



Luke 1:46–48

46 And Mary said:

‘My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God
my Saviour,

48 for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call
me blessed,

Reflection

Have you ever noticed how many medical doctors play the violin? Or at the very least are trained to an impressively high degree in classical music? I'm not sure the correlation, except perhaps high levels of discipline from an early age and parents motivated to see their children excel, but I've often noticed that a background in classical music and the heights of the medical profession often seem to go in hand. And it would appear from Luke's gospel at least that this is not a new phenomenon.

Luke was a medical doctor, the personal physician of the Apostle Paul for much of his missionary journeys, after which he likely spent several years researching, writing and compiling his two-volume work on the origins of Christianity, Luke-Acts. And one of the striking differences

between Luke's biography of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ when compared to Matthew, Mark and John is Luke's evident love of music. It would appear this doctor too was musically trained.

Luke's is a singing Gospel. It resounds with the music of praise, especially in the beginning when the Son of God breaks so extraordinarily and ordinarily into the world through angels and miracles in the lives of very ordinary people. Today's passage is the beginning of four songs of praise that burst spontaneously out of the hearts of Mary, Zechariah, Simeon and a great company of angels in the night sky over Bethlehem. Over the centuries these songs have been given Latin names: the *Magnificat* sung by Mary (1:46–55); *Benedictus* by Zechariah (1:68–79); Simeon's

Nunc Dimmittis (2:29–32) and *Gloria in altissimus* sung by the heavenly host (2:14) and millions down throughout the centuries in various versions including today's Christmas hymn *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*.

We're going to slow down through these songs and savour their words of worship, beginning today with the first part of Mary's *Magnificat*, latin for 'magnify', taken from the first line of Mary's song, 'My soul magnifies the Lord'. In older English, 'magnify' carried today's sense of 'glorify' – to praise, bless, worship, venerate, adore and extol. Reading from today's passage, Luke 1:46–48, the first half of Mary's song,

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John the Baptist filled with the Holy Spirit as an unborn baby inside his mother Elizabeth's womb leapt at Mary's arrival into Elizabeth's household. Elizabeth too was filled with Holy Spirit; glowing with child, she exclaimed in a loud voice on Mary's arrival,

'Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the child you will
bear! 43 But why am I so favoured,
that the mother of my Lord should
come to me?

Mary's heart too began to overflow with the Holy Spirit in the words of this beautiful song. Predictably, due to its greatness, many have tried to claim that the song is too theological for an early teen peasant girl and therefore must have been added in by Luke. It's too theological, too poetic, too carefully structured, too subtle, too finished they would say. And yet in doing so they forget that in the oral culture of the first century every God-fearing Jew from an early age would learn by heart the songs of Hannah, Deborah and David as well as great swathes of Old Testament Scripture. And so, filled with the Holy Spirit and inspired no doubt by Hannah's circumstances (so similar to her own), at her cousin's Spirit-filled words of joy, Mary cannot contain herself either. Her heart over-

flows with praise and from her lips fall the first and greatest song of Luke's Gospel. Mary begins,¹

‘My soul glorifies the Lord’

In the Latin the word is ‘magnify’ which perhaps better reflects the Greek underneath. More literally rendered we could translate the phrase, ‘My soul makes great the Lord’ or ‘My soul enlarges the Lord’. Wrapped in here is to glorify, to magnify, to praise, bless, worship, venerate and extol him. Of course, God cannot be made any bigger, but he can be enlarged in our own lives. That's what praise and worship do. They enlarge God, they magnify him as we pause to think deeply over some new aspect of his greatness that simultaneously fills our heart, minds and lips through the

1 R. Kent Hughes, Luke: That You May Know the Truth (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 49–51.

work of the Spirit.²

That's what's happening to Mary in this moment. She is meditating over the deep recesses of the character of God and in doing so is filled with the Spirit, with joy and with song,

‘My soul glorifies the Lord
47 and my spirit rejoices in God
my Saviour,

What aspect of the character of God is Mary contemplating as she worships?
Verses 48 & 49,

48 for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
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² Hughes, Luke, 49-51.

Mary was a nobody from nowhere who has been abundantly blessed by God. And this sense of unworthiness, humility and incalculable blessing is the essence of the Gospel. Just as God came to Mary, Jesus comes to those who realize their need, who know they cannot save themselves, who are humble, and open to their failings and their need for help. Mary's worship of God flows from the grace she has received in her humble state; and this is the source and fountainhead of the deepest of our praise. To fully appreciate and appropriate grace requires humility. Humility is where Luke's Gospel begins, where the life of Jesus began, and where grace begins.

Augustine of Hippo, the greatest Christian

theologian since the Apostle Paul, wrote:

‘For those who would learn God’s ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second, and humility is the third.’

Think

Magnifying the Lord, making great the Lord with our entire spirit and soul is what God desires in our lives today. How can you magnify God today? How can you enlarge God in your life and make him great in your relationships and interactions through this day that he has given you? Meditate over that word ‘magnify’: to praise, glory, bless, worship, enlarge, make great; to venerate, adore and extol. How can you keep the fire burning for God in your private life so

that it will spill over into the lives of those you encounter? What is it that you need to do to fan those emotional flames, to enliven your intellectual love of God and his ways, to convict your head and your heart of God's perfect design for both creature and creation, people and planet?

Many Christians listen to worship music like Mary's song. Do you own any? The Bible is filled with worship music. Songs of praise have been close to the heart of believers since time immemorial. God has designed us to respond to, remember and cherish song. Why not consider incorporating Christian worship music into your daily commute, or your daily time with God, your lunch hour and or your family time? No matter how you're wired, universally worship music seems to elevate our soul,

join our mind and heart, and bring joy, conviction and resolve to our walk with God.

Pray

As of course does prayer, another crucial habit of those growing closer to our Lord. It's no wonder so many worship songs are also prayers. Why not sing a prayer to God this morning in the quiet of your heart or in full voice if you're game! Even those least musical amongst us can usually find a chorus or two of a Christian song in our memories. Music is like that. Or hop on to Youtube and find something you like. Sing like Mary. And then set about magnifying our Lord today. Make him great in your life today because he is great and he is worthy of our praise.