

MAGNIFICAT ANIMA MEA DOMINUM

Sermon, December 13, 2020

The Third Sunday of Advent

Texts: Luke 1:46-55; John 1:1-14

"Magnificat anima mea Dominum." Don't worry, I'm not going Pentecostal on you. That's the Latin translation of Luke 1:46. "Magnificat" is the first word of the first line in the Latin (*"My soul magnifies the Lord."*), hence the traditional title of this very first Christmas carol, Mary's Magnificat (*In the Byzantine tradition, it's called "Ode of the Theotokos,"* literally, the God-bearer – Theotokos was a term designed to clarify that Mary wasn't actually the **mother** of God, she was the **bearer** of God. Yes, in an earthly sense, she was the mother of Jesus; she carried Him in her womb and she delivered Him into her world ... but the Eastern Orthodox church takes pains to clarify that Jesus, being eternal God, doesn't have a "mother." Mary is simply the bearer, the "tokos", the one through whom the Son of God would enter her world). "Anima" is Latin for the animating force, the soul ... we get the English word "animation" from it. Anima is that animating force which gives the physical body life and vitality. Well, here in the Magnificat, Mary wants to use all the animating force and vitality of her life and heart to **magnify** her Lord. You might say she sang in the Key of "M" ... **Mary's Magnificat Magnifies God's Mindfulness, Might and Mercy!** The Latin "Magnificat" is the translation of the original Greek word "Megaluneî" (*which might sound at first like something of a large goofy bird*). "Megaluneî" (μεγαλύνει) literally means to make large, to make conspicuous. It's also contains the same root word from which we get the word Megaphone; as you know, a megaphone enlarges a voice, it magnifies a voice, it makes the voice loud, conspicuous, attention-getting, significant. And that's what Mary wants to do, that's what animates her ... with all her animated soul she wants to magnify, *megaluneî*, God.

What does it mean to "megaluneî" God; what does it mean to **magnify** the Lord? As I pointed out in years past when we've looked at this passage, it may help to think in terms of opposites. The opposite of "to magnify" is to shrink, to reduce in size, to minimize. We can magnify the Lord and His significance and His influence and His reality in our lives, or we can minimize God and His significance and His influence and His reality in our lives. However, when we do the latter, we usually wind up magnifying everything else way out of proper proportion.

The last time we looked at this passage I recalled that TV show from the late sixties, "The Land of the Giants," a rather ill-fated series that lasted less than two seasons. Producer Irwin Allen had four series in that decade of the sixties: "Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea," "Lost in Space," "Time Tunnel" and "The Land of the Giants." The setting for "The Land of the Giants" was far in the future ... in the 1968 pilot program, the date on the dashboard of the spaceship read June 16 ... 1983. The basic plot was that Suborbital Flight 612, bound for London, crash landed and its crew and passengers soon realized they had not landed on Earth ... their vessel had entered some sort of time space warp, and they ended up on a planet like Earth, except that everything, including the human-like inhabitants, was many times the size of its earthly counterpart. Everything in the **Land of the Giants** was "magnified" way out of proportion, and the passengers and crew were miniature. Each week they battled the hazards of giant children, giant cats (*magnifi-cats?*), giant dogs, giant bugs, giant everything. Everything was gigantic to them ... things normally small and insignificant back on Earth were now monstrously huge, dangerous, life-threatening. Their being "minimized" had the result of magnifying the threat and danger of just about everything else around them.

It's not a perfect analogy, but something of the same thing happens when we don't magnify God, when we reduce Him, when we minimize His reality and diminish His importance in our lives. When we do that, when we shrink God, then just about **everything** else around us becomes a much larger threat from our human perspective. We become increasingly afraid of everything! Magnifying God is about coming into focus with just how big God really is ... and just how small we are. Just Who is big and who is little? Just Who is powerful and who is weak? Just Who is the Creator and who is the creature? Who is Sovereign and who is servant? It's a fundamental human temptation to magnify ourselves, our opinions, our desires, while simultaneously reducing God's reality, God's desires, God's perspectives. If God is not properly magnified, however, other things and other opinions and other moral codes and other fears and worries will be magnified way out of proportion as a result. This is why magnifying God, making Him a large and conspicuous and central part of our lives, is so crucial. To magnify God is to increase our attention to and awareness of Him and His reality, which puts everything else in its proper perspective. A benediction I once heard and still use on occasion (*I think the last time was week three of this pandemic*) sums it up well: *"May you love God so much, that you'll love nothing else too much. And may you fear God so much, that you fear nothing else at all."*

So Mary magnifies the Lord, and she is also a prime example of how God magnifies and lifts up those who magnify Him. We know the story ... God sent His angel to Mary, to tell her that she is about to receive this special favor from God. She was about to become the mother of the Savior. The young Mary was, of course, initially perplexed by all this. Why should God notice her and single her out for this immense honor? She was not a rabbi; she was not a princess; she was not a governor; she was just a relatively anonymous young woman in an insignificant little town. But as she contemplated what was happening and what she was hearing, she began to make sense of it all. The more she thought about who God is, and what God had done, and about what God is doing, the more things began to come together ... and the less she cared about the opinions and favor of others and the more she cared about the favor of God. The more she focused on God's grace and presence, the better she understood God really was giving her the opportunity to play such an important role in the saving of the world! The bigger God became to her, the larger her joy grew, and the smaller her apprehensions became. And she was used by God to bring the Savior into her world! That was what she was being called to do. And, by the way, that's what we are all called to do ... if indeed we have been born anew by the Spirit of God within, we too carry the life of Jesus in us. And we are all called to do what we can to bring our Savior into the worlds where we live and work through our very lives. When we magnify God, when we maximize His significance in our lives, like Mary, the better we will see and perform our vital role in bringing the Savior and His saving, salvaging power and grace into the world about us ... an increasingly darkening and fear-filled world so much in need of the Light, especially today

A quote attributed to Francis of Assisi I've mentioned before: *"Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words."* I like that. Francis is speaking about being a lens, a magnifying glass, about living all of life in such a way that we become a magnifying portal through which other people can look and see *God better*. Even though I work with words, and spend hours each week hammering out the right words to say from this pulpit, I know words are so inadequate, so prone to being misunderstood, forgotten and/or ignored. Even I forget what I've said in some of my own sermons! (*In fact, I've calculated I have preached just about twelve hundred sermons since I first stood in this pulpit twenty-four years and one week ago ... now I'm sure some of you may remember every single word, but I certainly don't!*) Don't get me wrong; I certainly do believe words are important, and I make every effort to speak well, correctly, succinctly, honorably, engagingly, truthfully and clearly. Yet the most effective communicators of the reality of God's grace and love in my life have not necessarily been those who have been good with words; they have been those genuinely faithful people who have lived the quiet, consistent, faithful, magnifying Christian witness of **lives well lived**, even if I can't remember a word they said. Such people magnified God in their faith-full lives by living and loving well ... their "megalunei" lives were a lens, a magnifier, through which I could look and see more clearly God's reality, God's grace, God's love. Such *"mega-loonies"* lived lives which spoke as loudly to me as megaphones because they drew my attention to the only real Word that matters ... the Word described by the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

According to John, Jesus was that Word ... He was the fullest and clearest expression of God's thought, God's will, God's person, God's essence, God's personality ... and this "Word," this divine self-expression, *"became flesh and dwelt among us."* We also read, *"There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light."* John was another *"Megalooney;"* he was called to be a magnifying lens through whom others could see the Light, a megaphone calling attention not to himself, but directing attention to the only real Word that matters.

Our mission is the same as Mary's, to bring our Savior into our worlds, and our mission is the same as John's, to witness to the Light and direct attention to the only real Word that matters. Our mission as individuals and our mission as a church is to faithfully, consistently, patiently do what it takes to direct people to the only true Light there is. And we do that by preaching the Gospel always ... using words when we have to. We do that by magnifying God through the lens of faithful and loving and honorable lives well lived. And I'm convinced the way we best do that is by making certain, like Mary, that what animates us is magnifying the Lord at every opportunity, making Him a conspicuous and obvious and central part of our lives ... and living as He would have us live.

To close, I'd like us to repeat our Call to Worship earlier this morning:

"I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall be continually in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the Lord. Let the humble hear and be glad.

O MAGNIFY THE LORD WITH ME, AND LET US EXALT HIS NAME TOGETHER."

Amen.