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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 25, 2015
Christmas Day

Scripture Lessons: Micah 5:2-5a; Titus 3:4-7; Matthew 1:18-25
Hymns: 136; 76; 92; 87; (89:1,5) 94; 97

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 1:46-47

And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Christmas is Here!

We have been getting ready for this day and now it's here! And it seemed to come too fast. There was so much to do. But we were not allowing all that peripheral stuff to distract us from the need to be ready for the Lord's appearing. The day that we celebrate today actually commemorates an event that took place more than 2000 years ago, but it was the greatest day in the history of the world. It was a day that was the fulfillment of hope, the hopes of many faithful believers who had been watching, who had been preparing their hearts, who had been rejoicing in the grace of God. That day of Jesus' birth was the fulfillment of a great hope, the hope of our redemption.

Now we live in Advent readiness, and on this Christmas Day as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus in Bethlehem, we also live in hope as we watch, as we prepare, and as we rejoice. Oh, how the Spirit of our God lifts our hearts so that we lift up our voices in rejoicing! This is not a superficial joy; this is the joy of our salvation that finds its fulfillment, its substance in the love and kindness of God as it appeared in the person of Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem.

So it is that today we join Mary, the mother of our Lord and we --

THEME: Magnify the Lord.

To magnify something means to make it appear larger, right? As my eyes age I find myself looking for a magnifying glass so I can make small type appear larger. I have even purchased a magnifier that has a floor stand so I can use it for reading. This morning we don't need a magnifying glass to make the Lord look bigger. We simply need to realize how great the Lord actually is, and that is easily done as we look at this great work of salvation that was set in motion when Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

The first part of making the Lord bigger is realizing how small we are before the Lord. We learn a wonderful lesson from Mary about --

I. Humility.

Mary acknowledged that she was not worthy of the grace that was being bestowed upon her by the Lord. She too was but a lowly sinner who needed to be delivered from her sin. And yet the Lord chose Mary, and what marvelous even incredible things the Lord would bring into her life! Mary didn't object, thinking of how the Lord's plan for her would interfere with her plans for life. No, that was not at all where Mary's thoughts went with this imposition that the Lord brought into her life. She regarded the Lord as being benevolent in all these things. Mary sang of this in her song to Elizabeth recorded for our learning.

Mary said

Luke 1:47-48 “My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

Mary made no claims of greatness or merit before anyone, not before the Lord, and not before her cousin Elizabeth. She acknowledged her lowly estate. It was the Lord who brought His power into Mary’s life. It was the Lord’s work and the Lord’s presence that was great in Mary’s life so that she was blessed.

And so it is for us also. What we are observing is the greatness of the Lord’s love and compassion. He saw us in our fallen state and loved us. He loved us even when we were still sinners. Sin is rebellion against God. The Lord saw the enmity of the carnal mind, that fleshly mind which we all possessed, and still He came to us to call us to be His own! What the Lord has done for and in us is truly great and wonderful. We magnify the Lord with Mary when we respond in faith to the Lord’s presence in our lives:

Luke 1:38 “Behold the *servant* of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

A trusting submission to the Word of God in our lives, acknowledging the work of salvation which He has wrought in and for us magnifies the Lord!

Consider --

II. The great salvation which God alone could bring

In her song of praise Mary sang:

Luke 1:50-51 “His mercy *is* on those who fear Him From generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

Mary’s words speak of the greatness of God’s salvation in its timeless nature. She didn’t speak of how God did great things just for her. Mary exalted the wonder of a salvation that extended from generation to generation. It went back to the patriarchs. It extended back to the first promise of a Savior spoken before Adam and Eve

in the Garden of Eden. Neither did it end with Mary, but it would continue to bless generations to come all the way down to us, literally to us who are gathered here this morning as the Lord announces His love and His grace and His salvation to us.

It is not appreciated by those who exalted themselves, who see no need of a Savior. It is a wonder of grace for those whom the Lord would receive as His people, His Israel, the people of God.

Luke 1:54-55 “He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy, ⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

Today we celebrate a perfect fulfillment of the covenant that God made to Abraham regarding the seed of Abraham being blessed. Indeed God made it clear to Abraham that his special descendent that would come would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

That is the blessing which has come to us, the people of a nation that was unknown to all except the Lord when Jesus was born. In 21st century America we have this great salvation presented to us which came into the world because Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The Apostle John spoke of the great marvel of God’s love in His first epistle.

1 John 3:1, 5, 8 “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God. ... ⁵He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. ... ⁸ For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

We praise and glorify God! We magnify His name for a great salvation that bestows an honor upon us we could never deserve apart from the Babe born in Bethlehem. **We are called children of God!** This was possible because and **only** because Jesus took our sins away. The devil had done a terrible thing, worked a horrible work, when he deceived Adam and Eve and they sinned. His goal is to enslave men’s souls that they might spend eternity with him in the torments of hell. As a result of the fall into sin the devil enslaved men’s souls with the fear of death. The devil enslaved people in a service to sin by the corruption of their souls.

All this, all of this horror, Jesus, the Child of Mary, destroyed. He alone destroyed the works of the devil. He alone is our Savior. This is the clear testimony to the true greatness of God's love. John continued in the next chapter of his first epistle:

1 John 4:9-10 "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins."

God sent His Son to be that payment for sin that would successfully ransom us from slavery and set us free to live with Him. With so great a salvation freely given to us from God, let us --
III. Magnify the Lord before the world.

Yes, we should be bursting with joy and the desire to tell this wonder of God to all around us. That was exactly what Mary was feeling when she burst into Spirit inspired song before Elizabeth. But such joy breaking out in praise was hardly limited to Mary. We do well also to recall how the shepherds raced to find and then worship Jesus. Recall the words we heard last night:

Luke 2:15-20 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷Now when they had seen *Him*, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. ¹⁸And all those who heard *it* marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹But Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

The shepherds began their magnifying of the Lord by putting the Lord first, even before tending their flocks. They went to worship the Lord, their Savior! It was a wonder of grace to find this Babe who had come into the world to save them in a lowly stable with a

manger as His first bed. It was all so wonderful; this fulfillment of God's promise was there right before their eyes!

They could not contain this news; it had to be shared. And so they magnified the Lord by making it all widely known, the saying which was told them concerning this Child! It caused people to marvel, not just at the shepherds. It wasn't about the shepherds. It was about Jesus! People marveled at the things which were told them concerning this Child! The shepherds magnified the Lord, making the Lord bigger in the sight of the people they saw, and certainly for more than that one day. Jesus' birth was the marvel which they shared with others for the rest of their days!

Finally, consider how the shepherds turned to their flock, but their hearts were filled to overflowing with the joy of their salvation and they magnified the Lord glorifying Him, and praising Him for all they had seen and heard that first Christmas night.

Don't let this be an interesting tale, a curiosity, a tradition that we merely listen to each Christmas. **Magnify the Lord.** Put Him first, before others. It seems we are so afraid of slighting others, or offending others, or causing them to think that we are too religious that sometimes we don't put the Lord first. How can we put others ahead of the Lord when He has brought us so great a salvation? Magnify the Lord by letting others see that the Lord is the biggest, the best thing, the most wonderful thing there is in my life! **MAGNIFY THE LORD!**

Tell people, tell them again and again what the Lord has made known to you about this Child of Bethlehem, how He humbled Himself, and made that humility obvious by the manner of His birth. He became one of us, our flesh and blood brother even though He is and ever shall be our Lord our God our Savior! **MAGNIFY THE LORD!**

And yes, of course when our Christmas observance is over and it is time for us to return to our day to day life and responsibilities, continue to magnify the Lord by praising with our words, our testimony, our actions, our manner of life. Make the Lord big in your life, so **BIG** that no one will be able to miss him.

Now is the time to pick up on our Advent readiness with all that watching, that preparation, and that joy. Let it shine as we join Mary and say: **“My soul magnifies the Lord,⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior!”**

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.