



# First United Church of Oak Park

## Mary's Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55

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Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 46-55

46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

50 His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Will you pray with me?

Gracious God, in your presence we humbly ask that you send your spirit to us, inspire us, and may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you. Amen.

Just over a month ago, I stood up here and talked to you about Hannah's song from the book of 1 Samuel. I talked about how it should be revered, not just because it's a beautiful hymn of praise, but because it is one woman's honest practice of gratitude. I mentioned then that Hannah's song was the inspiration for Mary's Magnificat and here we are on the fourth Sunday of advent, Mary's Magnificat Sunday, and we have lit the candle of love.

I struggled with what message to bring you today. With Christmas eve being tomorrow, it's easy to want to just focus on giving a message of love and talking about the picture-perfect, feel good story of Mary. But if the social realities of the context we currently live in have taught me anything it's that there is always more to the story; we just have to be willing to look for it and listen to it.

Women do not have a dominant role in the Bible; named women are few and far between. So whenever there is a woman saying something, and/or a woman who has a name, I perk up. I want to really hear what she is saying, not just on a surface level. I want to give her a voice or give space for her voice to be heard and understood. I want to do her justice.

Mary is one of these few and far between women and I have grown up feeling like Mary has not gotten the due she deserves or the respect for that matter. Too often we use her young age and the signifier of 'virgin' to paint her as naïve and therefore easy to control or manipulate. We portray her role in the narrative of Jesus' birth as a passive character, just a vessel. Her whole identity has become, "The virgin Mary" or "Mary the mother of Jesus." Not, "Mary the brave, strong rebel, and heroine of our story."

Mary was living in the time of the Roman Empire when Cesar Augustus reigned and was not only a political leader but considered a divine being. Her people lived truly difficult lives. They were oppressed, the targets of violence including rape, enslavement, and murder. Because of the lack of separation of religion and politics and Cesar's status of political leader and son of God, the Jewish people believed the only way they could possibly overcome the imperial power of Rome was through divine intervention and that their God would have to step in.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God constantly tries to intervene in the suffering of the Jewish people. God continually promises to save the Israelites. This is the theme and plot of the entire story. And the narrative of the annunciation, when the angel announced Mary's pregnancy, was God's promise of rescuing the oppressed Jewish people coming to fruition through the incarnation of Jesus, and through Mary. By agreeing to be the mother of this child, she is essentially resisting the empire and doing her part to save her people.

Mary takes on this role, despite the danger it put her in and despite what others would say about her, out of a fierce love for her people. Mary's Magnificat is a love song to her people who have struggled for so long. Mary's Magnificat foreshadows the loving person Jesus would be; someone who cares about the social realities of the people, someone who loves and cares for the marginalized and oppressed, someone to feed the hungry and overthrow the powerful, a leader willing to be a servant themselves. Someone who preaches and teaches the ways of peace and love and talks about a kingdom that is ruled with peace and love, the opposite of the empire they were living in. God sought out Mary, not because she was weak or naïve or easy to control or manipulate but because she was a faithful activist, whose love for her people gave her the strength and courage she needed to do something awesome.

So today I do get to give you a message about love. God's love for the Jewish people meant God was willing to be born into the world and suffer among us. Mary's love for her people meant she was willing to sacrifice her safety, her body, and her reputation for the hope that the child she carried would bring. And the birth of Jesus came with a promise of love for all people.

But we know that Mary's Magnificat is more than just a message of love, just like Hannah's song was more than just praise for God. Mary's Magnificat is a beautiful piece of poetry that packs a punch of resistance, rebellion, strength, bravery, and courage when we consider the social context. It is a love song.

I hope that in this advent season and throughout your Christmas celebrations you are able to hear this message of love, and that you are inspired to share it with all people, because like Mary the power of love should not be underestimated. Amen.