

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

There are times when life is so good that you can't help but sing about it. And that really is why we have such wonderful music at Christmas. Do you have a favorite carol? Is there a certain song or collection of music, holiday or otherwise, that stands in your life like a monument?

In the summer of 2003, I was living in Minnesota with a dear friend and roommate from college named Alec. And during that particular summer, there were a collection of songs that came to become sort of the soundtrack of our friendship. So, to seal that in our lives as a monument for our friendship, I compiled all of those songs onto a CD which will forever live in infamy as the Freedom Mix. Not because we were both painfully single at the time, but because much of it was made up of country music and other patriotic songs.

For the last 10 years, the Freedom Mix has gone with me on every journey I've made. That CD became a sort of symbol of a treasured relationship. So much so that whenever either of us is listening to the Freedom Mix, we call and let the other one know. Whenever I hear the songs of that CD, my heart lifts. It magnifies God, because it reminds me of the faithfulness of God in giving me such an amazing friend.

The verses we just read are perhaps some of the most breathtaking and important words of poetry and praise ever penned, and they came from the mother of our Lord. Mary, if you remember, receives a visit from the angel Gabriel who tells her that she is going to have a child, and that child would be the Savior of all mankind. Now her boyfriend Joseph is not going to like this, because he's from a good family and has a good reputation, and the child is not his. So instead of putting him through the scorn and criticism from his community, Mary comes up with a plan. Mary sets out to be with her older wiser cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant; maybe she'll know what to do.

And when she arrived to see her cousin Elizabeth, the child within this elderly woman leapt. Something unexplainably wonderful was taking place, and now Mary was beginning to see. And what follows are the words we just read, so famous are they that

they have a title, The Magnificat, because in the opening lines we read that Mary's soul magnifies the Lord. Because of this remarkable occurrence and connection between her and Elizabeth, Mary's life and Mary's heart leaps for joy because of what God is doing. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior."

What do we do when we magnify something? We take something that is far off, something that is distant, and we bring it close, we enlarge it. I can still remember the first time I ever looked through a telescope at the moon. It was on a bitterly cold and cloudless night in northern Minnesota. And what I thought I was going to see paled in comparison with what I actually saw. All of a sudden, what seemed so small out in the distance was now up close, what was sort of round and nondescript suddenly shone before me with remarkable intricacy and detail. All of a sudden I saw the craters and intricacies, all of a sudden our nearest celestial body was up close and I felt very small and humbled by the sight of it. And had I had the words to say it at the time, I would have said to myself and all those with me, "My soul doth magnify...the moon."

Mary's heart explodes with the praise and worship of God. In her, what was far off was now brought close and given a whole new sense of reality. What was majestic now stooped low to her, what was mysterious now becomes clear, what was unjust suddenly become righteous, what was heartbreaking all of a sudden becomes the greatest news of all, and Mary proclaims, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior."

We hear this and it sounds like the sweet, innocent, and quaint retelling of the Christmas story that we've come to know so well. But might I remind you that this is anything but innocent, and it's far from quaint. Mary is actually somewhat of a fugitive. Jewish law dictated that she should be put to death for what is happening to her, and so scared she runs. And in the safety and the friendship and in the love of her cousin Elizabeth, Mary discovers safety, rest, and hope for this journey she is on.

Scientists tell us that there is a most amazing, and inexplicable, phenomenon called "quantum entanglement." It says that if two particles of energy are kept in close proximity to each other for a long time, they form a relationship, a kind of bond that defies imagination. The connection between these two particles is so strong that if you take one particle to a laboratory in Los Angeles and remove the other one to a lab in New York City, whatever you do to the particle in L.A. will instantly happen to the one in New York, too. Einstein called it "spooky."

In a world in which physically nothing is capable of traveling faster than the speed of light, somehow there exists a phenomenological bond between two objects—you might even call it the bond of God's love that cannot be severed no matter what the distance.

At the end of our reading today, did you see in verse 56 what it says about Mary? That she remained with her about three months and returned home. I want you to listen very carefully when I say this: only in the safety and hospitality of Elizabeth's home was Mary able to sing the Magnificat. Only in the presence and palpability of the Spirit was she

able to rejoice in the promise of the Savior, and only with this abiding peace in knowing that there was at least one other person in the world who shared her hope in what God was doing was Mary able to continue her journey home to Nazareth and on to Bethlehem.

During the years preceding the Protestant Reformation, there was a man, a very influential figure who lived in Prague, named Jan Hus. And for ten years of his career, from 1402-1412, Hus served what is appropriately called Bethlehem Chapel in the middle of Prague. But what is more interesting is a certain feature of the church itself. You see, just to the left of the pulpit stands a well that was open anytime for anyone, even in the middle of the service. But what's even more interesting is the reason for the building of this church. This well was the primary source of fresh water for the village, and during this time, the town was a very dangerous place, particularly at night. But even more than violent crime, there was something else that was contaminating the water.

Tragically there were scores of people, many of them prostitutes who, for reasons of superstition, were throwing the unwanted babies into the well. And tragically not only was there this loss of life, but there was also the loss of safety and usability of the well. Here's where Pastor Jan comes in. He enlists members of the church and they begin digging up the precious stone floors, and they keep digging and keep digging until they find fresh water. And there in the church in the southeast corner stands a well—the provision of God right next to where they read the word of God.

They put in a new door on that end of the church so that people could come in whenever they wanted and retrieve fresh water, even during the middle of worship. There are times when God calls us to move the well inside the church.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty, because the rich do not realize they have need. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

And then with her heart bursting with the promise of what God is doing within her, and her voice singing out with words of praise to her exceedingly generous God, and with the assurance that no matter where she goes, Elizabeth too knows the blessedness of Mary's condition, Mary returns home to Joseph. And a few weeks ago, we saw the scandal of what happened when Mary and her protruding belly came into Nazareth. But what we didn't see in the film was how Joseph, with sturdy trust and faithful resolve, remained by her side and began the journey with her to Bethlehem.

And here is where we pick up our second reading for today. **In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And**

she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

It was because of the warm welcome and loving embrace of Elizabeth that Mary had the courage to believe that the impossible was indeed happening to her, and that it was the greatest gift of God, and that all women from then on would call her blessed—this little girl from Nazareth. It was because of Elizabeth that this song burst forth from Mary's heart. And it was because of Elizabeth that that very song would literally carry her on the 160 Kilometer plus journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to give birth to the Son of God. Because Elizabeth moved the well inside for Mary, Mary could keep the dream alive and the Magnificat became the soundtrack to the birth to the Savior.

In the same way, the sacredness of Bethlehem Chapel was transformed to be a place of worldly provision, so must our vision for the interrelationship between the sacred and secular be transformed. Where is God inviting Wabash Church to dig up the floors in order to nourish the very souls and lives of the people of God—especially those who don't show up here on Sunday mornings? Because you just never know, and I know it may sound cliché, but you just never know what potential lies in the lives of those whom God might be sending into our lives.

Maybe it's time for us to start building some more wells at Wabash Presbyterian Church, maybe it's time for us to make room for the Son of Man to lay his head.

Until we sing with all of creation, My soul magnifies, my soul magnifies, my soul magnifies the Lord.