

THE MAGNIFICAT

THE LESSON: THE MAGNIFICAT

The Old Testament tells us the story of all that has gone wrong with humanity, and of God’s loving promise to one day send a Saviour. When the New Testament story in Luke’s Gospel opens, there is no chance of missing the fact that something epic is going on. In the first two chapters of Luke, three people – not to mention the choir of angels – burst into song when they catch a glimpse of what God is doing.

These songs are called canticles, and if we pray with the BCP, then we will recognize them from Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline. Today we’re going to look at the Song of Mary, also called the Magnificat (which comes from the Latin for “My soul magnifies”, the first words of the song).

By the time we get to Mary’s canticle, a lot has happened to this young lady. She is betrothed to be married. She has met an angel. She is pregnant by the Holy Spirit and the Son she will have is going to be the promised Messiah. She rushes off to visit her relatives Zechariah and Elizabeth and is greeted with a wonderful affirmation of all that she has experienced and is about to experience. Luke’s Gospel doesn’t tell us what difficulties Mary faced, so we can only guess. But it does tell us that meeting the angel was frightening, and the news she received was bewildering. Her whole life was about to change.

Christians over the centuries have had a special regard for Mary because of the unique role that was given to her and because of the amazing example she sets for all believers.

As we read through her song, pay special attention to how she sees herself, and to how she sees God, as well as to her perspective on the whole situation.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Spend some time with Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”. Rephrase it in your own words as a prayer. (For example, “I am your servant, whatever your will is for me, my answer is yes”). Then, spend some time praying through your own hopes and dreams for the future, offering them to God by closing with your paraphrase of Mary’s words.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

O God Most High, who didst endue with wonderful virtue and grace the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord: Grant that we, who now call her blessed, may be made very members of the heavenly family of him who was pleased to be called the firstborn among many brethren; who livest and reignest with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (COLLECT FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, BCP PAGE 309)

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LUKE 1: **HUMILITY AND JOY**

⁴⁶“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, ⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”