

## The Magnificat

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It was back in 1847 when the **pastor of a small church near Avignon, France**, asked the local mayor, who was also an amateur poet, to write a poem for their upcoming Christmas mass.

- He agreed. And, soon after, **while on a horse-driven coach** traveling down a bumpy road on route to Paris,
- that mayor, **Placide Cappeau** began to write.
- And, as he's writing, **utterly inspired by the Gospel of Luke**, he could almost see himself there at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

And so, by the time he arrived in Paris, his poem, "**Cantique de Noel**," had been completed.

- Moved by his own work, **Cappeau decided that his poem should be set to music**,
- Which was done by Adolphe Adam.
- The finished product was performed just three weeks later at a midnight mass on **Christmas Eve in 1849**.
- And soon became one of the most beloved Christmas songs in France.

By 1855, the song made its way to America... and was called, in English, "**O Holy Night**".

- It quickly became a favorite, especially in the Northern states during the Civil War.
- But, it was **on Christmas Eve, in 1906**, that it made history by being the very first song ever to be broadcast over the airwaves.

The very idea of a live broadcast was a miracle in itself...

- but ***this miracle*** was just a shadow against the ***greatest miracle of all***, the birth of our Savior.
- And so, it **went out over the airways for the 1<sup>st</sup> time**:

*"O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of the dear Savior's birth... a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, for yonder*

*beams a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born... ”*

It really is one of the most beautiful Christmas carols ever written.

- And yet, when I gave my life to Jesus, there was another song that came to mean even more to me.
- It was a song actually composed about 2,000 years ago by an impoverished, pregnant, teenage Jewish girl named Mary...
- who had **just been miraculously visited** by an angel announcing that she would give birth to the “Son of the Most High God.”

Shortly after that announcement, Mary journeys several days to see her **cousin Elizabeth**, who was also pregnant with a baby the world would soon know as John the Baptist.

- And when she got there, we’re told in **Luke 1:41** that **“At the sound of Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth’s child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all woman, and your child is blessed.”**”

Mary must have been so overwhelmed... that without having to explain a thing to her... Elizabeth knew exactly what God had done.

- In the midst of **all the confusion in Mary’s life**, what an affirmation this must’ve been!
- And so, in response, **these remarkable words pour out from Mary’s heart...**
- a “song of Mary” the Church has long identified as “The Magnificat,” found in **Luke 1:46-55**.

These words of Mary, this impoverished teenage peasant girl from the other side of the tracks,

- are so powerful that **during the British rule of India**, the *Magnificat* was prohibited from being sung in church.
- In the late 70s, **after a military coup in Argentina** left thousands dead,

- **mothers placed the words of the Magnificat on posters around the city.**
- Those words of Mary's were then outlawed.

In the 1980s, the **government of Guatemala** made it illegal to recite this song of Mary's in public as well...

- because, like in India and Argentina, they were causing such a stir amongst the country's impoverished masses.
- But why would they do that?

Nobody ever banned "Away in A Manger" or "Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer," though somebody probably should have.

- And yet, these words of Mary were banned. Why?
- Because they were **considered subversive**... because they seemed to express that if people...
- especially **downtrodden & hopeless** people... That if **marginalized or oppressed** people ever heard these words...
- than perhaps **they might incite them embrace the kind of hope** that could change both lives & nations

So, let me read for you "**the Magnificat**," the first Christmas carol ever composed...

**"Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.** *How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.*

**He shows mercy from generation to generation** *to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.*

**He has filled the hungry with good things** *and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham*

*and his children forever."*

I love these words of Mary... I love that she spoke these words of praise to God ***immediately after*** Elizabeth began to ***praise her***.

- You see, this song comes pouring out of Mary...
- making sure that it was God and God alone **who received all the glory & honor** here.

You may remember from the Gospels that the people of Israel lived their lives under the heavy burden of two very powerful, oppressive kings.

- **The first King reigned from Rome**... some 1500 miles away.
- This emperor, **Augustus Caesar**, who bore the title of his great uncle Julius Caesar, was the most powerful man in the world.

He was devoted to extending his glory and expanding his kingdom... a kingdom that extended **as far north as England**,

- as far east as Asia, **all** of the Middle East, and south into Africa.
- Caesar literally ruled the known world. It's why he was known as **"The King of Kings."**

When he was just sixteen years old, the Roman orator **Cicero** said about him that he was a *"talented young man who should be praised, honored and eliminated."*

- And yet, one by one, it was Augustus who eliminated all of his rivals.
- Untold **numbers of statues** were built to venerate Caesar Augustus... to honor him... and even worship him.

People would cry out, ***"Glory to Caesar in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom Caesar's favor rests."***

- And to his people, Caesar would reply, ***"My peace I give to you"***
- It was known as the *Pax Romana*—the "Peace of Rome."

- And yet, we know that **this peace came at a very bloody price.**
- No one could even imagine how many people he had to kill in order to achieve it, though, a lot more were killed in order to maintain it.

We're told by an ancient doctor & historian named Luke that, "***It came to pass in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed***" (Luke 2:1).

- Think about that! ALL the world.
- Perhaps no human being, before or after, had ever held so much power so tightly for so long.
- All he has to do is simply lift his finger there in Rome and 1500 miles away, in an obscure province in Israel...
- **a poverty stricken young couple** is forced to make a hazardous journey to a little town called Bethlehem **in order to register themselves on Caesar's tax rolls.**

***"There went out a decree..."*** we're told here in **Luke 2**, and that ***"it came to pass."***

- But why did it come to pass? Some might say it was **because of Caesar...** that it was ***his decree*** that caused all this to happen.
- And, of course, this is true.
- And yet, what Luke is getting at here is that **behind the scene**, there is another King at work.

In **Micah 5:2-5** we read, "***But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you will come for me One who will be ruler over Israel and He will be the man of peace.***"

You see, we're told in the Old Testament that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem... **and yet, Joseph & Mary** are living in Nazareth.

- They never would have gone to Bethlehem if Caesar hadn't called for a new census.
- Caesar may have made the decree... **though, let me ask you... who is ultimately at work** here?

- Who's really sitting on the throne?

But **beyond Caesar Augustus** there was **another king**... one who would carry out the orders of this Roman king.

- Some 30 years before Joseph & Mary made their journey to Bethlehem,
- the Roman Senate gave **this man, known as Herod the Great, the title "King of the Jews."**

But believe me... Herod had to fight for that title. To get it, he had to ***"work the system"*** over a number of years.

- And from what we know about him... **he was good at it.**
- He knew how things worked... he knew how to get what he wanted.
- He started by **hitching his wagon to the star of Julius Caesar.**

And **when Caesar was assassinated**, Herod the Great was able to convince **Mark Anthony** that he was really a Mark Anthony guy.

- And then **when Mark Anthony was overthrown by Caesar Augustus**,
- Herod said he'd really been on Caesar Augustus' side all along. He knew how the world works.

He was married to at least 10 wives and had somewhere in the neighborhood of 43 children.

- Not surprisingly, most of his marriages were politically motivated.
- They were all about obtaining and holding on to power because he knew how the world works.

The **only wife he ever loved**, according to the ancient historian, Josephus, was one of his wives named **Miriam**.

- She bore him 5 children in 7 years but he did not trust her loyalty and so **he had her executed**
- (along with two of their three sons) **just to make sure** he could hold on to his power & wealth.

By the way... anyone here want to take a wild guess as to who bestowed on Herod the title, “**Herod the Great?**” Yes... Herod!

- He wanted to be great... he wanted to be known for huge, magnificent building projects.
- In fact, part of why the second temple was so controversial in Jesus’ day,
- was simply because Herod’s the guy who built it.
- ***Herod’s Temple***, as it was called, was **built it on the backs of the poor.**
- His heavy taxation absolutely crushed the poor in Jesus’ day.

Just to really give you an idea of who this guy was... Toward the end of his reign, lying there in his deathbed,

- **Herod was pretty sure** that no one in Israel would mourn his death.
- So, he had **70 of the most elite citizens of Israel** imprisoned...
- giving his **sister Salome** instructions that on the day of his death, all 70 of these citizens were to be put to death.

You know why he did this? Because **he wanted the people of Israel to be grieving & in tears** on the day of his death.

- This was the fabulously wealthy Herod the Great, the ***King of the Jews***. He knew how the world worked.
- He **watched Caesars come** & he watched them go. He **watched them rise** & he watched them fall.
- He **knew who the players were** and who were not.
- He **knew who counted** and who didn’t count.
- He knew how to **out maneuver, out wait, outsmart, outfox, out intimidate.**

Well, one day some strangers came to Jerusalem. **They were called Magi**, visitors of the east: **men of wisdom & wealth.**

- They began asking people... “*Where is the one who was born King of the Jews?*”
- Of course, that should’ve meant that they were looking for

Herod... but they weren't.

In response to this, we're told in **Matthew 2:2-3** that... **"When Herod heard this, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him."**

- Now, from what we've already talked about, you can understand why **Herod** was disturbed by these questions.
- But why would **"all Jerusalem?"** be disturbed along with Herod?
- Well... it's simply because *when Herod is disturbed...* when Herod's not happy, nobody's happy!

And yet, it's in this context that Mary pours out her heart to God in the Magnificat. Listen to what she's saying here...

- **"He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts."** Who might she be referring to here? Herod!
- **"He has brought down rulers from their thrones."** Who's on the throne? Herod!
- **"He has sent the rich away empty."** Well... who's most rich in Jerusalem? Herod!

In fact, these words of Mary's were repeated often enough that they got remembered... they got known... and written down.

- Somebody must have said, *"Be careful, Mary... those are pretty subversive words you're saying there. You can't just go around talking about kings getting dethroned. Somebody's going to get mad."*
- These aren't the kind of words you'd find on a Hallmark card.
- Nobody was tuning into the radio back in those days to **hear Bing Crosby sing**, *"He brought down rulers & the proud and sent the rich away empty!"*

You see, there were only two people initially who really understood **just how subversive** this little life inside of Mary was going to be.

- One of them was the most powerful man in the country—**Herod the Great.**
- The other was a powerless, penniless, illiterate, maybe **15-**

### **year-old Jewish peasant girl.**

- **To one of them** Jesus' coming was the foundation of every hope.
- **To the other** it was a catastrophe to be feared and prevented at all cost... up to and including the murder of every first-born son of Israel.

You see, all the *hopes of Mary* and all the *fears of Herod* were captured in this little soon-to-be-born child.

- And yet, Mary continues praising God for all He's doing... How He has **brought down rulers, embraced the humble...**
- How He has **filled the hungry** with good things while **sending the rich away empty-handed...**
- How He has **scattered those who are proud** in their inmost thoughts but has been **mindful of the humble** state of His servant.

But you wonder... Who's going to listen to what an illiterate teenage Jewish pregnant girl has to say about all of this?

- Well... we're listening to her today, 2000 years later!
- And, **some 30 years later**, they would listen to her Son... who spoke to a large crowd one day saying,
- *"Blessed are those who are humble... blessed are the merciful... blessed are those who work for peace... blessed are you who hunger now... blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

Those words from the **Sermon on the Mount**, in Matthew 6, are some of the most famous words spoken in history.

- And yet, much of it had been spoken by His mother over 30 years earlier.
- To the poor in Mary & Jesus' day can you imagine how these words would sound... ***that God's Messiah was coming*** to set things right.

But, in setting things right... Jesus will not overthrow Herod by

using Herod's methods.

- **He won't out-Herod Herod.** Instead, He will out-love Herod.
- Jesus will **defeat Herod's capacity to hate** by His **greater capacity to suffer**.
- Put it all on Me, He says... All the **injustice**, all the **violence**, all the **grieving**, all the **sin of humanity**. Put it all on Me.
  - o He will **defeat Herod's pride** by His **infinitely greater humility**.
  - o He will defeat Herod's cruelty by His **infinitely greater love**.

This is Jesus... THE **King of the Jews**... THE **King of kings**... the Prince of Peace.

- Though, rest assure, unlike Herod & Caesar, **His peace would never come at the cost** of innocent people.
- Instead, **this King would allow His own blood to be shed** so that we could enter into His Kingdom.

He will be **born in a stable**. He will **grow up in poverty**. He will live out His life, **from the cradle to the cross** with **one passion & purpose**:

- to **redeem us** from sin and death... and from the darkness and despair of this world...
- and to **restore us** back to Himself,
- where we can live forever with Him in intimacy & friendship.
- This **“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...”**

This **child born to us**... this **Son given to us** on whose shoulders governments will rest...

Will be **accused unfairly**... He will be **tried corruptly**. He will be **mocked mercilessly**. He will be **executed excruciatingly**.

- And yet, having traded in His throne & crown for a cradle & a cross...
- He will overcome the **power** and **dominion** of satan & sin **through His willful sacrifice on a cross** for me and for

you...

- Listen to just this one part from the Song of Mary...

You see, this song, the Magnificat... this is Mary's song... **but it's not at all about Mary.** She made sure of that!

- She says, —> **“My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**
- She's not rejoicing because God has given her a problem-free life... her life was anything but trouble-free.
- Instead, Mary's been captured by the reality of **all God is** and **all He's done** and all He **promises to do**.

Mary's song is called “The Magnificat” because in the Latin translation, that's the first word of her song...

- **“Magnificat anima mea Dominum,”** “My soul magnifies the Lord.”
- But it **wasn't just Mary singing out to God that day.**
- With her were **untold numbers of angels** singing, praising God for what He was about to do.

You see, for the angels, it didn't matter **how powerful Caesar was there in Rome...**

- it meant nothing that **Herod reigned as a powerful king in Israel.**
- In total disregard, **the angels were, instead, singing over a newborn king** that day in Bethlehem.
- → So ***what had the angels singing*** that day most of all? **What was the very best part... the most amazing part of all of this?**

Well... **For one thing, in an act of amazing love, Jesus, who is infinite & omni-present... chose to live within the limitations of man.**

- In other words, the **One who had occupied the whole universe** can now **only be in one place at one time...**
- **confined to the life and body** of this tiny little baby?
- He will have to **learn how to walk...** only able to travel as fast as two little feet will carry Him.

I mean, **the angels were there** watching Jesus speak the world into existence, **but now they're watching Him take His first steps!**

- Jesus will have to go through all the difficulties that people who have bodies endure.
- Sometimes His **body will be tired**; He will **trip over a rock a stub his big toe**.
- Even worse... He will even have to endure **Junior High**. He's deserving of my worship just for that!

But He not only confined Himself to space... **but, our** Eternal God also confines Himself to **time**.

- It's hard to get our minds around this... that, until this time, as the Psalmist puts it,
- ***"A thousand years, in your sight, are like a day that's just gone by—like a watch in the night. You live in eternity"*** (Psalm 90:4).

That was His existence from before the beginning of creation.

- Now He will have to live in time. Now He will have to learn to wait.
- He will feel the frustration that every teenager feels, for example, at having to grow up only one day at a time.
- **But that's not the best part**. That's not the part that **REALLY** got the angels singing that first Christmas 2000 years ago!

**The angels also see that now the Lord of all Creation will have to submit to His creation.**

- Think about that: throughout all Eternity, He was Master!
- The Psalmist says: ***"Nations are in an uproar. Kingdoms fall. He lifts His voice, and the earth melts"*** (Psalm 46:6).
- Well, the earth isn't melting for Him now... not for a little baby born in a dirty feeding trough in Bethlehem.

**He's known ultimate authority** through all eternity. Now, He's going to have to submit His parents... both of whom He Himself

created.

- They would tell Him **when to go to bed**; where He **can and can't go**; what He **must and must not do**;
- He would have to submit to others—to teachers.
- The Creator of the universe would have to **work in the carpenter's shop**, helping his dad pound nails and saw boards.
- And yet, He chooses all of this.

So many people get all “amped up” about things like career trajectories and where they are on organizational charts.

- But think about this one: The Master of the Universe becomes a carpenter's assistant.
- Paul writes, “***You know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes, He became poor so that you, through his poverty, could become rich***” (2 Cor. 7:9).

You see, the birth of our Jesus isn't a “rags to riches” story... but a “**riches to rags**” story.

- It's one more thing that moved those angels to sing that incredible Christmas day Jesus was born.
- **But, for the angels singing that day, there was something else that also had them singing.**

You see, angels were also looking on... as **the God who had known nothing but perfection... took on human suffering.**

- The One who had, from eternity, been worshipped by angels was **now being mocked by cynics & hypocrites.**
- We're told that *He was despised and rejected* by people.
- Internally, He took on our **worries**, our **fears**, our **loneliness**. At one point, He says, “*My heart is in anguish.*”

He took on our **guilt**; He took on our **suffering**; He took the **punishment of our sin** on Himself;

- Jesus took that on. He did that for you and for me.
- The angels watch as **The Eternal** steps into time, as **The**

- Infinite** is confined to space,  
 - and as **Absolute Authority** becomes weak, as **True Perfection** takes on sin.

But that's **not** the best part! Here's the **best part of the Incarnation**, the part that **REALLY** had the angels singing that day.

- You see, the best part... the part that really blew them away... was simply this... **that He came!**
- **That He came to you... that He came for you.**
- **That He came into this world to bring you back to Himself. He came for you.**

Wherever you are in your life right now... perhaps this is a wonderful season in your life... maybe this has been a painful season.

- Wherever you are in your life right now... remember that **He came for you**. He came for you.
- In **John 1:14** we read this: ***“So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”***

***And we beheld His glory.*** Not a glory like Caesar's. Not a distant king living thousands of miles away.

- But a **King of kings** who comes to us... to **reveal** Himself to us, to **redeem** us, to **love**, to **embrace** us.
- He comes to you and says, *“My peace I give to you. My peace I leave to you. Not like the world gives...”*

When that true King appeared that day in Bethlehem...

- **He appeared that day... for you.** The real “King of the Jews”... the ultimate “King of kings”...
- It was **for you that He left His Throne in Heaven** that first Christmas morning 2000 years ago.

And now, on this Christmas Eve morning, so many years later... He wants you to know that He's still here for you...

- That He's here **standing with you**... He **understands you**, He **sees you** and is overwhelmed with love.
- He **hears you**... whether cries or joy or pain, He hears you... and carries the weight of those cries on His own shoulders.

He is here **with you**... He is here **for you**... His arms wrapped around you... His heart full of love for you!

- Reminding you that **it was all for you**... and that, one day, **as you leave this life** for eternity...
- All the tears, all the fears, and all the shame and all the pain will simply melt away.
- As we **reign with the true King of kings** for ever and ever.