

## **Scripture**

Luke 1: 46-49

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

*(New International Version)*

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## **Message**

Pastor Dennis

### *Fulfillment Leads to Fulfillment*

Big Idea: Mary sees her role as God-Bearer as a part of the fulfillment of God's grand plan and as a result, she is fulfilled.

The first two chapters of Luke provide to us poetry that provides the Latin text for numerous pieces of music – and all three are in some way about the idea of blessing ...

One is the song of Zachariah – which offers a blessing to God for the Birth of his Son – who will be John the Baptist – *Benedictus* ...

Another is the blessing of the Devout Jew Simeon who has seen the Christ Child and testifies that he has seen the evidence of God's salvation plan ... and it is called the *Nunc Dimitis* ... often sung at high church funerals which ask that we now ask that God bless the dismissal of God's servant in peace ...

Today's scripture piece is called the *Magnificat* ... and there are many musical settings for this poetry ...

For example, the English Composer – John Rutter – gives it to as "*magnificat, mangnifcat, anima mea, dominus*"

*Magnificat* – glorifies  
*Anima mea* – my soul  
*Dominus* – Lord ...

My soul glorifies the Lord ...

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It would be so wonderful if we could ourselves feel that way on this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, but then ... we might ask, what on earth does Mary have to be so happy about ...

She is not yet married ...

Her betrothal to Joseph has to be at risk due to her pregnancy ...

She is at risk of being stoned to death for the sin of being pregnant and not married ...

What reason does she have to be so happy, so overjoyed, so filled with hope!

It would seem that based on the events that Mary is experiencing that she would have more reason to be unhappy than so overjoyed ...

But ... the text tells us ... that instead of being consumed with gloom and concern, Mary instead says:

"My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

*(New International Version)*

Mary isn't filled with gloom and concern because Mary sees herself playing a role as part of the fulfillment of God's salvation plan ... and as a result, she is fulfilled ...

God has a plan ... a salvation plan for all of God's peoples ... Jesus is part of the fulfillment of that salvation plan ... and Mary has a God-bearing role within that salvation plan ...

God has a plan ... and because Mary knows she the real story of how she has become pregnant ... that she has nothing to fear ...

God has a plan ....

If Mary's poetic outburst sounds familiar, it might be because it echoes Old Testament language from a perspective that sees the present in light of God's consistent activity throughout time.

Notice how her praise is personal--her *soul* and *spirit* offer praise.

She *glorifies the Lord*. That means her words acknowledge God's goodness and bring attention to him like a huge neon light shining out from a building.

And Mary approaches the scene in humility ... offering service to the mighty one that is God. Her humble perspective forms the basis of her gratitude. The exemplary character of Mary grows out of her understanding of God's character. God owes her nothing; she owes God everything. All the good things that come from his hand are acts of grace.

Despite her humble position, she will be honored by *all generations*. Here is the reason for both her honor and her praise--God the Almighty has done great things on her behalf. Generations will see her as an example of a simple human touched by divine power and presence. But it is God who is unique; it is God who is the object of her praise, as her declaration of his holiness makes clear.

He is the one "set apart" who is worthy of praise. For her, his name is wonderful because his character is true.

And it is in the worthiness and reliability of God's character, that we can look to understanding fulfillment in two different ways.

One has to do with the fulfillment of a prior covenantal promise ... and that promise, that plan surrounding that promise will be realized through Jesus ...

And the other has to do with fulfillment as an inner contentment in being part of this plan ...

*In the fulfillment of God's plan, Mary finds fulfillment ... (repeat that)*

Mary is fulfilled because God has chosen her for fulfillment ...

Now I know, some people you may know might say ... I don't need God in order to be fulfilled ... I can find inner contentment without God ...

C. S. Lewis suggests you can't ... he tells us ...

British theologian C.S. Lewis described happiness 50 years ago in terms that make even more sense today in our commuter-driven society:

A car is made to run on petrol [gasoline], and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is

no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.<sup>1</sup>

We asked during our Litany ... “As people of the covenant, let us seek God's will for our lives – it is in finding God's will for us, that we find fulfillment.”

Some Illustrations of how people are fulfilled ...Bishop Schnase of the Missouri Conference offers us some thoughts:

- ✦ Radical Hospitality: Personal Stories from the Stratmoor Hills Community ...
- ✦ Passionate Worship: Personal Stories from the Stratmoor Hills Community ...
- ✦ Intentional Faith Development: Personal Stories from the Stratmoor Hills Community ...
- ✦ Risk Taking Mission and Service: Personal Stories from the Stratmoor Hills Community ...
- ✦ Extravagant Generosity: Last year capital campaign and this year's plan to support the staff ... level of giving has risen ...

I could go on ... but I leave it to you to look around and ask how are you fulfilling God's plan, and have been led to a place of fulfillment ....?

*“magnificat, mangnifcat, anima mea, dominus”* (Sing from the Rutter)

Can you imagine the joy that Mary must have been feeling when she sang a different version of those words?

Can you imagine the joy – no, the inner peace, the fulfillment -- that you might feel when you realize that you are an instrument of the fulfillment of God's plan ....?

Isn't that the theme of Frank Capra's classic film “A Wonderful Life” – where George Bailey discovers the joy he has brought others by affirming their worthiness and sacredness.

If we have learned one thing over the past two-thousand years it is that in bringing joy to ourselves is really more about being of value to others, than any other single thing. – and we know that ... 60% percent of people surveyed in 2004 answered that success is defined in terms of value to someone, and not about wealth or profit or all of that ...

And what is of greater value to someone else, than giving them a glimpse of who you can be ... the inner peace ... the inner contentment ... the fulfillment ... you receive when you are part of the fulfillment of God's salvation history?

What would it be like if during this advent/Christmas season we could say to God that we are instruments in the fulfillment of God's salvation plans and as a result of that, we are fulfilled ...

C.S. Lewis phrase about Petrol and what fuels us is accurate ... we are constructed in such a way so that we can be people of fulfillment only when we allow God into our hearts. Otherwise, we are just trying to run a car on a fuel that it is not made for ...

We are truly called to see in Mary the joy of being an instrument of God's salvation story ...

*“magnificat, mangnifcat, anima mea, dominus”* (Sing from the Rutter)

Mary ... a story of finding fulfillment, in fulfillment ...

Mary ... her story is our story ...

Mary ... are you ready to sing in joy as Mary sang ...?

*And Mary said:*

*“My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.*

The word of God for the people of God ...

This Sermon was delivered at Stratmoor Hills UMC in Colorado Springs on December 21, 2008. The copyright for material that is not foot-noted belongs to C. Dennis Shaw and dates from December 21, 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> *C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (Harper Collins, 1952) p.50;*