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## LET HEAVEN AND NATURE SING

### MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD

Luke 1:46-55

I would like to remind you that this Wednesday night at 7:00 pm is our church-wide prayer service. Here is the topic that we will look at Wednesday night: “How Can I Be Filled With the Holy Spirit?” So, come Wednesday night. There is childcare. There is youth. There is something for everyone, and there will be a teaching on this subject of the filling of the Holy Spirit, then a time of prayer for one another and with one another together for God’s purposes. That’s this Wednesday night at 7:00 pm.

We begin today our Christmas series. I want to pray, then introduce the series and share the passage, so let’s go to the Lord and ask for the help of his Holy Spirit as we open his word today. Lord, we come in this moment to just ask that you would help us to be without distraction, to be unhindered as we open your word. I pray that you would help me to proclaim the good news and the glory of Jesus Christ. I pray that you would help us all to hear, that we really would be unhindered and without distraction. Lord, I pray that we would respond from our hearts and from our minds and from our wills, that we would go forth in faith and in obedience and worship to you as a result of this time. Lord, help us, we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Our Christmas series is “Let Heaven and Nature Sing.” During the month of December we will be looking at a song from the gospel of Luke, a Christmas song that we find in the actual Christmas story in Luke’s gospel. Each song has a Christmas theme, and that will be our topic for each of the Sundays that we have in the month of December.

Today we look at Mary’s song, the Magnificat. Magnificat is a Latin word that is taken from the first phrase of Mary’s song: “My soul magnifies the Lord” – magnify. It’s going to be our passage for this morning. The verses of the song are verses 46 through 55, but I would like to begin reading with the previous paragraph, so let’s go to verse 39 of Luke Chapter 1. Our title today is “My Soul Magnifies the Lord.”

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb

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leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
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.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Our theme for today’s message and the theme for Mary’s song is humility. Mary herself is a model of humility and in her song she celebrates this virtue. She celebrates that God works in behalf of the lowly. God is near the brokenhearted. God has promised that he gives his kingdom to the poor in spirit. You see, Mary received a visit from the angel of God. She was told that she, a virgin, this young girl – that she is going to carry the Son of God, the Messiah of the world, and give birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. She receives the word of the Lord and commits to the mission that God gives her.

We read in this passage that upon this happening, she travels to her cousin Elizabeth’s house. Elizabeth is in old age. She and Zechariah are now old and they have not had any children. Elizabeth has been barren her whole life. Supernaturally, through the gift of God, they too are going to have a child, and this child is John the Baptist. He will be the forerunner of the Messiah. So Mary comes into the house and when these two pregnant women see each other there is an explosion of

joy that takes place. Elizabeth speaks this incredible blessing over Mary: “Blessed are you. You have received the word of the Lord. You have responded in faith.” She is just overcome. She is filled with the Spirit of God.

In the midst of this, Mary herself breaks out into this joyous celebration: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” This is a happy moment. These ladies are overcome with the joy of the Lord. Mary’s song captures this marvelous truth that God works in behalf of those who cannot help themselves. It’s a celebration of humility and how God helps those who are in need. Jesus has come as a Savior.

Hopefully, we understand and we probably need to be reminded that humility is really a great theme of Christmas, period. Jesus, the exalted Son of God, enters into humanity, not as a privileged ruler, but into a very average, very poor family. His parents have nowhere to stay. They stay in what we would call a stable, and Jesus is born in a manger that’s used to feed animals. Jesus, in this incredible act of condescension, humbles himself to come, that we might be saved.

Then Mary, this young teenager, maybe only 13 or 14 years of age – imagine this -- on Wednesday night go over to our Emerge group, maybe our Transfer group, and you find Mary there. When she is overcome with the goodness of God, she just begins to celebrate how God has seen her in her low estate. She is the handmaiden of the Lord. She is a servant, as she refers to herself, teaching us that humility – here is our main idea for today – humility is the door to God’s power that’s available for us in Jesus Christ. Humility is the door to God’s power. It leads to fantastic joy, real happiness.

So, Mary’s song is a song of exhilaration. I want to call it “informed exhilaration.” We are going to break it down in three parts. We are going to look at her song of praise around this theme of humility in these three parts.

I. Personal Experience, verses 46-49.

Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate” (the low status) “of his servant” (his handmaiden, his bondservant). “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me...” Mary has no imaginations of her own greatness or her own position, her own potential. She sees herself in this humble state, acknowledging that this is just the sheer grace of God. She already understands that she is giving birth to the Savior of the world, and she worships and celebrates God, her Savior.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in talking about Exodus Chapter 33, brings out an important truth, telling us that this proper assessment of ourselves is actually the first step to experiencing the power of God. Exodus 33 is a troubling section of scripture. The children of Israel have committed incredible sin. God supernaturally leads them out of slavery, miracle after miracle. They find themselves now delivered and being led. Moses, their leader, is there. Moses is on the mountain speaking with God, getting instruction, and what do they do? They have Aaron craft an idol, a golden calf. They bow

down to this idol and say, “This is our God. This is the one who saves us. This is the one who has delivered us.” And they began to take part in all kinds of sin.

The judgment of God falls on the people of God and it’s horrifying. The people are overcome with conviction over what they’ve done and they begin to realize the seriousness of it and to repent to God. And God tells Moses, “Listen, I know that I have promised to give the people the land.” He actually tells Moses, “These are your people and you’ve led them out.” God is suddenly distancing himself from his own people. He says, “I’m going to fulfill my promise to you, but I’m not going to go with you. I’m going to send an angel and you are going to go in and possess the land that I’ve promised to give you.”

If you know this incredible passage, Moses begins to call out to God. He says, “God, have mercy on us. If you don’t go with us, how will people know that we are actually your people?” This is a very important principle in scripture. This is the distinguishing mark of what it means to be the people of God: that God is present with us. We worship the Lord and we experience his presence together, church.

So, as Moses begins to pray, and throughout his prayer, this is what he says: “We are a stubborn, hard-hearted people.” He gets real with God. Do you see the principle? You cannot move forward with God until you see your own spiritual need. Until you understand your sin and the consequence of that sin – that it brings the judgment of God, that it brings death, that it brings eternal judgment and eternal death, and that you and I are powerless to solve that severe problem, and that we are powerless, really, to do the will of God, and that we are in a desperate place where we lack position, we lack purity, we lack power – there is no move of God until there is an understanding of our need before God.

When God begins to convict us of sin and we begin to see our need and we begin to see our powerlessness, well we can get discouraged. But it’s actually not the time for discouragement, because it’s an indication that God is opening our eyes to see who we are and what our need really is before the Lord. Then there are the promises in scripture that God meets us in that place of brokenness. Let me just share a sampling of those promises.

Proverbs 3:34: To the humble God gives favor.

James 4:6: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Psalm 138:6: For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly.

Isaiah 57:15: For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

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That's a magnificent promise. This is a picture of God – exalted, high, lifted up, holy, without sin. He dwells in holiness and he also dwells with the person who has a broken heart, who is contrite in spirit and broken over his or her sin.

Psalm 147:3: God heals the brokenhearted, he binds up their wounds.

Psalm 34:18: The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and he saves the crushed in spirit.

That's a beautiful promise, isn't it?

I have to just say from personal experience that on occasion, the older I get, I don't sleep all the way through the night. In fact, it feels like it's been decades since I slept all the way through the night. Occasionally, I will wake up in the middle of the night -- I don't know why -- I'll just be anxious and I'll feel like just life is too much. So many times that moment leads to the sweetest times in the presence of the Lord -- to get up and just pray and seek the Lord. If it sounds like, "Wow, he's really spiritual. He's just getting up in the middle of the night and praying." Listen, the point is that I'm an anxious wreck! I'm just crying out, "God, I need you! Lord, you gave me these kids. They're yours. And they cost a lot." You get the picture, right? You know, sometimes it doesn't take a lot to humble us. Just a good cold will get you on your knees. And the promise of scripture is that God is near those who are crushed in spirit.

If it seems like I'm making light, I understand. Some of you say, "I am crushed in spirit. This is not the trial of daily life and just the pressures of life. I feel, Brian, like I'm not going to make it through this." So many promises of God. Do you see the picture of Mary? This teenager, the little girl, this young lady saying, "I'm a nobody and God chose me! God dwells with those who are in low position. He lifts up the lowly. He helps those in need. He uses as his instrument the powerless."

This is what gives way to her informed exhilaration -- a real understanding of her own need. #1 -- Personal Experience.

## II. The Unchanging Character of God.

This is the second element of this song of praise, this amazing, informed, exhilaration. Based on the unchanging character of God, she sees her own need and that God has met her in her humility, in her humble estate. Now, she makes a transition. She says, "You know what? This is true, not just for me. This is true for everyone, and I can say that because of who God is, because of his unchanging nature, because of his unchanging character."

The verses here are the very end of 49 (49b) through 53. Coming out of this summary of her own experience, she begins to rehearse, recite the nature of God: "...and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him." That's her point. If you have a desire to worship God, if you desire to revere and to be in awe of God, this same mercy is available for you. "...holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

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He has shown strength with his arm..." Just begin to look at the character of God that's being unveiled. He is holy. He is merciful. From generation to generation. The idea there is faithfulness. He is merciful. He is holy. He is faithful. He is powerful, verse 51: "He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate..."

Do you see now how this theme of humility is being developed? She is saying, "Out of the nature of who God is: holy, just, sovereign, and yet merciful, all who fear him, he lifts up." If you feel like you've been under the thumb of someone else your entire life, then why don't you just get out from under that and climb into the hand of God and let him take care of you, celebrating the attributes of who God is?

John Livingston, not of Africa fame, but in Europe, in Kilsyth, Scotland, in the year 1630, was a pastor. He was a part of a series of meetings that took place over the weekend. There was preaching and worship and these pastors had been sharing. Sunday night comes and the meetings are over and they are doing what we might call a recap. They are sharing. They are fellowshiping together and praying together, and they ask Livingston to preach on Monday morning. So Livingston goes home and on Monday morning he goes out into the field and begins to pray to God.

The meetings are over. The weekend is over and he is going to meet with whoever will come on Monday. And there in this field he is praying to God. All of a sudden he has this epiphany. He is overcome with the weight of what he has been called to do, and he feels completely unworthy. He finds himself there in this field saying, "God, I am unworthy to preach your word, and the responsibility of this, and the magnitude of it is too much." He literally tells God he is going to run. Instead of showing up to preach, he is going to run. And he has an experience with God. God meets him there in the field, in this place of telling God of his own unworthiness, and God tells him to go back and to preach. So he does.

He goes back and he preaches out of Ezekiel 36. He takes 90 minutes, an hour and a half, to explain the text. Then for another hour he applies the text. Just stop for a minute. Monday morning. You've been in church all weekend. Two and a half hour sermon. I mean, I work to hold your attention for 40 minutes. Two and a half hours he preaches. He is in this little place in Scotland, a place I've never heard of – 500 people get saved. You wouldn't even think there are 500 people there! And when I say 500 people get saved, I mean 500 people are recorded as joining the church.

Do you see the principle? "God, I can't do this. Find someone else. I'm running." Who knows what went into the mix of the emotion of that morning -- tired from serving, maybe feeling ineffective after pouring himself out in ministry, and the Lord saying, "No, no. I have chosen you to do this. Go and be faithful and preach and watch what I'll do." Then – boom!

You see, this is the nature of God – to exalt himself as he works through the humble. He is near the brokenhearted, he lifts up the lowly, and he powerfully uses the powerless. Mary celebrates that her experience can be your experience

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because of who God is. God is holy. He is just. He will not overlook or ignore sin, but he is merciful, and he has provided for the forgiveness of our sin. He is merciful to all who fear him who will trust in Jesus Christ. Psalm 51:17: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

So, #1 – A Personal Experience. #2 – The Unchanging Nature or Character of God.

III. Relationship. Covenant Relationship.

She ends in verses 54 and 55, celebrating that the people of God are in covenant with God. What do I mean by covenant? I mean this is a relationship that cannot be broken. This is a relationship where one party (in this case God) says, “Rather than be unfaithful, rather than our relationship be broken, I will die.” Of course, literally that’s what Jesus did for us to bring us into this relationship. So this is what she does. She reaches back in history and brings the promises of God forward, saying, “We are your people, we are in covenant.” The idea here is that the humble experience the power of God when they are in relationship with God, when they are in covenant relationship with God.

If you are here today, that’s what God wants with you. He wants to have a personal relationship with you. As you come and you admit your need, your sin, the judgment that we all deserve for that sin, Jesus Christ offers to you the free grace of salvation, the gift of salvation. If you say: “Yes, that’s me. I am without position. I am without power. I am without purity. I am in a place of need. I am coming to receive,” God pours out his mercy, his forgiveness, his power on you and in your behalf.

So she says, “He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy (and celebration of his mercy) as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” She goes all the way back to Genesis 12 and she says, “This moment in history is the fulfillment of Genesis 12.” Do you know him? Here is the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, confessing that she is a part of a very ancient plan of God to bring us into relationship with him, inviting you to do the very same.

Samuel Pearce was a pastor who died in 1799. He was only 33 years of age when he died of tuberculosis. He left five children at 33 years of age. When he was dying, his wife took a hymn of John Newton. John Newton was the author of “Amazing Grace,” captain of a slave ship, marvelously converted – his own life just a tribute to how God’s grace saves the humble. She read this verse from a Newton hymn: “Since all that I meet shall work for my good, the bitter is sweet, the medicine is food. Though painful at present, twill cease before long, and then oh how pleasant the conqueror’s song.” She reads this to her husband and he seizes on this last phrase: the conqueror’s song. He repeats it over and over, and he dies.

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Well, Newton was now an old man, almost in his eighties. It's not even so much about age, but Newton had this keen awareness that he was aging out and that his ministry was coming to an end. He becomes aware of this and he writes Samuel Pearce's widow a letter. Newton had lost his own wife. His testimony was that his relationship with his wife meant so much to him that he thought at times it might mean too much to him. So grieving, he writes this widow. He is identifying with her loss through his own loss and he says this: "You are a widow, yet not strictly so, for your Maker, your Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts is still your husband. He is unchangeably the same, and because he lives, you shall live also."

I want you to catch what's happening here, because I am aware that as we come to a season of Christmas, we start to look at a theme of humility, and for some of you, many of you – this is a painful time for you. You are a widow or a widower. You have had great loss in your family, and when the holidays come, it's difficult. It's difficult because you remember what you no longer have. The holidays accent absence and brokenness for you.

Newton is writing this letter in late November, right before Christmas, and he is comforting this widow. The first thing he says to her is: "Listen, you are part of the people of God. You feel alone, but you are not alone because God is your husband." Then he continues by saying to her, "You know, you and your husband, no doubt, alone and together, prayed many prayers for your children. And I want to tell you, based on the promises of scripture, God answers prayer." Then he quotes to her a specific promise from Jeremiah 49:11, about God taking care of widows and the fatherless. Then he ends with this. He says, "Depend upon God's promises, madam. They will bear you up. He has not bid his people seek his face in vain. All hearts and means are in his hands, and he could as easily provide for 50 children if you had so many, as for five, or for one." Newton had one surviving child that they had adopted.

The question is: Are you in covenant relationship with God? If so, God invites you to experience his power through your humility. I want to end by giving you some takeaways. I'm going to give you 99 things to do, 99 takeaways. Thank you, Michelle, for laughing. Four.

1. Inform yourself.

Mary's song is informed exhilaration. It has substance to it. Here is the principle: Greater understanding about God will increase your capacity for joy and worship. So, you're standing here on Sunday morning and you're looking at the words. It's not just three or four words repeated over and over, but there are verses, there is substance, there is content. There is content about your sin, God's wrath against sin, judgment, God's payment, the eternal ramifications of that. You are studying. You are growing in your mind, and that understanding connects to your personal experience. You are thinking about your deliverances from sin, and how you tasted the death that your sin brings. Your personal experience flowing together with scriptural understanding enlarges your heart and your capacity to understand, to comprehend the work of God in your own life, and your worship capacity is increasing.

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You might say it like this: Mind plus heart (intellect plus desires and emotion) plus will (which is obedience) equals multiplied joy. God's great commandment to you is to love God with all you are – your mind, your heart, your soul. So give yourself to that wholeness in the pursuit of God. Inform yourself, #1.

2. Renounce selfish ambition.

James 3:16: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice." There are side effects to selfish ambition. Mary is saying, "I'm the handmaiden of the Lord. Use me. It's about your glory." Jonathan Edwards said it this way: "Love and humility are the two things more contrary to the devil than anything in the entire world." Put in the positive: "The character of the devil, above all things, consists of pride and malice." James 3:16: Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, you are going to have all kinds of disorder and division. This is the second takeaway: Renounce the pursuit of your own glory. Renounce it as a pastor, as a business person, as a husband, as a father, as a wife. Seek the glory of God. This is how humility is expressed and joy is experienced.

3. Admit your need and embrace your Savior.

In verse 48 Mary says, "God has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." There is something interesting there. "From now on I will always be viewed differently." Do you know what that is? That's the language of conversion. She has had a meeting with God. God has done something in her life and she is saying, "I will never ever be the same and people will never look at me the same."

There is a place where you admit your need before God, and you embrace Jesus as your sufficiency in all things. He is your Savior, and you, my friend, will never be the same.

4. Revel in your weakness.

Perhaps the hardest for us, but maybe where we really come down to live out this message, if we are Christians: Revel in your weakness. Humility is the door to God's power. Many times God is just wanting us to embrace our dependence on him. You know, there are so many times – perhaps you can identify with this -- where you say, "Lord, I just wish I was a little different in this area, maybe a lot different, that I really didn't struggle with this so much. What I'm really saying is, God, you could have done just a little bit better in making me." And God is saying, "Son, in those points of weakness, I meet you with my grace and my power. Don't resent it." Listen to the words of Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed."

## Let Heaven and Nature Sing – My Soul Magnifies The Lord

Luke 1:46-55 | Sunday, December 4, 2016 | By Brian Brookins

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Let's pray.