Mary’s Song - "Magnificat"

Luke 1:46-55

Mary’s song begins "My soul magnifies the Lord." It is interesting wording. Some modern translators want to make it easier for us, by rephrasing it in English as "My soul praises God" or "My heart rejoices in the Lord." But I prefer her original poetry: "My soul magnifies the Lord." Magnifies implies make bigger, make greater, enlarge. Mary’s song is called “magnificat,” which translates as the word “magnifies.” Mary’s soul magnifies God. Mary was able to magnify God because she was humbly open to the unexpected new life God was birthing within her. Mary offers praise to God for the surprises of God’s providence.

As we listen to Mary’s Song, the Magnificat, let us ponder in our hearts how Mary’s words offer for celebrating Jesus’ birth. “Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word.” (Luke 1: 38) These words remind of me the Beatles, Paul McCartney’s song, “Let it be.” It was very popular when I was a college student.

“When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.”
This song begins with Paul saying that when he finds himself in times of trouble, “Mother Mary” comes to him. When I first heard this, I immediately thought of Mary, the mother of Jesus, but Paul’s mother was also named Mary, and she died when he was a young boy; Paul has said in interviews that he wrote the song after he saw her in his dream to advice him, "let it be."

“And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.”

The words “let it be” is "words of wisdom," which means "let it happen" "surrender" -- deep trust, so that some new world becomes a reality. “Let it happen!”

Mary, the mother of Jesus speaks to us: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” -- surrender, deep trust.

As we listen to Mary’s song and also enjoy beautiful music of orchestra and choir, "Magnificat," composed by Bach, we may allow our souls to be uplifted by Mary’s open-hearted willingness to partner with God in birth and new life!

Today let us ponder in our hearts Mary’s willingness to magnify God, and her boldness to sing with confidence that:
“God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 
God has brought down the powerful from their thrones; 
and lifted up the lowly; 
Has filled the hungry with good things, 
and sent the rich away empty.” 

Those words are calling us toward new, life-giving ways of celebrating Jesus’ birth.

How is God calling you to sing Mary’s song?

“When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me 
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.”

“Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Friends, we are being called to sing Mary’s Song, Magnificat with lyrics of hope, peace, joy, and love, during this Advent and Christmas season, as well as into the New Year, so that our souls and our daily lives might more fully magnify the Lord! Let’s ponder: “My Soul Magnifies the Lord!”

How could we magnify the Lord? A magnifying glass has another very interesting potential, besides making things look larger. A magnifying glass
can focus bright light into a tiny, hot point of intensity. Do you remember trying experiments like that with a magnifying glass? The glass can concentrate light into a single brilliant spot. When Mary says her soul magnifies the Lord, maybe she is pointing to a possibility we hardly acknowledge. I think that she brought God's love to a small point of great strength, brightness, and brilliant intensity. In this Advent season like Mary, we can bring God to focus on. Surely God's love must find ways to be born anew within our hearts, in the community, and in the world. Could we do it as an individual and as a church family? How?

Biblical scholars say that in Mary's Magnificat there are three major obstacles to the coming to focus on God. Do you know what they are? They are power, prestige and possessions. Mary refers to them as "the proud," "the mighty on thrones" and "the rich." These, she says, God is "pulling down" and "sending away empty." Jesus teachings are very clearly aligned with these three categories: our attachments to power (Control), prestige (Affection) and possessions (Safety) which are obstacles to God's coming to us. We often miss it. Why could we not see that? Interestingly for some reason, we have chosen not to see it. So the big question for your life and mine this morning is: can we let God's revolution occur in our lives? Has this revolution occurred in your life and mine?
The Christmas story has frequently missed this radicalness of the claim that God is found, not as the royal child of a queen, but as the son of an unmarried peasant. As a teenager in a small town, how stunning is it that Mary finds the courage to sing the Magnificat. Mary’s song sets the tone for Jesus’ radical and controversial ministry that is to come:

“He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

Martin Luther says that the Magnificat “comforts the lowly and terrifies the rich.” Therefore, we also call the Magnificat as *anawim* spirituality in a nutshell. *Anawim* is the Hebrew word that refers to those who are oppressed because of their poverty. *Anawim* refers to those voiceless people who have no influence, help or power. *Anawim* would be the humble and the helpless who put their trust in God and who depend on God alone for the vindication of their rights.

If we listen to the meaning of the Magnificat which may begin a
revolution in your life and mine. Whenever the Gospel Luke can, it makes its point about God's love for the poor. At the same time the poverty of the *anawim* is not simply physical economic deprivation, but a vulnerability in spirit.

The Magnificat is God’s revolution. In the Magnificat, God totally changes the order of things. God takes that which is on the bottom; and God turns everything upside down, and puts the bottom on top and the top on the bottom. God revolutionizes the way we think, the way we act, and the way we live. Before God’s revolution, we were impressed with three Ps -- power, prestige, possessions. We were impressed with money, status and education. But God revolutionizes all of that; God totally changes all of that; God turns it upside down. The Magnificat clearly tells us of God’s compassion for the poor and the disadvantaged. We also need to have a renewed compassion and action for the poor.

Let's ponder the Magnificat and how we can magnify the Lord this time of our life. Let's meditate the Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord." With this spirit I wish you merry Christmas. Amen.