



December 18, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem."
Luke 2:4

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A Mother Magnifies

Mary was like most other mothers in wanting to see her child become great, but her famous *Magnificat* prayer in response to the angelic announcement meant much more than that! "My soul **magnifies** the Lord." What was she feeling? What was she trying to say?

It's definitely an expression of praise to God in which we can all join her; we use similar phrases in our weekly worship services. But for Mary the meaning was more intense --- even radical --- because the Baby being formed inside of her was the actual Presence of God! Entrusted to her maternal care! As an imperfect human person, she would certainly detract from his greatness, not enhance it.

But No; she had the faith to believe that God would find a way to be magnified through her! If I were Mary, I think I'd have to pray, "Lord, please don't let my weaknesses and frailties diminish your glory too much." However, the angelic messenger had said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35). Mary took this literally and just accepted it as the Lord's work. She had nothing to offer; there was nothing in her that could enhance God's reputation, but neither was there much in her that would get in God's way.

In her prayer she describes herself as being a "servant" ("handmaid of the Lord" in the *King James Version*) of "lowly estate" (verse 48) and as being among those who were poor and "hungry" (verse 53). It was because she had little hope of ever amounting to anything on her own that God could be so effectively magnified through her life.

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Unfortunately, throughout church history, more and more glory has been attached to Mary herself. Extra-Biblical folk beliefs have solidified into teachings and then into dogmatic pronouncements: that Mary herself was conceived miraculously, that she never committed any sin, that she remained a virgin throughout her life, that at the end of her days she was "assumed" into heaven without dying. Many Catholics pray to her more than to God, refer to her as "Our Lady," the "Mother of God" and the "Queen of Heaven." The Roman Catholic Church has some great insights into the Faith, but also some profound blind spots, and the worship of Mary is one of the worst. Mary would be shocked and embarrassed by it all. She never saw herself as anything more than "a handmaid of the Lord."

Judging by human standards, Mary was a classic loser. But ironically, a loser can only win with God. There's no way to go but up. A person who, like Mary, knows this about her- or himself is just the kind of human agent God can use best. His infinite power can be seen most clearly in a person who is very weak and limited, because when something good happens --- like Love, or Grace, or Forgiveness, or Peace --- it's got to be God! He's magnified.

Maybe that's the major lesson to be learned from Mary's experience.

Pastor George Van Alstine