottish carol that sums up what I'm trying to say superbly well, "*Child in the Manger*" was originally written in Gaelic by Mary M. Macdonald from Bunessan on the island of Mull, her expression of her faith.

Young Mary from that beautiful island on the west coast of Scotland wrote,

*Child in the manger, Infant of Mary,
Outcast and Stranger, Lord of all,
Child Who inherits all our transgressions,
All our demerits on Him fall.*

*Once the most holy Child of salvation
Gently and lowly lived below.
Now as our glorious mighty Redeemer,
See Him victorious o'er each foe.*

Prophets foretold Him, Infant of wonder;

Angels behold Him on His throne.

Worthy our Saviour of all our praises;

Happy forever are His own.

Mary MacDonald like Mary mother of Jesus magnifies God.

1. The holiness of his name.

In the Magnificat which comes from the lips of Mary, she said, "*The mighty one has done great things for me – holy is his name.*"

When we magnify the Lord we must magnify his holiness, this is where we begin.

Why here?

Because holiness simply means something that is different.

When we talk about a holy God, we are talking about a God who is different to us.

Yes, we are made in his image, but we must remember that it's an image.

The Holy God cannot be compared with anything. His ways are not our ways. His love is beyond our comprehension. The psalmist grappled with this aspect of the character of God and penned the words. "*The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgression.*"

Aren't these words beautiful?

Christian friends, these are God's words to us this Christmas. That in the manger we see the abounding love of God. We see his compassion and his generosity. That's what the baby in the manger is all about. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. Christmas is about knowing and experiencing the love of God and it's to the manger we must go for that's what Mary MacDonald saw when she wrote

Child in the manger, Infant of Mary,

*Outcast and Stranger, Lord of all,
Child Who inherits all our transgressions,
All our demerits on Him fall.*

This is God's outstanding love to us, that he came to us and for us, that he died for us, that he has opened the Kingdom of heaven to all who believe, and it begins at Christmas in the manger.

2. The wonder of his mercy.

Mary said, *his mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.* This is an aspect of God, his mercy. His mercies are new every morning and his mercy was seen on that first Christmas night, as he chose to reveal himself to poor shepherds in the field.

You see, Christmas is a message about God's mercy. Mary grasped this and she saw that this birth was all about the mercy of God, and it would continue for generations, and it has, we are part of Mary's words, it has reached down to us 2000 years later, and the mercy of God is still beeing poured upon us.

We are Christians only because of God's mercy. We are Christians because we have glimpsed, like Mary, something of the mercy of God. We call this mercy Grace, and Christmas is a time of Amazing Grace. We love to sing in Scotland,

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me,

I once was lost but now am found

Was blind but now I see“

Only the mercy of God enables us to sing those words with feeling in our hearts. What I love about Scotland is that our faith runs deep, we have a joy in Scotland deep in our hearts, we might not express it in emotional ways, but there is a joy that is deep because we have experienced the mercy of God.

3. The extent of his goodness.

God's goodness is extended to the humble and the poor. A new Kingdom was coming and it was not for the powerful and the mighty but for the poor and the oppressed. There would a shift in values and through this child, a revolution would happen, powerful rulers would be brought down from their thrones and the poor would be exalted.

Christmas tells us that God is on the side of the poor and those who know their need for them. He has come to fill the hungry with good things. The extent of his goodness is for all people, regardless of status, privilege or wealth. God sees our human hearts and he is reaching out to those on the fringes.

I love Charles Dickens' tale of the *Christmas Carol* and how that greedy, grasping, covetous individual called Ebenezer Scrooge, meets with the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future, and through their revelations he is brought down, he is humbled, he is brought to his knees.

Dickens catches the spirit of Christmas beautifully well and that spirit is still alive today, it is a spirit of challenge, for God still comes today, to bring down the proud and to raise the humble. That is what the Kingdom of God is all about, a reversal of fortunes for this world.

The ultimate reversal will come at the end of time, when our Lord returns, and all our worldly values will be reversed and the Spirit of the New Kingdom will be one of servanthood and sharing and caring and loving and being kind to each other.

We pray every week in this church, *may your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*. Well, we believe that Christ's Kingdom has begun, and that he will return to bring it to fulfilment. In the meantime, let us hold onto those three aspects of his nature, and so magnify his name,

The holiness of his name

The wonder of his mercy

The extent of his goodness

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen.