

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## ***The Magnificat***

*Luke 1:46-56*

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# The *Magnificat*

## Scripture

We are studying the Gospel of Luke in a sermon series I am calling “To Seek and To Save the Lost.” Today I would like to study the passage in which we learn about Mary’s song of praise that is known as “The *Magnificat*.”

Last week I mentioned that Luke gave us five nativity hymns. They are: Elizabeth’s *Benedicta* (1:42-45), Mary’s *Magnificat* (1:46-55), Zechariah’s *Benedictus* (1:68-79), the angels’ *Gloria* (2:14), and Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32). The name for each of these nativity hymns comes from the first word in the Latin translation of the Bible.

Last week we learned about Elizabeth’s *Benedicta*. Today, we will learn about Mary’s *Magnificat*. Theologian R. C. Sproul said that “Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, is one of the most important hymns in the history of the church.”<sup>1</sup> And Bible commentator William Barclay wrote, “It has been said that religion is the opiate of the people; but it has also been said that the *Magnificat* is the most revolutionary document in the world.”<sup>2</sup> These are strong words for a song that we do not know very well.

So, as I said, today we will learn about Mary’s *Magnificat*. And then, Lord willing, we will close our Worship Service today by singing a version of the *Magnificat*, which has been arranged by Keith and Kristyn Getty.

Let us now read Mary’s song of praise called the *Magnificat* in Luke 1:46-56:

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 22.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 19.

**<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,**

**“My soul magnifies the Lord,**

**<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his  
servant.**

**For behold, from now on all generations  
will call me blessed;**

**<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for  
me,  
and holy is his name.**

**<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.**

**<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the  
thoughts of their hearts;**

**<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their  
thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;**

**<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.**

**<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,**

**<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”**

**<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months  
and returned to her home. (Luke 1:46-56)**

## **Introduction**

Commentator Tom Wright asks the following question,  
“What would make you celebrate wildly, without inhibition?”

He then offers a number of suggestions.

Perhaps it would be the news that someone close to you  
who had been very sick was getting better and would soon be  
home.

Perhaps it would be the news that your country had es-

caped from tyranny and oppression, and could look forward to a new time of freedom and prosperity.

Perhaps it would be seeing that the floods, which had threatened your home, were going down again.

Perhaps it would be the message that all your money worries, or business worries, had been sorted out and you could relax.

Perhaps it would be the telephone call to say that you had been appointed to the job you had always longed for.

Whatever it might be, you would do things you normally would not.

You might dance round and round with a friend.

You might shout and throw your hat in the air.

You might phone everybody you could think of and invite them to a party.

You might sing a song. You might even make one up as you went along—probably out of snatches of poems and songs you already knew, or perhaps by adding your own new words to a great old hymn.

And if you lived in any kind of culture where rhythm and beat mattered, it would be the sort of song you could clap your hands to, or stamp on the ground.

“Now,” says Tom Wright, “read Mary’s song like that.”<sup>3</sup> Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, is an expression of enthusiastic, excited, and exuberant praise of God.

You may recall that after the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to conceive and bear the Son of God (1:31), he also told her that Elizabeth, her relative, had also conceived a son, and that she was in her sixth month of pregnancy (1:36). So Mary arose and went with haste to visit Elizabeth (1:39).

The meeting between the two relatives was a time of great joy and celebration. Elizabeth burst out singing the *Bene-*

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 13-14.

*dicta*, pronouncing blessing upon Mary, Jesus, and all who believe in Jesus. Mary responded with equal joy and elation by singing the *Magnificat*.

The *Magnificat* is a song of praise to God. Mary praises God for a number of his attributes.

## Lesson

In today's lesson we learn that there are several ways in which every Christian should praise God. We should praise God for:

1. His Condescension (1:46-48)
2. His Holiness (1:49)
3. His Mercy (1:50)
4. His Power (1:51)
5. His Sovereignty (1:52-53)
6. His Faithfulness (1:54-56)

### I. We Should Praise God for His Condescension (1:46-48)

First, we should praise God for his condescension.

Mary began her song by saying, in verses 46-47a, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

**Magnifies** translates a form of the verb *megalynō*, which literally means, “to make great,” “to magnify” (hence *Magnificat*) or “to enlarge”; figuratively it means, “to extol,” “to exalt,” “to celebrate,” “to esteem highly,” “to praise,” or “to glorify.”<sup>4</sup>

**Rejoices** is another intense word. It is an expression of supreme joy.

Mary began her song by expressing supreme joy and de-

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 79.

light in making God's name great. That is foundational to praising God. We are to magnify his name, and no one or nothing else.

But why was Mary expressing supreme delight and joy in making God's name great? It was because of God's condescension toward her. She praised God that he took notice of her. She said in verse 47b, **"For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."**

Mary was stunned that God would choose her. She knew that she was a sinner. She had just praised God as her **Savior**. Mary was not sinless or immaculate, as the Roman Catholic Church claims. She was very aware that she needed a **Savior** to deliver her from her sin. Mary would vehemently deny that the reason God chose her to conceive his Son was because she was without spot or blemish. As Bishop J. C. Ryle, in his rather antiquated English, said, "We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to reprove the honor paid by the Romish Church to the Virgin Mary, than the Virgin Mary herself."<sup>5</sup>

Mary was astonished that God had **looked** on her **humble estate**. She was just an ordinary girl from an insignificant Galilean village (Nazareth) that was scorned by other Israelites (John 1:46).

Mary did not view herself as exalted in any way. In fact, she saw herself as God's **servant** (see also 1:38). The Greek word for **servant** (*doule*) is the feminine form of the word for "slave." Mary was the first person in the New Testament to identify herself as the Lord's slave—a designation that became the norm for Christians after the death and resurrection of Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 7:22; Ephesians 6:6; Revelation 1:1).

And even though Mary was God's servant, she also recognized the incredible blessing that God was bestowing on her. She said in verse 48b, **"For behold, from now on all genera-**

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<sup>5</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke, Vol. 1* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 35-36.

**tions will call me blessed.”**

To be the mother of Jesus was an incredible honor. No other woman in all history will bear that honor. And yet, Mary recognized that God chose her, not because she was meritorious, but rather because of God’s grace. He condescended to bless Mary, and for that she praised him.

We also should praise God for his condescension. None of us has any merit to present to God. Rather, we deserve God’s judgment. But, in mercy God has reached down to us and given us his grace.

## **II. We Should Praise God for His Holiness (1:49)**

Second, we should praise God for his holiness.

Mary said in verse 49a, **“For he who is mighty has done great things for me.”**

Mary knew that she was blessed because God **is mighty** and that he had **done great things for** her. To become the mother of Jesus was astonishing. I am sure that she did not comprehend at the time all that would be involved in being the mother of Jesus. Nevertheless, she praised God for what he had done for her.

She praised God because she knew that **“holy is his name”** (1:49b). God’s holiness is his most dominant attribute. To be sure, God’s attributes consist of love, and mercy, and grace, and purity, and justice, and so on. But the attribute that is God’s most preeminent attribute is his holiness.

In Biblical times, when something important was said, the word was repeated. So, for example, when Jesus wanted to emphasize something to people, he did not simply say, “Truly.” No, he said, “Truly, truly” (see John 1:51; 3:3, 3:5, 3:11; 5:19). That meant that Jesus was about to say something really important.

But, to say something three times was really, really im-

portant. And the only thing in the entire Bible that is said three times has to do with the holiness of God. It is found in Isaiah's vision of the Lord in the Old Testament. When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne in the temple, he also saw angelic beings known as seraphim that called to one another and said,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory! (Isaiah 6:3)

The only other occasion when a word is repeated three times is found in the New Testament book of Revelation. John said that the four living creatures worshiping God around his throne in heaven never cease to say,

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come! (Revelation 4:8)

We should praise God for his holiness. We need to recognize that we are not coming into the presence of a buddy or pal. No. We are living in the presence of God who is altogether holy, and who cannot look at wrong (Habakkuk 1:13).

### III. We Should Praise God for His Mercy (1:50)

Third, we should praise God for his mercy.

Mary said in verse 50, **“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.”**

This is a rough quote of Psalm 103:17.

Actually, the *Magnificat* is filled with allusions to the Old Testament Scriptures. It is an indication that her heart and mind were saturated with the Scriptures. The *Magnificat* as a whole has lots of similarities to Hannah's prayer of thanks (1 Samuel 2:1-10), which she offered to God after he blessed her with a baby.

Furthermore, Mary began in verse 46 by praising God,



“My soul magnifies the Lord,” which echoes Psalm 34:2a, “My soul makes its boast in the Lord.” Her reference to God as her Savior (1:47) is reminiscent of Old Testament passages such as 2 Samuel 22:3; Isaiah 43:11; 45:21; and Hosea 13:4, while her statement, “For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant” (1:48) reflects Hannah’s prayer for a child in 1 Samuel 1:11. And there are several other allusions as well.

Mary was extremely well grounded in the Scriptures. She clearly knew her Bible and had memorized vast portions of Scripture. And remember, she was only thirteen years old!

Children, you are never too young to memorize God’s Word. God’s Word will be your sure and certain guide throughout your entire lives as you memorize it and live by it. The Psalmist says in Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Mary praised God for his mercy in verse 50, “**And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.**” **Those who fear** God are Christians. They are the ones who submit to God with reverence and respect. And, Mary said, God’s **mercy** is for them! They are blessed by his forgiveness, love, and grace.

We should praise God for his mercy. We deserved to go to hell for all eternity because we had broken God’s law. Yet, in spite of our sin and rebellion, God extended mercy to us. He loved us and set his heart upon us. He forgave us all our sin, not because we deserved forgiveness or because we had earned forgiveness, but rather because of his mercy.

#### **IV. We Should Praise God for His Power (1:51)**

Fourth, we should praise God for his power.

Mary said in verse 51a, “**He has shown strength with his arm.**”

This is a figure of speech. It reminds me of young boys

who are just learning about their muscles. They show others how much muscle they have in their arms. But, that is incomparable to the power of God. God is all-powerful.

And because God is all-powerful, **“He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts”** (1:51b). **The proud** are those who think that they are first and foremost. **The proud** are those who think that they know better than God. **The proud** are those who think that there is no God. And Mary said that because God is all-powerful, he would scatter them.

## V. We Should Praise God for His Sovereignty (1:52-53)

Fifth, we should praise God for his sovereignty.

Mary said in verses 52-53, **“He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”**

Mary demonstrated in these verses that she had a wonderful grasp of Old Testament history. She remembered how God had put down Pharaoh, and the Canaanites, and the Philistines, and Sennacherib, and Haman, and Belshazzar. She remembered how God had exalted Joseph and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel, and never allowed his chosen people to be completely destroyed. She remembered how God had fed the Israelites in the wilderness, and how in judgment he had sent the rich packing.

We should praise God for his sovereignty.

## VI. We Should Praise God for His Faithfulness (1:54-56)

And finally, we should praise God for his faithfulness.

Mary said in verses 54-55, **“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”**

Mary also understood God's covenant with his people. She knew that God had spoken to her fathers, and in particular to Abraham. God had promised to make from Abraham's spiritual seed a great nation that would be a blessing to the world. And now Mary saw that God was carrying out his covenant faithfulness in bringing the promised deliverer into the world through her. No wonder she was so filled with joy and excitement!

Luke simply concludes the *Magnificat* with the comment that **Mary remained with Elizabeth about three months and returned to her home (1:56).**

### Conclusion

So, having examined the various ways of praising God, every Christian should praise God.

Mary shows us that we should praise God for his condescension, his holiness, his mercy, his power, his sovereignty, and his covenant faithfulness. The *Magnificat* is rich in biblical truth, and we can spend many seasons of prayer using Mary's song as a model for praising God.

Are you a Christian? You should praise God for his condescension, his holiness, his mercy, his power, his sovereignty, and his covenant faithfulness that he has demonstrated to you. You have been adopted into the family of God by the finished work of Mary's son, Jesus, who was born, lived a perfect life, died to pay for your sin, and then was raised to life for your justification. You have a multitude of reasons to praise God.

Are you not yet a Christian? I invite you to ask God to give you the gift of faith. Ask God to help you believe that Jesus really is the sinless Savior of sinners. And then repent of your sin and ask God to forgive you. Then you too can join with Mary, the angels, and all the redeemed throughout history who praise God for all that he has done for you. Amen.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, I thank you for Mary's song, the *Magnificat*. We are grateful for this young girl who models for all believers how to praise you for your condescension, your holiness, your mercy, your power, your sovereignty, and your covenant faithfulness. Help us to make Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, our own song.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go into the world and praise God!