

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Blessed Virgin Mary

Isaiah 61:10-end      Psalm 45:10-end      Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 1:46-55

In speaking and listening, writing and reading, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Our gospel reading begins with a remarkable statement:

Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord"

It is the beginning of Mary's great song of praise given in response to her cousin Elizabeth's greeting that she is blessed among women in her total acceptance of the fulfilment of the promises of God at work in her, as she carries the child conceived in the power of the Holy Spirit: the one who is the Son of God and Saviour, Jesus.

The song known well by this astonishing first verb: Magnificat (in Latin), has a central place in the prayers of Evening Prayer, and that familiarity may dull us to the radical act of praise it is in the mouth of the young woman whose feast we mark today.

My soul: that is all that I am, my whole being, all that makes me who I am

Magnifies: the Greek word is "megalunei", variously translated declares the greatness, or makes great

The Lord: the one I serve, the God of all.

My whole being is a declaration of praise for God's greatness,

my whole being enlarges, makes great,

the one who is Lord of all

Mary's song continues with the words that extol God's greatness for God's faithfulness in the history of her people in a particular way: God's honouring of the lowly, the small ones and God's capacity to turn the values of the world on their head. Mary's song gives us a lens through which to remember the history of the

people of God – recalling that Abraham, the one whose calling was as one without even his own children who would step out into the wilderness faithful to God’s promise that he would found a nation; alluding to the toppling of the powerful and raising of the lowly perhaps reminding us of the exodus that formed God’s people and the toppling of the Egyptian oppressors, the return from the exile imposed by the power of Babylonian might, even in history more recent to her, the prevailing of the Maccabees against the power of the Greek empire. It is a lens which magnifies a pattern, the pattern of God’s action in the world which stands in dramatic contrast to the assumptions we usually have about where power truly lies.

So Mary’s praise declares true greatness, the greatness of God which is revealed through the presence of God in the weak and the vulnerable.

The young woman who sings this song is herself the place in which God is present in weakness and vulnerability, as the newly developing child within her.

That is what enables the second translation of “megalunei” to be equally true:

My whole being magnifies God:

Through her yes to the incarnation, Mary offers her body to be the means through which Jesus, God in human form, is made known to us and in all that she travels through with Jesus in his life, death and resurrection she is part of the story which is a fulfilment and amplification of all that the history of the people of God pointed towards: the way a human being can live completely in tune with God’s will, the way God is present in the deepest and costliest experiences of human suffering, the way God carries us through death to the life for which we are created, power of Spirit at work within us creating of us places of God’s presence and action in the world:

Mary brings Jesus to birth, she lets him go out into his mission, she is at the foot of the cross and the bleakness of his entombment, she receives his resurrection and rejoices at his ascension as the

prayerful prelude to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of his church. She is the closest witness to God's presence in all this. In the tradition she is honoured as the woman who knew great joys, and the woman of sorrows:

My whole being magnifies the Lord – she says of her own life

Her whole being knew that God was present in all that her Son experienced, transforming our whole human condition in a place of little significance and through both the ordinary life of an village artisan, and through the most degrading, shaming treatment of crucifixion as an apparently blaspheming insurrectionist at the hands of imperialist domination.

My whole being magnifies the Lord, she says...right at the beginning of the story, it is as if she is saying:

I will show you how God is in the tiniest dependent baby, the itinerant preacher, the crucified one, my risen Son and the one who ascends and sends the Spirit so that we can all become the place where God is made known, we can all become a magnifying lens for God's extraordinary action and love at work in the world.

And Mary's words are put on the lips of all of us who regularly say evening prayer. Her Magnificat has gripped the Christian imagination since early times as a focus for our own praise.

I wonder what really taking it seriously as our own words might do for the way we see the world around us, the way we find God in the world around us and the way we show God in our living?

How might mine and your whole being magnify the God whose power is at work in the small, the fragile and the vulnerable?

Mary declares God's praise for faithfulness in the small places, just as she knows God's presence in the midst of the rawest pain: as we mark the anniversary of the flood which caused such destruction and distress, remembering those lost in this area maybe we can open ourselves to see God's presence in both the pain and the reconstruction: remembering Bishop Mortimer's

words about the cross below Lynmouth bridge is a sign both of death and of resurrection.

Mary recognises God's honouring of her own lowliness. That might invite us to recognise the value in which God holds us and uses us to bring Christ to the world.

Mary sees the Kingdom of God as the reign where the poor and weak are at the centre, and worldly riches and power are revealed as illusory. Might we review where we place our trust and find our security so that we can discover our true freedom in dependence on God? As Mary pondered the history of her people to see the pattern of God's activity, perhaps we might see the pattern of God's action in the smallness of our lives, the vulnerable times, times when we let God transform us.

Above all Mary offers all that she is to God, so that God is fully revealed through her.

Let's pray for the grace for our lives to be, like Mary's, the magnifying glasses through which the world sees the infinite God present where least expected, the transformative God in the weak, the vulnerable, the suffering and the ordinary, the image of the incarnate God in every created life, and the fragile creation shot through with God's glory.

May our lives magnify the Lord, our Spirits rejoice in God our Saviour,

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen

