

Magnifying the Gifts of Christmas

Luke 1:46-49 (NIV)

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

The words recorded by Mary are her song after her relative, Elizabeth, greeted her by calling her the mother of her Lord. Baby John in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy at hearing Mary's voice. Her very first words in response are, "My soul glorifies the Lord..." The word "glorify" can also be translated as "magnify." "My soul magnifies the Lord!" This is why Mary's song is often called the Magnificat. It's a very fitting title as everything that Mary sings magnifying what God has done and is doing for her.

Of all the people who have ever lived in the history of the world, Jesus has appeared in the most paintings and sculptures. Do you know who the second most painted and sculpted person is? It's Mary. The reason why isn't that obscure. It's because she's the mother of Jesus. All generations since she bore Jesus have called her blessed!

But what if she had not been chosen to bear the Word made flesh? What would history have recorded of her? Certainly, her family of her day and age would have known her, loved her. She would probably have been a faithful wife and mother, one who shared the promise of the Savior with her children and raised them up in that truth. But after two generations or so, her memory and name would have probably faded into obscurity. She would be a name in a genealogy that is so common people don't have definitive recollections of her. History would probably have had no other note of her.

Have you ever thought about the legacy that you will leave behind? Will the world remember your name and the great things you did? Maybe not the world, but how about this community? Okay, well, at least your family will remember you, right? Hopefully more than what they find in a genealogy study?

Maybe you care a lot about what people think of you. Maybe you tell yourself that you don't care at all about what other people think. But Mary has a good, godly attitude of who really matters what they think of you.

Mary is remembered because the Lord was and is mindful of her. He thought of her. The Lord chose her to bear the Son of God not because she was so very faithful and good and pious and humble. He did not choose her because she was popular or rich or gorgeous or wise. He simply chose her. He thought of her. He elevated her. She will not be forgotten in our world ever because God was mindful of her and through her brought the Savior of the world. Mary is someone because God was and is mindful of her.

If you feel like nothing, know that God is mindful of you just as he is mindful of Mary. He thought of you in coming to earth as the Word made flesh. He came specifically to save you. He is God your Savior. He has your name written in his book of life. He calls you forgiven. He calls you family. He calls you blessed from generation to generation. This is the only one who truly matters what he thinks of you.

Let's magnify our Lord because he is mindful of you and me. We sing stanzas 1 & 3 of the hymn *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*.

Luke 1:50 (NIV)

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

We like to categorize each generation of people. We've got the Silent Generation, the Boomers, the Gen Xers, the Millennials, Gen Z or iGen, and now possibly the newest generation will be called Generation Alpha. However, as we've seen in history, this newest generation will eventually reject the name we put on them and come up with their own.

We label generations, but we don't like it when we are labeled with them. It's so impersonal, generic, stereotyped. It doesn't let individuals actually be who they are. And in a day and age where living authentically and true to yourself is the goal, to be lumped together with a whole bunch of other people feels like the greatest sin. I don't want to just be labeled as a generation.

Mary directs our focus on the Lord's mercy extending from generation to generation to those who fear him. This is more than God came for Boomers and Gen Xers and Millennials and the iGen. In every age, to every person, no matter their generational label, God's mercy extends to them because of the gift of the Word made flesh.

God came specifically to live as your substitute, as well as the substitute for everyone else in your generational category. He gave his life as a sacrifice for your specific sins as well as all the specific sins of every else who has ever lived and will ever live. There is not a single person on this earth – past, present, or future – to whom we cannot say: “Jesus came for you, lived perfectly for you in your place, took the punishment of your sins, and then rose from the dead so that you personally will live forever with him.”

Jesus came as an individual person, not as a people group or as a labeled generation. He came for every generation. He came for every person individually. This message has resounded for 2,000 years to every generation and to countless people and will continue to do so.

Let’s magnify our Lord because his mercy extends to each and every single one of us personally from generation to generation. We sing stanzas 1 & 2 of the hymn *Behold, a Branch is Growing*.

Luke 1:51-52 (NIV)

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

How do you take the infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful, present everywhere God of everything and put him in finite flesh and blood bound by space and time and yet still totally and completely and fully God? This is the mystery of the incarnation, of the Word made flesh.

How do we understand that concept? Well, I could give you a bunch of Latin words like *genus idiomaticum*, *genus maiestaticum*, and *genus apotelesmaticum* that other theologians smarter than me used to help define how infinite God took on finite flesh while still remaining infinite God. However, the more common word we use for this concept is Christ’s humiliation.

God humbled himself to take on human flesh and blood at a very specific, preplanned point in our time, in our history. Now, when we say humiliation, we don’t mean that God humiliated himself by taking on our flesh and blood, as if this was a disgraceful thing for him to do, that it was beneath him, insulting for him. What we mean is that Jesus, while being God for all eternity, the God who can do everything and be everywhere at all times, chose not to make full use of his divine attributes and powers. He did this to live under the law for us in our place. He did this to be our substitute while also being the God who could actually be perfect and who could infinitely pay for all our sins and the sins for all people and suffer hell for all of us. He used his humility to lift all of us up to him.

So, if you are wondering if that babe in swaddling clothes that Mary and Joseph placed in a manger is still fully God just as much as the Father and the Holy Spirit are, the answer is unequivocally: yes! In this way, Jesus is the Son given in time to be our Prince of Peace and who also always has been our Everlasting Father. This is the mighty deed he has worked with his arm.

Let’s magnify our Lord because of the mighty deeds of his arms as he as fully God also fully takes on our flesh and blood. We sing stanzas 1 & 4 of the hymn *Let All Together Praise Our God*.

Luke 1:53 (NIV)

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

We believe and confess that God is the provider of every good and perfect gift, particularly the things we need for our body every single day. He gives us what we need for our mental and physical health. He fills our hungry bellies.

But that’s not all that he fills us with. Some thirty years after being conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51)

The Word made flesh, the great I AM, fills us with his life so that we are full of forgiveness, full of his perfect life lived in obedience to God’s laws, and so full of life eternal with him. No one else can fill us in this way. Nothing else can satisfy us and our greatest needs the way the Christ Child does. We are filled today and every day because he came down and gave himself for us!

Let’s magnify our Lord because he satisfies our greatest needs by filling us with his forgiveness and his perfection. We sing stanzas 1 & 5 of the hymn *Once Again My Heart Rejoices*.

Luke 1:54-55 (NIV)

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors."

What's the longest you have ever had to wait for a promise to be fulfilled? Minutes? Days? Weeks? Months? Years? Are you still waiting?

When I think of waiting for promises to be fulfilled, I think of Abraham. At age 75, God promised that he would have more descendants than there were stars in the sky or sands on the seashore, but he and his wife Sarah were childless at the time. They waited 25 years before Sarah gave birth to their one and only child together. We know from some of the things they had done prior that there were times when they thought they had to give God some help in keeping his promise. But, God kept renewing and reminding them of his promise and fulfilled it at the exact time that he had planned and that he had revealed.

The very first promise of the Savior who would crush the head of the serpent, the devil, came in the Garden of Eden immediately after Adam and Eve had sinned. It was promised that a male offspring from Eve would accomplish defeat this most horrific enemy. Is this what Eve meant when she held her firstborn, Cain, in her arms saying, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man"? (Genesis 4:1)

But Cain was far from the promised Messiah who would save the world. Adam lived 930 years and didn't see the Savior come in his lifetime. Abraham lived 175 years and didn't see the Savior come in his lifetime.

Does our faith in God's promises waver because of time? It's hard to keep the faith when you are waiting expectantly for the day of deliverance and relief to come and all you find the next morning is the same suffering or more suffering. How long, Lord, until you take care of this? You promised!

It took thousands of years before Gabriel announced to Mary that now was the time, now the Savior had come into this world, that she was carrying him, conceived by the Holy Spirit. God remembers his promises. He never forgets. He knew exactly the right time and place to fulfill his promise of a Savior. He would never let his people down. He would never fail to do what he said he would do.

The gift of the Christ Child, of the Word made flesh, is a solid reminder that God always keeps his promises to us. It doesn't matter how long it takes. If he says he will do it, then he will. And we know that if he kept such a big promise, how much more he will keep all his littler promises to us as well. So, we take heart and confidently hold to the promises of God.

Let's magnify our Lord because he always keeps his promises. We sing stanzas 1 & 3 of the hymn *Of the Father's Love Begotten*.