

Christmas 2025 - The Magnificat

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Date: 21 December 2025

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[0 : 00] I'm aiming to keep it to 30 minutes today.

I thought that would amuse you. So we read all of Luke chapter 1, the Magnificat is the name by which it is known, which is just a Latin word.

It is the first word of the speech in the Latin Vulgate, and it means exult or magnify or praise highly, is what it means.

And it's sort of the name that stuck to that bit. So if you ever want to look up about it, then the Magnificat is its name, and you will find it. So what we're going to do is we will spend a bit of time looking at that this morning, looking at what Mary is saying, and what it means for us today.

But I thought I would share a few words on the preceding sections. So I thought I'd take a minute to review those first 45 verses.

[1 : 25] It's only Matthew and Luke who cover the Christmas story, or the narrative.

And both of them, of course, tell us about Joseph and Mary. It was funny for me to realize that Joseph and Mary are probably between Hannah and Becca's ages, my daughters, between sort of 14 and 16, maybe 17 at a push. And I was like, wow, that's... I pondered on that for a little while.

But that's Joseph and Mary, and they are betrothed to one another. Now, if you read Matthew, then what you will see is a narrative that focuses on Joseph's perspective.

We read how he discovers that she is pregnant. Scandalous! But being a righteous man, he decides to quietly, secretly end things, end the engagement, which is really more of the first stage of marriage.

[2 : 33] It was a legally binding contract already. So he... Which is why some Bibles will say divorce. And he decides, I will end things early. I don't want to disgrace her.

And then an angel comes to him and says, don't worry. Don't worry. The child is from the Holy Spirit. So in Matthew, you see nothing about... There's no angel visiting Mary.

There's no promise that we read to Mary. There's nothing about the trip that Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem. There's no innkeeper. There's no stable or ox or donkey or manger.

And there's no shepherds in their field abiding either. None of that is in Matthew. What Matthew does show for us is the magi or the wise men.

And we read about them coming from the east to worship him. And we see them go to a house, not a stable. They go to a house.

[3 : 32] And it would seem, from a careful review of the story, that probably Mary and Joseph and Jesus were there for about a year or so before the magi came.

And they didn't spend that year in a stable. But then we have Luke. And Luke, as we've read, takes Mary's perspective of things. Now, Luke goes into a lot more detail, as we've just read, all 80 verses.

We've just read 80 verses. And we didn't even get to the birth, right? We didn't get to the birth of Jesus. So what have we seen? We've seen Luke's introduction where he says how he has spent all this time researching, talking to eyewitnesses, trying to put together a detailed, orderly sequence of the events that took place.

And then we have an account of this promised birth, but it's not the birth of Jesus. Actually, we have the promise of the birth of John to a man, Zacharias, and his wife, Elizabeth.

And these two were described as righteous and walking blamelessly before God, but they had no child. Isn't it true that even those who walk faithfully before God do indeed suffer?

[4 : 55] And they did suffer not just the crushing, ongoing disappointments, and the lack of assurance about how they would be supported in their old age, but also the stigma of being unable

to bear and the assumption that that was because of God's judgment on them.

But they served. They served faithfully. Zacharias is still serving at the temple and he goes in to the temple to burn incense, that is, into the holy place, not the most holy place.

This would have been a twice-daily ministry, a regular thing that was done. If you're interested, you can look at Exodus 30 for the background. But it was the daily perpetual burning of incense.

So, normal day. Nothing specific or special about this day. A normal day. Another day at the office for Zacharias. And the angel Gabriel appears.

And he says to him, you're going to have a son. In fact, it is the son, the promise in the book of Malachi, the forerunner to Messiah.

[6 : 07] And Zacharias says, how can I be sure of this? The wife and I are too old for this. He doubts. And because of his doubting, Gabriel says, you will now be unable to speak from now on until it is fulfilled.

And then we've got six months past. Elizabeth indeed conceives. She goes into seclusion. And then that same angel, Gabriel. Gabriel, actually, I didn't say.

Gabriel just means man, geber, man of God. El. Gabriel, man of God. Interesting. And actually, if you read his description in Daniel 8, where he first shows up, he's just described as a man.

The man Gabriel. But given the fact that he's still alive in the time of Jesus, I think we can infer that he's not just a man. He is indeed an angel. And he goes to Nazareth.

So he's met them in the temple. Now he goes up to Nazareth to the north of Israel and he meets Mary. Mary betrothed to Joseph.

[7 : 14] What does that mean? It means that she is still in the house of her father and Joseph is somewhere preparing a place for her. And he makes these promises.

You are going to have a son. You are going to name him Jesus, Yehoshua. It derives from Joshua. It is a common name for the time.

And it just means that the Lord saves. Yahweh saves or his salvation. Jesus, Joshua. And her mind is blown. She knows enough about biology, even at the age of 15 or so, to understand that this is not possible, naturally speaking.

But she doesn't doubt. She doesn't doubt. We read that she is perplexed and that means that she's troubled throughout. And then she says, how will this be?

So it isn't a question of I'm doubting you. It is, how can this come to pass? How will you accomplish this, Lord?

[8 : 18] How will you bring this to pass? And of course, the crucial detail, the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David, and he will reign over Israel forever.

And that, indeed, we will come back to later. And to her question, Gabriel says, God can do anything, even your aging relative Elizabeth, even she is pregnant, God can do anything.

And at this, we read of Mary hurrying to Elizabeth in the Judean hill country, 80 miles. That's, it's a good going for her to go.

70 or 80 miles, probably a five-day journey or so on foot, not the kind of journey that a young woman would typically make alone. But Luke tells us nothing about whether she went with anyone, whether she was part of a caravan, whether she went with any relatives.

But it's also not clear why she decides to go either. We read that she hurries, but we don't read why. And it cannot be in order to see if Gabriel was telling the truth, because she's already believed.

[9 : 28] I think it was because she was going for mutual support. She goes to her relative, Elizabeth, because Elizabeth is actually going to believe her when she says, an angel came to me, and now I'm pregnant.

Whereas everyone else is going to say, sure, that's what happens. That's why you're pregnant. Elizabeth will believe her. And of course, there's such a value for fellowship and connection with believers, isn't there?

Especially when you're going through challenges, especially in those times. we should note that there is a significant generational gap. She's probably old enough to be her grandmother, and yet there they are, fellowshiping together.

So, that is the context for the Magnificat. She arrives, she sees her relative, who is by this point six months pregnant, and the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy.

I can't tell you from first hand experience what it is like for a baby to kick or leap, but I'm sure it's quite a thing, and for this to happen in a way that is, I don't know how excited a baby can get about

these things, but it's amazing, right?

[10:48] It is a supernatural thing, and the Holy Spirit comes upon Elizabeth, and she's, this is incredible, this is amazing, blessed or praised among women in you, and blessed or happy, is she who believed.

So, there we are, and now we come to the Magnificat, which I'll just read once again. Now as we read this, from Luke chapter 1 verse 46, bear in mind again, all she has is the promise.

There's no baby bump, there's no morning sickness yet, there's nothing other than the angel's words, and Elizabeth, and she says, so Luke 1 verse 46, and Mary said, my soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has had regard for the humble state of his bond slave.

For behold, from this time on, all generations will count me blessed, for the mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him.

He has done mighty deeds with his arm, he has scattered those who are proud in the thoughts of their heart, he has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who are humble, he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent away the rich, empty-handed.

[12:16] He has given help to Israel, his servants, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants, forever.

Wow. Now, I will say any study of this passage really must make reference to the prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2.

Now, we studied that probably over a year ago now, where, but in that prayer of Hannah, she, like Elizabeth, is an older lady who has received the promise of a child in her old age, until now she's been barren.

In her case, it is Samuel, the prophet, to whom she gives birth. But the link between Hannah, Elizabeth, and Mary, all of them have a pregnancy that can only be explained by God's intervention. And, like Mary, like what we've read here, Hannah's prayer goes way beyond saying, God, cheers for the baby, thanks.

[13:22] It's way beyond that. It is, well, we'll see, it is connecting it to covenant promises. Now, Mary, in her speech here, does say, God has done great things for me.

God has done great things for me. She does rejoice in that, but so much more, so much more. So, I'd like to observe a few things. And, the first thing is that we're going to observe how she draws from the Psalms.

She draws heavily from the Psalms, two in particular, actually, Psalm 103 and 107. And, again, remember, young woman, 13, 14, 15, or 16 or so, and it really is wonderful to see and consider her depth of understanding at what's going on here.

in Luke then, verse 50 is a quote from Psalm 103. And, it was interesting to me to discover that we read that Psalm in our morning reading almost exactly one year ago today.

Wow. And, Psalm 103 is filled with God's chesed. You know what that is. God's covenant grace, covenant mercy, his compassion and grace in the context of keeping covenant with Israel.

[14:47] Now, a quick reading from Psalm 103 going from verse 15. 103 verse 15 we read this.

As for man, his days are like grass. As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it, no longer.

But the loving kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember his precepts to do them.

So that's a little bit of the context of that Psalm from which Mary quotes. And again, the whole Psalm 103 is about the covenant keeping God and how our lives are tragically brief.

When you set them next to the context of eternity, it's just a few days in the context of eternity. But in the chesed, the covenant faithfulness of God, to have mercy, that is everlasting to those who fear him, to those who keep the covenant.

[16:08] And so we observe in the Psalm that Mary is quoting that faithfulness to the covenant of God is key, the key, to eternal life. Eternal chesed depends on faithfulness to the covenant of God.

And then we also read from Psalm 107. In Psalm 107, that is quoted in verse 53 of the Magnificat. This is a Psalm that is a call for the redeemed, those who have been bought, the ga'al, which is from the word go'el, which you may know from Ruth, the redeemed, to praise God.

Why? Because of his everlasting chesed once again. And then the Psalm goes in to look at these four different groups of people who are in peril, and all of them have become the redeemed. You have those wandering in the wilderness, hungry and thirsty, you have those dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death. You have fools who have sinned and thereby been afflicted, and you have merchants trading by sea who then see these storms that are in peril of their lives. All of them are the redeemed because all of them are called by God, they are saved by God. And so we read this, verse 8 of Psalm 107.

[17:28] Let them give thanks to the Lord for his loving kindness, chesed, and for his wonders to the sons of men, for he has satisfied the thirsty soul and the hungry soul he has filled with what is good.

So again, all of these people, their lives are in God's hand. And the psalmist says, let them give thanks because he has had chesed towards them. And Mary quotes this, and she puts herself in the place of those redeemed.

And she says, because of the covenant faithfulness of God, he redeems people from all kinds of suffering and to satisfy them with what they truly need.

So she's speaking way beyond just about how things are with her and with Joseph. And these two psalms together, I think, they are speaking of God's plans and purposes to do good to his people because of his commitments to them.

Life on earth is hard. Life on earth is brief. But God is eternal. And when we align ourselves to him and we choose to live by what he has said in his covenant, then and only then is there cause for joy and eternal hope.

[18:47] And you think, hang on, but this is a long way from you're going to have a baby, isn't it? It's a long way from you're going to have a baby. So what we then do is we cast our minds back and say, what did Gabriel actually say?

Luke 1.32, Gabriel said, he will be great and will be called the son of the most high. Not the son of Joseph. The son of the most high.

And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom will have no end.

The baby to be born, not just a baby, not even just a miraculously conceived baby like Samuel and like John, this is the king.

This is the son of David. And we've been studying in the book of Samuel, so we know this, we've been reading all through and we've seen about the promises, we've seen the creation of the kingdom of Israel, we've seen the ascension of David to the throne, we've seen how in many ways he's been this remarkable king, the best king and a sinner like everybody else.

[20:05] If we're going to have a king who reigns forever, he needs to be perfect. That's this baby. It is a fascinating study to look at the eligibility of Jesus Christ to sit on the throne of king David.

That's why Matthew's gospel opens with this line of names from Abraham through David, through Solomon, through the line of kings, all the way down to Jesus, all the way down to Joseph and Jesus.

And then Luke has a genealogy that traces a different line, again through king David, but down through his son Nathan, again all the way down, we believe through Mary to Jesus again.

Fascinating. The right of Jesus Christ to come and sit on that throne is established in those chapters. And it is amazing also to remember that the religious Jews today who look for the Messiah still, they've got a problem.

And that problem is what happened in 70 AD. Because all of the records are now lost. And there is no way anyone could be born today and show that he is descended from David.

[21:33] It's just not possible. Because the temple was destroyed, the records are gone, no messianic claimants could arise today. Not with a real bulletproof legal claim, but Jesus has it.

Amazing. Anyway, we're making observations in the text. Mary drew from Psalm 103, 107, and we see how the baby to be born is the fulfillment of God's covenant.

It is fulfilling all these promises. It is the pinnacle and the climax of all these things. He is the promised ancestor to David that we read about when we studied 2 Samuel 7.

He is the one who will reign forever. He is the one whom the Psalms speak of as the one who is the embodiment of God's chesed, his covenant faithfulness.

He is the one whom the prophet said is coming. You know that lovely carol or song at Christmas, Mary, did you know? Yes, she did know. Because she said this amazing song.

[22 : 37] She knew who Jesus was, even at the age of 15 or so. And she was amazed at the privilege as well. Now, anyway, let's make some more observations from the text.

Look at the verbs in the Magnificat and see how many of them are past tense. So in English we read that God has had regard.

He has done great things for me. He has done mighty deeds. He has scattered. He has brought down. He has filled. Now, I should say that a Greek does not have past tense in the same way that we do.

If you're interested, then the verbs use something called the aorist aspect. What does that mean? Well, it means, in English, past tense just means it happened in the past.

In aorist aspect in Greek, the emphasis is not that it happened in the past. The emphasis is that it is fully completed and accomplished. Fully completed and accomplished.

[23 : 42] And you think, hang on, no it isn't. No, it isn't. None of these things have happened yet. Again, there's no baby, no baby bump even. How can Mary say it is done?

And the answer is, this is what faith says. Faith sees the promises of God with such certainty as to consider them complete, accomplished, as good as accomplished.

And so faith then is able to take positive action on the basis of a promise. Some of us might be used to people making promises and then not following through, being let down by friends or maybe even by parents.

It can be really damaging on our perspective of God the Father if we have had parents who did not follow through on their promises.

And maybe many of us here have probably done the same thing. We've made promises and then not followed through. Well God is not like that. Amen.

[24 : 54] God is not like that. In Numbers 23 verse 19 we read this, God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent. Has he said and will he not do it?

or has he spoken and will he not make it good? God does what he says he will do. The powerful are brought down and the humble are lifted up.

The hungry are filled with good and the rich have nothing. God will do all these things because this is God's nature and this is his promise. And Mary puts them in a tense that means it is fully accomplished.

it is done because God is not a liar. God does it. So it is good then for us as the church today to remind ourselves what is promised to us, to what do we cling even though it is yet unseen.

And of course it is that the repentant are forgiven and made righteous. The word of God says in 1 John 1.9 that if we confess our sins he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[26 : 17] That is to say if we turn from our sins, if we confess them, if we don't hide them, we disclose them, we say God I have done these things, I confess.

Then we are forgiven and cleansed and we don't have to dwell on them anymore. We don't have to keep bringing them back up or feeling the weight of condemnation anymore. The promise is we are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

In 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21 speaking of Jesus Christ who has come, he made him, God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

If you are like me, then you will sometimes often feel that you aren't cleansed from all unrighteousness or that we have become the righteousness of God.

Sometimes it can be hard to keep that in mind, but we are. This is a promise, this is a commitment from God. He has done it, we become the righteousness of God.

[27 : 29] God doesn't see the sins of the repentant anymore. We become the righteousness of God. And it is true of course that the effects of sin, the consequences of sin often remain and we've talked about that when we talked about David's sin a few weeks ago.

But from an eternal perspective, from that it is accomplished perspective, we are clean and forgiven. We are cleansed, we are purified we are made whole.

And I was struck by this passage as well. This is Colossians 1. Again, speaking of to come, he says in verse 21 of Colossians chapter 1, And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind,

engaged in evil deeds, yet he has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death in order to present you before him holy and blameless and beyond reproach, if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

So again, just as we saw in the Psalms, that faithfulness, that steadfastness to the covenant, that chesed, is the key thing. We believe in it, we continue to believe in it, we continue to believe in it, and to put ourselves there as God's people.

Lord, we are yours. Then we are reconciled, and he will present us holy and blameless and beyond reproach, and it is as good as accomplished.

[29 : 12] It is done in the eternal perspective. I was just so blessed by that. And also this, we are no longer useless, we are made useful.

In Ephesians 2.10 it says that we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So not only are we made righteous, and made cleansed, and made, we are also prepared. We have good works to walk in, prepared for us.

I was also going to share from 2 Timothy 2.21, but time is getting on, so I'm going to skip on. But this is what God has said concerning his church. If we are in the new covenant of Christ's blood, then God is faithful, and these things are true, and they are as good as accomplished.

Praise God. Oh, there's one other thing I wanted to look at real quick. I wanted to just color this a bit more, because we read Matthew recently as well. Matthew 5. When you look at Matthew 5, the Beatitudes, we read a similar thing where Jesus is saying, Matthew 5, verse 4, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted, they shall inherit the earth, they shall be satisfied.

[30 : 34] So you've got the future sense there as well. But he also, if you look back at verse 3, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And so, in there, Jesus has a sense of, it is now, theirs is, yours is the kingdom of heaven, but also there's a sense of it's not yet, they shall be comforted.

And that's the same tension that we have today. There are so many things that are still to be accomplished for us, and yet we live as though they are complete, as Mary's song does.

so I want to urge us to frame our lives and our experience through faith this morning. That's what I wanted to impress on us.

Faith acknowledges what God has done, but it also acknowledges as just as certain what will come to pass, and indeed from the perspective of God, they are done.

[31 : 37] So, we live as though his promises are already complete. I've got one more. What does God's favour look like?

What does it look like to have God's favour in your life? What does it mean? She says that she is counted blessed, and not only that, all generations are going to count me blessed.

most highly favoured lady, Gloria. Now, think about this. A young lady, she is betrothed to be married to a man who loves her deeply.

They are both righteous before the laws. They know the scriptures, they know the promises. They are fixed to have a quiet, they're not going to be rich, they're going to be probably living day to day, but they will be married, they will have a good life, they will be in love.

And then this disruption comes along. You're going to get pregnant before you're married. This is a massive, lifelong disruption.

[32 : 58] We sang that song about the shame of scandal. people. If you read Psalm 69, then you will come to this verse.

Psalm 69 is often acknowledged to be a psalm about the Messiah. And in it, it says, those who sit in the gate talk about me, and I am the song of the drunkards.

Which is speaking of the lifelong stigma that he had of this child of fornication, which actually comes to the fore when we have this biting remark from the Pharisees, who say in John chapter 8 verse 41, they say to Jesus, we are not born of fornication, we are one father, God.

And this is just an ad hominem attack. They are attacking the man. But what they are doing is they are alluding to the apparently widespread rumor that Jesus was born of fornication, that Mary had slept around.

Mary is going to be blessed with this scandal that will be hers throughout her whole life by the unbelievers. Can you imagine?

[34 : 17] And bear in mind that the Pharisees are talking in Jerusalem. This is a long way away from Nazareth. The rumors are she can't escape them anyway.

One other thing. In Luke chapter 2 there is this blessing in the temple on the baby Jesus. And Simeon does that and then he blesses them, that is Mary and Joseph.

And he says to Mary his mother, behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel and for a sign to be opposed. And a sword will pierce even your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

A sword will pierce your own soul. So I ask you, what does the favor of God look like? What does it look like to live a life in God's grace and favor?

Well, it could be hard. It can be hard. I mean, and we could talk about the fact that she had to see her son disbelieved and mocked and ultimately brutally put to death on the cross.

[35 : 28] But we could also talk about all of the preceding years where there was this scandal and shame and probably shunned, and yet generations will call you blessed. Jesus said whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

And I think it is good for us to keep that in mind. It's quite noteworthy. If you've done the Christianity Explored course, does anyone remember the name of the last section in the course?

Section 7. It is called Come and Die. Come and Die. Why? Because whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

And we are called out of focusing on our own comfort and pleasure and trying to secure for ourselves a good life, into a life that is submitted to God, whatever that may mean.

So, in closing, the Magnificat then is Mary's faith-filled response to this incredible privilege that is hers, to be called the mother of the long prophesied Messiah.

[36 : 42] And she draws on the Psalms as evidence that she studied them and she understands the times that she is in. And at the same time, it is a call to a difficult and painful life.

And she says, Behold, the bond slave of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.

Of course, Mary's call was unique. She is the only person ever who will be called the mother of the Messiah. But every single one of us here today is also called to a unique purpose and a role in God's kingdom too.

First, we are called to faith, to believe what God has said, which means to live repentant, knowing that we must confess our sins and repent.

And that is how we remain faithful and how we remain in that covenant. We continue, we confess daily, we have our feet washed, and that he is a merciful God, that he sent Jesus to be the only way for us to be pardoned.

[37 : 47] And we continue in our faith, and we continue in our learning and believing more and more what God has said. And that is our call today. And so may we indeed be content to be the bond slaves of God.

Praise you, Lord, for the word. Praise you for what we have read. Praise you, Lord, for the call on our lives. We praise you, Lord, that you are active. And we thank you for how you worked through Mary and through Joseph.

And Lord, even though you called them to a hard life, they were faithful to you. Lord, I ask and I pray that you would help us to walk with you day by day, to cling to you, to know the wonderful reality of your daily presence with us as we walk with you, as we disclose to you our sins.

and we are reminded again and again of your love and your forgiveness. Lord, we long to be useful in your kingdom, to know your purposes and plans. We bless you and we praise you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.