**4 Advent 2024**

The Magnificat is the Blessed Virgin Mary’s hymn of praise to the Lord. It is also known as the Canticle of Mary, one of the canticles in our Episcopal Morning Prayer service. Although the Magnificat has had numerous musical settings from such composers as Palestrina, Bach and Mozart, it can be recited as well as sung. Its name comes from the first line of its text in Latin (“Magnificat anima mea Dominum”) translated as ‘My soul magnifies the Lord.’ Mary proclaims the Lord’s greatness with power, yet with humility and grace here.

The *Magnificat* is perhaps the most beautiful poem in the entire Bible. But in addition to its beauty, it is a profound piece of biblical theology packed into only nine verse. It includes references and parallels to verses in Genesis, six Psalms, both 1st and 2nd Samuel, the prophets Isaiah, Zephaniah and Ezekiel, Job, and extra canonical books like Sirach and the Psalms of Solomon. Its core is Hannah’s Song from second Samuel. Hannah being a type of Mary. Mary and Luke certainly knew their Hebrew scriptures!

The Magnificat also provides great material for meditation on the Visitation, the second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary. When the angel Gabriel informs Mary that she is to be the Mother of God, he also tells her of her relative Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. By now Elizabeth is old, but she is enabled to conceive and bear a child. Ladies over 60, imagine having a baby now!?

After Mary gives her famous consent to becoming the Mother of God, -- “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38) -- she goes “with haste” (1:39) to help Elizabeth, who is delighted to see her. Our Lady then expresses her joy in the Magnificat.

We can admire Mary’s devotion (as well as her stamina!) in setting out on what must have been an arduous journey to go from Nazareth, where she lived, to a town in Judah where her cousin lived, about 70 miles away. (Remember, this was in an era when she couldn’t just hop in a car or a bus to get there!)

Clearly Mary, in hastening to help her cousin, is focused on service to others. In this way she glorifies the Lord in reflecting (and “magnifying”) His goodness and love. And, of course by becoming the Mother of God she will help Him redeem us for our salvation in His Passion and Resurrection!

Speaking of magnifying, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once referred to our Blessed Mother as being like “a magnifying glass that intensifies our love of her Son.” We’ve all used magnifying glasses and lenses. They make things bigger so we can see them better. Their used in telescopes on satellites that can see deep into the Universe.

Note that Mary’s joyful claim that “all generations shall call me blessed” in no way takes away from her humility. If she seems to boast here, it is much as St. Paul does later on in scripture when he says “whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord” (2 Cor 10:17), that is to say, *God’s work being done through us.*

In this regard, the Magnificat is more than a prayer of praise. It also reminds us about the essential link between humility, holiness, service and justice. Just as God has “regarded the lowliness of his handmaid” and “has done great things” for Mary in making her the Mother of his Son, so too “he has put down the mighty from their thrones (with his own might!) and has exalted the lowly.”

As her Divine Son later stressed in the gospels, “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matt 23:12, also in slightly different words in Luke 18:14 and Luke 14:11).

Jesus wasn’t saying anything new here, either! We read similar thoughts in throughout the Old Testament such as in the Psalms and in this example from the book of Sirach “Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.” (Sirach 3:19) Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up! Is a call and response song we sang in seminary and on Cursillo weekends.

The line about God filling “the hungry with good things” resonates later in the Gospels as well, when our Lord says “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be filled” (Matt 5:7). This serves as a good reminder for us to “stay hungry” for God’s graces in praying and in reading His word in scripture, but also to be involved in feeding hungry people, physically and spiritually.

And as for the rich being sent away empty? This line refers to those who live for wealth and power and feel they have everything figured out. These people in, effect, wish to be little gods rather than serve the One True God. How can our Lord fill those who are already full--*of themselves*?

How about us? Do our souls magnify the Lord? We may never be able to approach Him from Mary’s level of sanctity as the Mother of God. Still, we are all called to be saints nonetheless. Think of all the ways this community magnifies the Lord. Think of all the ways we make God more visible to people who may otherwise not see him.

Our good example, like our Blessed Mother’s, can help others in their spiritual growth. Do people see Christ’s love and goodness in us? (Yes!) Are we letting God work within us to accomplish His will? (Yes!) Does Mary help give us the graces we need to follow her Son and His Church in praying and serving others? (Yes!) And remember what Amen means…Yes! Let it be! May it be so!

**Amen and amen!!**