



## MARY'S SONG

December 23, 2018, The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Luke 1:39-55

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We did it, we have finally arrived at the last Sunday of Advent, and here we are, so close to another Christmas celebration. Today, we “stand [together], expectantly at hope’s window.”

Which means, tomorrow and Tuesday, we will all be reminded as to why exactly Mary sang her song. Of how the child she was chosen to bear was the child our world so desperately needed. That He was the fulfilling of the prophecy of the Lord and that with Him came forgiveness, mercy, grace, love, and eternal life. This is why Mary sang her song. This is why her soul magnified the Lord. She knew that she would be saved by her own son, that He would forever change the world, and that **she** got to be a part of it all.

She remembered all the stories of old, the ones foretold by the prophets, and so she also knew that she would have to walk with Him to the grave. That He would face unbearable pain, and face a premature death, but that He would do it for all of us. This is Mary’s song, one of freedom, of hope, of mercy, and of love. Of God shining through humanity.

Mary may have sung today’s text, but it is our song too. It is a song, or a prayer, that is a reminder to each of us that we have all been called into Christ’s story, and that we have all been called to be vessels of God’s hope and love. That our souls too are to magnify God in all that we say and in all that we do. Mary’s song is to be the song that our hearts sing every day.



The other day I was on my walk with our little rescue dog, Sunny. And as we were on our way up to Central Park, I was thinking about what on earth I'd say about this thing called Mary's Magnificat. And as we walked I prayed and I listened for God's voice and more and more it all started to sink in.

Today's text is called the Magnificat. It got its name from the Roman Catholic Church because of the Latin word that translates into its first line: *"my soul magnifies the Lord."* We may have all heard that term used countless other times in sermons, but I must admit it never really sunk in for me. I never really quite understood what it meant or why it mattered so much to so many people. Perhaps because I was more focused on baby Jesus and the music of the season rather than what I had thought was a minor song, a piece of scripture that sounded like so many other pieces of scripture. Having now studied this text, and seeing how much depth and substance are in Mary's words, I ended up writing enough material for three different sermons. So, I will say to you all now that you all are lucky, because I sharpened my focus, cut out many pages and ideas, whittled it down, and simplified it to what it is for you today, and we will save all the other material for another year.

So, there I was at 6:00 in the morning, walking Sunny up 94<sup>th</sup> Street heading to the park thinking, what did Mary mean when she sang, "My soul magnifies the Lord!"

What does it mean to have a soul that magnifies the Lord? Does my soul magnify the Lord?

Well, sometimes it does. But why didn't it yesterday? Or why didn't it that one day last week or last year?

And then it hit me, perhaps, once we understand what it means to have a soul that magnifies the Lord, we can train our souls to do just that. Not just for a minute, an hour, a day, or a week but also at the very core of who we are and how we live.



You see, when Christ radiates in our hearts, a new song forms deep within, and we walk in the light. That is when our souls magnify the Lord. When Christ shines brightly through us and He radiates out of us. That is when we walk the streets of New York City and instead of getting angry at everything and everyone in our way; we start to take notice of everyone and everything. We begin to live a life more illuminated. And as other things become more vibrant to us, / our lives, our being, our depths, our souls do to, / and we start to greet people more, help people more, be kind to one another more, and wear our smiles more than our frowns. There are so many frowns out there.

So as I thought through what it means for our souls to magnify the Lord, I started taking notice of things around me more and more, and I started to see them in more detail and light. A grin began to grow on my face and a giggle in my heart. As the sun started to rise, I enjoyed watching people chat and the dogs chase each other around the Great Lawn as if we were all living in a Norman Rockwell painting. It was magnificent and it was magnificent. People laughed, smiled, and whistled. And as I enjoyed soaking it all in more and more, the light of Christ grew in my heart more and more.

Sunny and I greeted strangers and other dogs, and we all exchanged “good mornings, hello’s and have a good day’s” and it was fun for all of us. It’s cliché, but I’ve got to say it: All the dogs had smiles on their faces and they happily wagged their tails all over the place. And in that instant I thought to myself, maybe a dog’s smile and the wagging of its tail is what it means for a soul to magnify the Lord.

When they are happy, dogs are so happy and joyful that they squeak and squeal, and ours even oinks. And there are times that they get so excited that they whack themselves in their own faces with their tails, but they don’t care because they are so grateful, gleeful, so happy, so loving and so loved in that moment. Maybe that is what it means to have a soul that magnifies the Lord.



But that's a dog, and that's absolutely a cliché yet conceivably totally true. So what does it mean, or how does that, show us how to have souls that magnify the Lord?

As time slipped by, and we had to head back home, and back to life, I noticed that having been filled with the beauty of a sunrise, the greetings of strangers and dogs, and a walk in one of the most beautiful parks in the world, that I was a little different than when we had first begun up that hill that morning. In that transformation I began to smile brightly and say good morning to doormen on Fifth Avenue. Ones who ordinarily might come off as grumpy to a stranger but who rather cheerily said back to me "have a good day, sir!"

And from there I saw a little old lady fishing cans out of the trash in front of a brownstone on 93<sup>rd</sup> and rather than harrumphing, I happily said "Good morning, mam!" And she excitedly stopped what she was doing, stood up, perked up, and said a joy-filled good morning back.

My soul started to glow and I believe that was a glimpse of what Mary meant when she said that her soul magnified the Lord. In that moment, my soul was thankful, grateful, and joyful. It was rejoicing and because of that, it exuded kindness, mercy, grace and love.

Mary's soul magnified the Lord because she had the best gift and promise of all. She was blessed by the Lord our God to bear His child. And she trusted in that and she was joyful of that. Joy and love, that is at the heart of the magnificat. And from joy and love come forth so many other things.

So let's forget about waiting for Christmas and let's head out into this day celebrating together that the Lord indeed has come to earth, Emmanuel, to save us and to pour his mercy upon us. To give us grace upon grace. Let's be reminded of that and pour that same mercy and grace out onto each other. Let's spread love, kindness, support and comfort, not anger, malice, wickedness or wrath. Let's be



patient with one another and bear each other's burdens, speaking words of encouragement and love rather than impatient barbs at one another.

I promise you, there are people sitting in the pews next to you, longing for the opportunity to connect more deeply with you and with others. Greet them. Be kind to them. Shake their hands and ask them their names. They, just like you, long to connect their small story with the larger stories of God and His people.

Writer Gareth Higgins says, "The times cry out for a better story to move us from separation, selfishness and scapegoating to connection, service and community. The work, play, thinking and dreaming we do in that direction is never in vain."

A while back I preached a sermon about putting on God's armor. And in that sermon I recited a prayer I had written that I thought would be beneficial to everyone. Several of you had told me that for a time you used that prayer on a daily basis and I am so thankful and grateful for that. So at this time, as we head into Christmas, I'd like to share another prayer with you from my heart. One I learned from preparing this sermon for us today.

It's a version of Mary's song that we can all sing in our hearts to God in the morning as we gather ourselves for the day. Or we can pray it silently while we sit on the subway on the way to our next meeting or in a cab on our way across town to see our friends. Really wherever and whenever. It could probably be put to use best any time you feel grumpy, crabby, tired or down. Or, then again, it could be used when you are upbeat and ready to charge into the day. Really, you can say it any time and use it like an injection, a booster shot of God in and through your soul.

So will you all join me in this prayer by closing your eyes, clasping your hands, bowing your heads, and joining your hearts with mine?

Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, as we head out into this day may we be filled with joy and love in our hearts; rejoicing in the fact that our savior Jesus



Christ has come into our lives. May our souls magnify you in all that we say and in all that we do. May our very beings, our nature, and the fabric of who we are radiate your love, your forgiveness, your mercy and your grace. May we be kind to everyone we encounter this day, and may we spread the Christmas message in a world that so desperately needs it.

*In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*