

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

LUKE 1

³⁹In those days Mary got up and hurried to the hill country, to a town of Judah. ⁴⁰She entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹Just as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! ⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!" ⁴⁶Then Mary said,

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,
⁴⁸because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm.
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones.
He has lifted up the lowly.
⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty.
⁵⁴He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,
⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.*



Was Mary really the right woman for the job? Who else could be the right woman for the job? Pharaoh's daughter, who drew out Moses; Esther, who saved her people; the daughter of Caiaphas; Deborah, who fought back the enemy?

You would need a magnifying glass to find Mary of Nazareth. But find Mary, Gabriel did. Gabriel brought her the message that she would be the mother of the incarnate Christ and therefore the mother of God. It has been said, "True humility never knows it is humble." So Mary sang her song of humble faith; there wasn't something about Mary. There was nothing about Mary—not if you asked her! The only thing she would claim for herself was that her God was the God of blessings. Mary was living testimony that ...

WHEN THE LORD COMES NEAR ... HE LIFTS UP THE HUMBLED

It's possible Mary was very poor and maybe an orphan, because the first person she sought after was not her mother or close friend, but her cousin, Elizabeth. This cousin was old enough to be her

mother and was clearly a mother figure for Mary. Of course Mary was looking for a woman to share this mysterious news, someone who could help her sort it all out.

Of course, Elizabeth was also with child in her own mysterious pregnancy, being an elderly mother-to-be. She was about six months along, and God was watching over her. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, her son John miraculously leapt in her womb. Then she blessed Mary, which was the first in a long line of generations who cannot help themselves but to bless this humble, favored mother.

If she went to hill country to a town of Judah, Mary was headed the same direction as Bethlehem. The place may have been Hebron, which would be an 80-mile journey and would typically take 4 days. She may have spent those four days treasuring up all her thoughts after the angel visited her. Those thoughts spilled out of her in a lovely song. In this song, historically called the "*Magnificat*," Mary became a great teacher, not of works, but of grace.

First notice that Mary did not say, "I proclaim and I rejoice," but, "*my soul*," and, "*my spirit*." Mary spent her soul and spirit (that is, her whole life and being, mind and strength) on magnifying God and was caught up with God's good and gracious will. Soul and spirit take hold of the incomprehensible. "Proclaim the greatness," or "magnify," acts like a book title. This is the theme of her canticle, and the point of her singing—to magnify the greatness of the Lord. We cannot possibly magnify God so far as His nature is concerned. He is unchangeable. But He is magnified in our knowledge and experience when we greatly esteem Him and highly regard Him.

Some take up magnifying God only when life is going well. Others magnify themselves. No matter how loud your song, you may not be singing the same as Mary. Korah's sons in Psa. 49:18 say, "*Men praise You [only] when You prosper them.*" Peter says in his first epistle 5:5, "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" The mightier you are, the more you must fear; the lowlier you are, the more you must take comfort. Mary remained simple and lowly. She did not self-exalt.

Mary knew she was unworthy of this great thing. She would not be upset about us saying so, either. She was astounded with God's grace. She doesn't want us to come to her. She wants us to come to God. "*He has looked with favor*" on me, "*regarded*" my lowly state. Humility is being brought low or being brought to nothing. It is a love and leaning to lowly and despised things. It doesn't enter the mind of the truly humble that they are humble. For if they knew that, humility would turn proud from contemplation of so fine a virtue. Hence, honors always come unexpectedly on them, and their exaltation is a surprise to them. For they have simply been content with a lowly station and never aspired to the heights.

But the falsely humble wonder why their glory and honor are so long in coming. Their secret false pride is not content with their low estate. This Mary never expected anything like being the mother of God. If Gabriel had come to Caiaphas' daughter, she would have thought, "It all makes sense to me. Of course the angel chose her." Caiaphas would have said the same thing. Instead, the angel came to our Mary.

The Lord did great things for her. Mary would bear the God-man. No one can say anything greater of her or to her, though he had as many tongues as there are leaves on the trees or grass in the fields or stars in the sky or sand by the sea. Mary understood grace. How does a creature deserve to become the mother of God? Though certain scribblers make much ado about her worthiness for this responsibility, we prefer to believe her rather than them. She says her low estate was regarded by God, not asking rewards for what she's done, but without any doing of hers. "*He has done great things for me.*"

From the mercy God has on generations, to the promise given to Abraham and their offspring forever, He makes good. Judah was a stump, but Jesse sprung a shoot, and David's line had developed considerably into a mighty tree. Mary was but a leaf on top of God's mighty family tree. Yet the thin red line of Jesus trained out in the Scriptures crossed right into her heart. Her child was a national treasure and true God, and He was about to change the world.

They used to have this "Teen Mom" TV show. The whole premise of the show was to explore the emotions and feelings of a pregnant teenager. Mary would have been so exciting to follow. She had big treasures in her heart. If you were a pregnant teen out of wedlock only from God, what would be your feelings? Mary takes the good and bad from God without whining or hoarding, but with praising; this is faith.

Where's your soul? Are you dejected? Are you in a lowly place? Would God need a magnifying glass to find you? He has. Psalm 32:8, "*I will counsel you and fix my eyes on you.*" Psalm 136, "*The Lord is on high, He looks upon the lowly, but the proud He has seen from afar.*" Jesus is your treasure, too. ⁵¹*He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered those who were proud in the imaginations of their hearts.* God often makes or breaks one creature by means of another, but it is different when God Himself works with His own arm. Then a thing is destroyed or raised up before anyone knows it, and no one sees it happen. For where man's strength ends, there God's strength begins. And when the oppression ends, it becomes obvious what great strength was hidden under the weakness through faith. All you had was God's grace alone. As Joel 3:10 says, "*Let the weak say I am strong.*"

Take Jesus Christ. He was powerless on the cross, yet there He performed His mightiest work and conquered sin, death, world, hell, devil, and all evil.

On the other hand, God withdraws His power from the self-exalted and lets them puff themselves up with their own power alone. For where man's strength begins, there God's strength ends. When their bubble is full-blown, and everyone supposes them to have won and overcome, and they feel smug in their achievement, then God bursts the bubble and it is all over. They don't even know what hit them. While they were self-exalting, waxing bold and strong, and puffing themselves up, they were forsaken by God. God's arm was not with them.

For Mary also says, ⁵²*He has brought down rulers from their thrones. He has lifted up the lowly.* Notice that Mary doesn't say God breaks the thrones themselves. Authority and rule must remain, nor does God destroy reason, wisdom, and rights. For if the world is to go on, these things must remain. But He does destroy pride and the proud, who use these things selfishly, abusing God's fair gifts and turning them against Him. Throughout all history, God raises up one kingdom after another and increases one people and diminishes another.

On the other hand, God comforts those who must suffer wrong and shame for the right, for truth, and for the Word. He raises up those who must suffer injury and evil. And as much as He comforts the lowly, so much He terrifies the ruler.

Therefore, wait for God in faith. Just a little longer. Lift up your hearts as Mary was lifted up. She invites you to the top of the tree, where you can see God's work on the ground. Who was the right woman for the job? Eve maybe, Sarah who waited, Esther who saved Jews from genocide, or Caiaphas' daughter. But He chose Mary, and by grace He's chosen you too; God is for you. This worship, this congregation, these people, this church, these words. Let's do what Mary did. Put a magnifying glass on "*God my Savior*"; in Jesus' name, Amen.