
My Soul Magnifies the Lord

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 16 August 2026

Galatians 4:4-7 • Luke 1:46-55



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.” Thus begins this beautiful reading, Mary’s song, also known by its Latin name, Magnificat, which of course means magnifies. Mary is praising God and giving thanks for God choosing her to be the mother of our Lord. She is the example we can all follow of joyous obedience to God’s will. When the Angel Gabriel told her what was to happen, she did not resist, she didn’t argue, she didn’t show any fear or worry. She was curious, and asked Gabriel, “How can this be, as I am a virgin?” After he explained, she readily assented: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:34,38). If Mary could so readily assent to bearing God’s son, with all the discomfort and risk of pregnancy and delivery, how much more could we assent to the usually lesser things God asks of us?

That phrase, “My soul magnifies the Lord,” always jumps out at me from this reading. What does it mean? We cannot possibly magnify the Lord, if by that we mean to make God bigger — God already fills the universe, and nothing we can do can affect God in any way, in that sense.

First, it means she praises the Lord. Mary was a good Jewish woman and loved God. Many times she would have humbly prayed for God’s blessing. To her, being the mother of the Son of God would be the greatest blessing she could ever expect, and she knows that God loves her and trusts her to carry out this important task of bearing and raising Jesus. She says, “From now on, all generations will call me blessed.” I believe that God gave her not only his Son to bear, but gave her the understanding of what it would mean. Not the whole story, not the complete understanding; for there would be many times when she would marvel and ponder, such as when the shepherds appeared at Jesus’ birth and bowed down, and when the Wise Men brought their presents. She is thankful and humbled by this great blessing.

Next, magnifying God means telling of his greatness. God sent his archangel to declare the good news to her, and will make this pregnancy happen to a virgin, one who has never been with a man. This is a great and unheard of miracle, and Mary points to that miracle as a great act of our God. She is aware of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who sings a similar song of thanksgiving for the birth of her son, when she had been barren before. But Samuel had a human father. This new thing God has done is a much greater miracle. The news of it will quickly spread through the region, and eventually around the world. So we may take magnify to mean to increase awareness of God and this miracle among God’s people. Mary foretells this happening when she sings, “All generations will call me blessed.” And indeed, generation after generation since Jesus’ birth have remembered Mary as the mother of Jesus.

Next, “magnifies” makes us think of examining something — like what you do with a magnifying glass. You use it to bring something into greater focus, and Mary at this point knows something that very few people know. She knows a bit about God’s great plan for her people. He is bringing a Saviour into the world. Gabriel tells her that Jesus will have the throne of King David, and his kingdom will have no end (Luke 1:32-33). God has let her into some special knowledge.

We should all be able to sing with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” For when we praise God, when we give thanks to God, when we sing hymns and worship songs, we give glory to God. That glory lies in recognising that all things come from God, and without him, we have and are nothing. In the sense we first looked at, to increase awareness of God and his works, we all have a

responsibility to magnify God. One of our churches is named after St Mary. If Mary magnifies the Lord, then so should we.

The remainder of Mary's song is a resumé of God's great acts and his essential nature. Mary speaks of God's:

- mercy: we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" as Paul says (Romans 3:23). We try our best, but we are all in need of God's mercy, which is freely given to us if we put our faith in Christ. His mercy and his grace are free gifts to us. We should teach our children to love and follow Christ, so that our faith will indeed go "from generation to generation."
- strength: although God is always ready to act with mercy, he will show his strength to those who continue to ignore or defy him, as is shown abundantly in the books of the Old Testament. God showed his strength in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt to the promised land and establishing them as his chosen people.
- judgment: God will always have an ear for the poor and downtrodden, lifting them up from poverty and despair, and bringing down the rich and privileged who do not acknowledge him.
- faith: God kept faith with Abraham, to whom he promised to make of his descendants a mighty people. We, God's people, may be faithless; God never is.

As we remember Mary on this day it is a good occasion to remind ourselves of the greatness of God, and how blessed we are to be God's people. Mary did not take God's love for granted, but sang his praises from her heart. Every time we sing a hymn or worship song, we too should sing from our hearts; for God is good, and his mercy and his love endure forever. Amen.