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MAGNIFY

Luke 1:45-56

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Mary's song of love to God carries within it one of the most resonantly poetic, beautiful, and powerful phrases in all of scripture: "My soul magnifies the Lord." To hear it is to want to know more about what God has done in the heart of Mary to lead her to utter such devotion and love. It gives one the impression that the Lord God has touched her deep, in her innermost being, in such a way that utter faith, utter hope has secured her heart; so that she moves forward in life with perfect confidence that God will accomplish not only her deepest hopes, but the healing of humanity itself.

It is the unusual but compelling word "magnify" that makes her song so powerful. To magnify is to make great but one obviously cannot make God greater. In this context, it means to amplify that presence of God's truth and wonder in the hearts and minds of others – to help others see the greatness of God. In this way it is connected to our modern use of the word *magnify* - to enlarge something which enables us to more clearly see the essence of a thing.

This was the wonder of Galileo's vast improvements of the telescopes of his day over 400 years ago. He took an instrument that could only magnify an object two or three times to a factor of thirty! Suddenly the heavens were opened to the world. Things people never could have known without this magnification included discovering bumps and pock marks on what was thought to be a perfectly round sphere of the moon, and seeing the moons of Jupiter!

It is almost impossible for us to appreciate how this challenged the prevailing world view of the day. Up to this point, the Western world built its view of God, the Bible, everything on the perfection of the heavens and an earth-centered universe. Discovering blemishes on the moon and heavenly

bodies that revolved around Jupiter, rather than the earth, absolutely smashed these axioms.

It completely and utterly changed how people would see the world moving forward.

This same world-changing vision was given to Mary. The angel magnified the truth in Mary's mind and the promise so utterly convinced Mary that she sings of God's future in the past tense!

*He has shown strength...
he has scattered the proud
He has brought down the powerful
and has lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry...*

Mary is speaking of these events in the past tense because the angel showed her God's will. And since it is God's will, the reality of it is as assured as much as if it were in the past.

Not only is the future now in the past, but the world is being changed through the magnification of her truth. Knowing what is going to happen in the future is changing the present. It is something like the world in *Through the Looking Glass*.

In Lewis Carroll's sequel, Alice finds her way into a new world by walking through a mirror (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through_the_Looking-Glass). In that world, walking away from something brings you towards it and in running, one stays in place. It makes no sense because everything is reversed, just like in a mirror. Listen to her encounter with the Red Queen,

"Well, in our country," said Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else – if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place."

Mary also lived in a world that made no sense. You and I live in a world that makes no sense but, like the Red Queen, because it's our world, we cannot see it.

Once Mary saw the truth magnified by the Angel it all became clear. At this time many believed that poverty was a punishment from God or at the very least a sign of one's inferior blood. But Mary turns this view upon its head and instead shows that rather than God's heart centering on the powerful, it centers on the poor. As she declares, the proud are scattered and the low are lifted up. That is a complete and utter change, even more radical than finding pock marks on the moon.

The world had been looking through the wrong end of the looking glass. The world is inverted and backwards and the wrong things are "magnified" like violence, greed, and covetousness. The opposite of magnify is to make small. We have turned around the telescope and diminished and denigrated those whom God loves.

And we diminish God the same way Mary magnified God, but in reverse, when we allow children to flounder. For her child was to be a gift, a gift for the whole world, but especially to elevate the poor and feed the hungry.

We can see that our world, in some ways, is as insane as that of the Red Queen.

Some people cannot afford to work. Just saying it sounds as crazy as the Red Queen's declarations. Many people in poverty run and run and run and only fall further behind from their destination of financial stability. Some single mothers looking for work need to turn down certain jobs because the low pay is just enough to get them off government assistance, but not enough to cover the amount lost.

Equally ludicrous is the reality, in an age of plenty and even excess, that there are children – many, many children right here in our town – that do not have enough. That this is skewed badly toward children of color makes it even more preposterous

as if the color of one's skin has anything to do with a person's character or value in the eyes of God.

But whereas Mary's soul magnifies the Lord's truth, the child coming into the world will do more. Magnification only appears to make things bigger and grander and more wondrous; her child will actually change things.

Jesus will turn it around and has come to bring us back out of the looking-glass world where everything is as it should be; as God wills it to be. We saw in this life how he treasured the presence of the poor and the outcast – healing them, forgiving them, loving them. In his actions, Mary sees God. She helped us to see that those in poverty are beautiful in the eyes of God; strongly present in the heart of God.

This child then is a sign of promise for the future of Israel but, in some way, every child for us today is that same promise, for it is the children who will bear the burden of our future. So we had better nurture and bless them with this love and passion, as if they were all our very own, for we are our brother's keeper – unlike Cain's sentiments.

The vision we have at First Presbyterian, to *eradicate child poverty* not simply to reduce it, comes like Mary's declaration of God's future as if it were in the past. She knows the hungry *have been filled with good things* - *have been* – because God wills it, it absolutely *will* happen. We know that God treasures every child and that it is never acceptable to allow even one of His precious children to suffer. God wills that every child thrive and we trust that, through us and others, one day, God WILL bring it to pass.

Mary's child will smash the looking-glass world through his life, death, and resurrection. But not only will he smash what is wrong, he will reveal a world more fantastic and wondrous than we could ever conceive. That is the promise of the child.

That was the other mind-blowing accomplishments of what Galileo began. It not only remedied our deficient understanding of the universe but showed us, now through the Hubble

Telescope and others, not only a universe vaster than we can conceive but one more complex and beautiful and inspiring. To gaze on this universe is to be slack-jawed in awesome wonder, mind-boggling truth. It shocks me into reverence every time I look at those pictures from the Hubble Telescope. So beyond me; so vast; beautiful almost to the point of being painful.

Jesus' life showed us amazing truths about God and us that we could never comprehend otherwise. He showed us that God will redeem and heal the world. He showed us the depth of love and concern God has. He showed us God so loved the world that he sent His only son. How could God have that much love?!

But his power is not only to show us the grand scale of God's blessings but the intimate wonder of each person. Instead of a telescope he acts like a microscope. Imagine the first to discover a whole world of life, teeming with millions of microorganisms, in a few drops of pond water.

I saw the power of this discovery this past Saturday. I had the amazing experience of attending the woman's leadership luncheon, sponsored by the Spartanburg County Foundation. Four women were recognized, and our own Jennifer Parker took home the "Award of Courage" for all her work with children in our county. It was incredible to see.

At this luncheon, one woman shared her journey. As she came to the podium, she was bent over in tears, overwhelmed by the moment. She had suffered self-hatred, devastating addiction, and years and years of heartache and pain. But before those hundreds gathered, she shared how our Lord magnified her true self, revealed her inner beauty, strength, and worth. She told us how, when she looks in the mirror, she sees someone of worth, of power, of love, and of hope. Jesus showed her her true self and it sent all our hearts soaring. Incredible.

We stood up and cheered. Cheering not only her courage, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave her this gift.

May Christ magnify your sight to see the breadth of the glory of this world; and may God zoom into your heart that you may truly know the true self God made you to be.