

Text: Luke 1:39-56

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

I got stuck on the first line of Mary’s song this week. Stuck so hard it just wouldn’t get out of my mind. I couldn’t even get past it to the rest of the Magnificat.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

What does it mean, I began to wonder, to magnify God? And what does it mean for a “soul” to do that? Not my lips, not my hands, not my heart, but my soul.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

In the reading from Luke we travel with Mary as she goes “with haste” to see her cousin Elizabeth. Imagine the scene, if you will. Mary has just had a visit from an angel who tells her that the Holy Spirit is going to come upon her and make her pregnant. And not only that, but that the child to be born will be called the Son of God.

It is no wonder, then, that she goes “with haste” to see her cousin. No small journey, she would have traveled at least 40 miles - a trip that would have taken several days. So she arrives at Elizabeth’s house. Maybe she is hungry, tired, dirty, worn out from the journey. Perhaps she is confused, wondering if she dreamed the whole thing, wondering if she is really going to bring the Son of God into the world. The Son of God!

So Elizabeth opens the door and Mary greets her. We don’t know what she said, but I can only imagine it might have been something like, “You’ll never guess what just happened to me.”

Or maybe she told Elizabeth in a rush of pent up words, “An angel of God came and said God’s spirit was going to give me a baby, and it’s going to be God’s Son!”

We don’t know what she said. But Elizabeth, before she could even respond, felt the soul of her unborn child, reach out to the soul of the unborn child in Mary’s womb. Soul to soul, John and Jesus, Elizabeth and Mary.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

My soul. My *psu-kay* in Greek, meaning, my life force: that which causes me to have being; the center of everything in me that is not flesh and blood. My soul magnifies the lord.

When we look through a magnifying glass, we often experience an “aha” moment as the thing we couldn’t see before suddenly becomes clear, and large, and obvious. Aha, I see the words on the page! Aha, I see that a spider has lots of eyes! Aha! I see the love of God manifest in you.

My soul magnifies the Lord.

The other day I turned on the radio and a station was playing “O Holy Night.” As I listened, I heard these words, as if for the first time: “Long lay the world in sin and error pining / ‘Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth. / A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices / For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”

The soul felt its worth. The weary world rejoices.

Behind the glitter, behind the reindeer, behind the presents, behind the tree, the world and, perhaps, our souls, are weary. Some of us are fighting a battle in a far off land; some of us are searching for work, wondering how long we can keep our house,

or our car; some of us lack essential healthcare; some of us are sick; some are grieving; some are skeptical, some are optimistic.

Mary rushed to Elizabeth; a long journey. Tired from the journey, perhaps dirty and hungry, she arrived weary, to Elizabeth's house. But her weariness was quickly dispelled. Any questions she had were quickly discarded. Any soul weary concerns were forgotten. For in that moment she was filled with the Holy Spirit, and gave up her song to God. In that moment, as the soul of John reached out to the soul of Jesus, and Elizabeth reached out to Mary, the God they had wondered about, the God they had heard about, the God they worshipped was manifest, magnified, in the soul of Mary, in the babe in her womb. And a weary world, a weary pair of cousins, rejoiced.

A friend told me this story the other day. A woman and a young girl she cares for were unpacking the manger scene. As they unpacked the beautiful, life-like figurines, the little girl paused. "I thought that you said Jesus was poor," she exclaimed. "He was," said the woman. "He was born in a stable, and he was a carpenter..." "Then why is Mary so pretty?" asked the child. "And I thought you said that Mary and Joseph traveled really far, and were tired. And mangers are dirty! Why is Mary so clean and pretty?" "Well," the woman was a bit stumped. "Well," she said, "we cleaned her up a bit for this." The little girl thought. "I think," she said, "I think I like her better a little dirty."

My soul magnifies the Lord.

All that is in me, that is not flesh and blood, manifests the love of God.

We are a little dirty. We are weary. But when our souls reach out to Jesus, when we are touched by his glory, we shine; pretty, and new, and clean. And God is revealed through us to a weary world.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting she was filled with the Holy Spirit. And Mary sang.
Sang to God, and to a weary world, and to us: My soul magnifies the Lord!

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