

Theme: “Christmas Traditions” – Christmas Carols

Text: Luke 1:46-55 (NKJV)

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ And 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. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. ⁵⁰ And 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. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ 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."

If we're going to do an Advent series on “**Christmas Traditions**” that list has got to include **Christmas Carols**! There are few things this time of year that put us in the “Christmas spirit” like **Christmas Carols** do. All it takes is a few verses of “O Holy Night” or “Joy to the World” and we're filled with that unique joy that only our Christmas celebration can bring. Some radio stations begin playing exclusively Christmas music the day after Thanksgiving. We listen to Christmas carols and songs while we put up our Christmas decorations. We share that Christmas joy by going Christmas caroling. The joy of Christmas is a unique joy that we usually only feel in our hearts around this time each year, and Christmas carols have a unique way of filling us with that joy and sharing it. One might even say that singing Christmas carols is the best way to spread Christmas cheer!

If you had to pick a favorite Christmas carol or Christmas hymn, which one would you say is your favorite? Have you ever stopped to think about why it is your favorite? What is it that makes it your favorite? What makes you want to sing it, or listen to it year after year?

Even just with music in general—not just with Christmas songs—what is it that makes a song a “timeless classic” that you can listen to over and over again, year after year and still enjoy it?

Usually it's a combination of several things: 1) the song has to have depth, both musically and lyrically. It can't just be a catchy tune with an equally catchy, but repetitive refrain—the song has got to say something—something meaningful and the tune has to reflect that meaning. 2) The song has to mean something to you. The words have to speak to your situation in life or touch your heart in some sort of personal way.

The song that Mary's heart sings to the Lord in our text is one of these “timeless Christmas classics.” It was first spoken over 2000 years ago, but has been enjoyed and sung by Christians as a hymn of praise even to this day. The early church named this song the “Magnificat,” since that is the first word of Mary's song in the Latin translation of the Bible (“Magnificat” means “magnifies”—a word of praise; a synonym for *glorifies*). They sung this song as a part of their daily evening vespers services. If you were to turn to p. 231 in the LSB hymnal (*Lutheran Service Book*) (or p. 43 in the front of *The Lutheran Hymnal*) you'd see that the “Magnificat” is still included as part of the vespers liturgy. Two of the hymns in our worship service today are based on Mary's words from our text. What makes this song of Mary's a “timeless classic?” What gives it its staying power? Pretty much the same reasons I gave above: 1) The song has depth—it is meaningful, and 2) the song means something to us—it “speaks to us” and touches our hearts in a very important and personal way. This song is so important and so personal, in fact, that we can truly say that Mary's song is our song: “Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our savior!”

Now, it's true; our life situations are not exactly the same as Mary's was. In fact, no one in the history of the world was in a situation exactly like Mary's. However, her reasons for “**magnifying the Lord**” and “**rejoicing in God her Savior**” were the same as ours.

Mary gives the first reason for her joy in **v. 48**, **“He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant.”** God, in His grace, looked with favor upon this young virgin, Mary; a “nobody” from the backwater town of Nazareth in Galilee. She wasn’t the daughter of a king or prince or some other high-ranking official. Some scholars believe she may have only been about 14 years old. She was, in her own words a **“maidservant.”** A humble young woman betrothed to another “nobody” of Nazareth, a carpenter named Joseph. All of the “ordinariness” of her life quickly changed with the announcement of the angel Gabriel that she, a virgin, would be the mother of the Son of God, the Savior of the human race! This blessing that God was about to give her was why Mary rightly prophesied, **“For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (v. 48b).**

Think of how this good news changed Mary’s day-to-day life. Not only was she about to experience the unexpected joy of having a baby boy, but also this child would be the Messiah that her people had been looking forward to for some 4000 years. Imagine her joy, and the rush of thoughts and emotions that must have been flooding her heart and mind.

That is why Mary expresses her joy in the fullest way possible, by declaring, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (v. 46-47).** This was Spirit-inspired praise that couldn’t even be expressed properly with her lips, only with her inmost being: her **soul** and **spirit**.

For the same reason **“Our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our savior!”** Obviously none of us are about to be the mother of Jesus, but just like Mary, **1. God has regarded our lowly state.**

What a lowly state we were in! We weren’t just “nobodies,” we were spiritually dead-bodies! We had no goodness within ourselves, no hope of salvation. That is why God had to “regard our lowly state.” He remembered us and saved us by “remembering” His saving promise. As Mary says in our text, **“He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever” (v. 54-55).** In His limitless mercy, God reached down to mankind with His Son Jesus and **“helped”** us from our helpless situation of sin and damnation. He not only sent Jesus to save us by His perfect life and sacrifice on the cross, He also caused us to hear and believe this good news so that by faith we are members of His chosen people **Israel** in a spiritual sense; spiritual **seeds of Abraham (v. 54, 55).** Think of how this good news should change our day-to-day lives, much like it changed Mary’s!

Above and beyond this greatest of all gifts that God has given us in Christ, God has also given us many other reasons to **“magnify”** Him and **“rejoice”** that He is our God. He is not a detached deity that is only concerned about eventually, someday being with us eternally in heaven. He is a God that is with us right now, and wants to continue to be with us from now on, into forever. Therefore He is also a very practical God. He is the God of the here and now; the God of this life and the next. A God who has blessed us many times over in the lives we live here on this earth, and will continue to bless us into eternity. When Mary looked back into her life she could not help proclaiming, **“For He who is mighty has done great things for me” (v. 49).** As she expanded on her praise she also looked back into the history of the people of God and praised, **“His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm” (v. 50-51).** From the Exodus from Egypt, to David’s mighty kingdom, to His proclamation of the birth of His own Son to Mary herself, it is plain to see that God had, throughout history, helped Mary and His people **“Israel, in remembrance of His mercy” (v. 54).**

As citizens of God’s spiritual kingdom we can look back in our own lives, and throughout the history of His people and also sing, **2. “God has done great things for us!”** As a church, God has given us a few centuries worth of unprecedented freedom and peace to spread the Gospel, and has made it available in more places and in more ways than ever before in the history of the world. Even with the economic downturn we are facing, we are a nation of incredible prosperity and wealth. As individuals, we have everyday comforts and conveniences that are beyond what even the wealthiest kings of ancient times could have even dreamed of. And yet we should rest our hearts on none of these things: not on the strength of our church, or our nation, or ourselves. For, as Mary’s words indicate, God works in contrasting ways.

- ✝ If we boast and take pride in our Christian heritage as Lutherans we read that “[**God**] has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” (v. 51).
- ✝ If we put our trust in the power and military might of our country, Mary’s words remind us “**He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly**” (v. 52).
- ✝ If our focus in life is on our selves and all the stuff we can get for ourselves v. 53 tells us “**He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.**”

On the other hand, those who “**humble**” themselves under the Word of God and acknowledge their sinful “**lowly**” state, the Lord will exalt. Those who “**hunger**” and thirst after God’s Word, and His righteousness, will “**be filled**” with the bread and water of life.

These are the great gifts that have been given to us through Mary’s Son Jesus. He was sent to “exalt” us from the “lowly” state of sin, unbelief, and death, to eternal life in heaven with Him because of the perfect life He lived in our place, the innocent sacrifice He made for our sins on the cross, and His glorious rising from the dead which guarantees us we will be “exalted” with Him in our heavenly home on the last day.

As we sing our carols and praises to our coming King this Advent & Christmas season, I hope they bring all of us joy once again. I pray that like Mary, when we sing our Christmas carols and songs we will also think about and praise God for all that He has done for us personally in our lives, both physically and spiritually. May each one of us join in Mary’s song, “**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded my lowly state. For He who is mighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name!**” (v. 46-49) Amen.