

A Soul That Magnifies - Luke 1:39-56
Sermon - Pastor Joe Davis
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I. INTRODUCTION

What do you get excited about in life? What can make you jump up and down for joy? What can bring tears of joy to your eyes? What can make you forget your inhibitions and shout out loud in celebration? For some of us it takes a lot before we're ready to let down our guard and show without reservation how excited and overjoyed we are about something. A few people just wear their emotions on their sleeve and let out their excitement just whenever and wherever it comes...but I would say precious few adults are this way. When we're kids we tend to be a little more free in showing our excitement, but as we get older we get more self-conscious, more aware of what other people might think of us, and more careful about giving others any clues about what we might be feeling or thinking on the inside. We fine-tune our poker face and get very adept at keeping our emotions in check and only showing our excitement when it's safe.

Nevertheless, I think all of us can think of at least a few times in our lives when something so significant happened that all of our attempts at hiding or suppressing our excitement failed us and we had to dance around a little bit, let out a "Woo-hoooh!!!," or maybe even let out a few tears of joy. Some of you could be this way every time your football team wins! For some reason sports seems to be the one culturally acceptable place to let our emotions out. People who are otherwise quiet and reserved suddenly scream at the top of their lungs, jump up and down, and even cry when a clinch victory is achieved.

I can remember being this way when I would watch my sister's basketball team in high school. There's just something about seeing our loved ones succeed and excel and do their best that really affects our emotions and causes us to abandon our inhibitions as we celebrate with them. Those games were an emotional roller coaster for me...sometimes fighting back the tears at a crucial basket...constant cheering at the top of my lungs. And when they would finally clinch the victory, all attempts at holding back the emotions failed and the usual quiet and reserved Joe would be cheering, jumping up and down, wiping away tears and running out

onto the court with the crowd to celebrate. What in the world had happened to me?! The intensity of the joy and celebration just couldn't be kept inside...it broke down all my attempts to keep it hidden safely within.

And beyond sports, we can probably all think of other things in our lives that caused a similar reaction...maybe when you landed your first job...or when you graduated from college...or when you finally achieved some goal you'd been chasing...or when your kids did really well at something...or when a broken relationship with a friend or family member was restored.

What are some of the things that have caused a spontaneous outburst of joy and celebration in your life? In those moments did you have any awareness of God as you celebrated? Did it lead you to magnify him and rejoice in him? Did you have an awareness of his personal involvement in the situation and that he was communicating his love and care for you through it? Has your excitement and joy and celebration ever caused you to spontaneously give audible praise to God and proclaim his goodness? And why do you think it seems so much harder to break down this wall of inhibitions...the wall that keeps us worried about what people will think if we audibly declare how great God is and give him glory?

Well today, we're going to look at a situation that caused two women to break through that wall. Their joy and celebration went beyond just a self-absorbed party and moved on to a loud and uninhibited proclamation of God's greatness, goodness and tender care of those who fear him. Turn with me if you would in your Bibles to Luke chapter 1, where we'll be focusing today on verses 39 to 56. Today's message is called, "A Soul That Magnifies."

To get you up to speed on where we are in history, the priest Zacharias has already had his encounter with the angel Gabriel in the temple and is now unable to speak because of his unbelief; his elderly wife Elizabeth is now 6-months pregnant with John the Baptist as promised by the angel; and the virgin Mary has just now had her encounter with an angel who told her that the Holy Spirit would conceive a son in her womb, without the help of a man, and that her son would be called the Son of God. In Mary's encounter with the angel she was also told about the pregnancy of her previously barren relative Elizabeth. So this is where we pick up the events in Luke chapter 1, verse 39.

II. MARY TRAVELS IN A HURRY AND GREETES ELIZABETH (vs. 39-40)

Let's read verses 39 and 40 to begin:

39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

As you might imagine after Mary's life-changing encounter with an angel of the Lord, she probably wanted to share it with someone who would believe her. And who would be more likely to believe her than her own relative Elizabeth who was also taking part in these miraculous events? Imagine the excitement of being able to share with Elizabeth that you knew she was pregnant because an angel had told you! And though Mary hadn't asked the angel for a sign in order to believe, the angel had graciously provided one for Mary, and that was the prophetic information that Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant. Wouldn't you want to go check it out?

Notice that Mary went in a hurry. We get the impression that immediately after her encounter with the angel she packed up her bags, left her home in Nazareth, and hit the trail to Elizabeth's house in the hill country of Judah. And after her journey of several days, she arrived at Elizabeth's house, went right in and said something like, "Elizabeth, how are you?!" Or more likely, in the character of Jewish greetings, "My dear Elizabeth, blessings be upon you!" Obviously we don't know her exact words, but I think that's a pretty good guess!

III. THE SPIRIT MOVES AND FILLS (v. 41)

So let's see what happens in verse 41 as Mary comes in unexpectedly and greets Elizabeth. In verse 41 we read:

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

As Mary greeted Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit was on the move. At the very sound of her greeting, the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb and Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit. Don't you wonder what that felt like? Most of you ladies

know what it's like to have babies kicking and moving around in your womb, but imagine what a leaping would feel like. But however it felt, clearly it was very noticeable for Elizabeth and it got her attention. This baby was already letting his emotions out and couldn't contain his joy at hearing the voice of the woman who was carrying the Savior of the world in her womb.

If you'll remember from last week, the baby John was already filled with Holy Spirit even in Elizabeth's womb, and the Spirit was already moving and filling him and doing miraculous things through him. But the Spirit wasn't only filling the baby. As the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb the Spirit filled Elizabeth as well. In this idea of "filling," we get the picture of wind filling the sails of a boat and moving it along...or of helium filling a balloon and causing it to rise in the air. And as we'll see in the next 3 verses, in filling Elizabeth the Holy Spirit was working and moving within her, giving her insight into things only God could know, sharing prophetic truths about things that were happening and still to come, and giving her boldness to speak what she saw loudly and unashamedly.

IV. ELIZABETH SPEAKS BOLDLY IN THE SPIRIT (vs. 42-45)

Let's find out in verses 42-45 what happened as Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit:

42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 "And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? 44 "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. 45 "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Elizabeth had suddenly become bold and confident and unashamed through the filling of the Holy Spirit. She didn't even care anymore what the neighbors might think! As the Spirit filled her up and revealed things to her, she simply couldn't contain herself and began loudly proclaiming God-given truths.

At the unexpected arrival of Mary and in response to her greeting, Elizabeth experienced the power of the Spirit working through her in ways beyond what she had likely ever experienced before and the result was a loud and bold proclamation of God's Word.

In addition to the boldness he gave Elizabeth, the Spirit also revealed things to her that only God could know. Mary had shared nothing about her pregnancy, and yet Elizabeth through the Spirit knew that Mary was pregnant with a child who is none other than her very own Lord. And through the Spirit, Elizabeth knew that the Lord had spoken a promise to Mary about this child and that Mary had believed there would be a fulfillment of that promise. And Elizabeth, through the Spirit, was also given insight about why the baby had leaped in her womb. She knew that he had leaped for joy because he heard the voice of his Savior's mother! And in filling Elizabeth, the Spirit also proclaimed information about the future. He shared through Elizabeth a three-fold message of current and future blessing to Mary and her baby: 1) Mary would be considered blessed among other women; 2) Mary's baby would be blessed; and 3) Mary's choice to believe that God's promise would be fulfilled was already bringing blessing.

Do you know what the Greek Word for that 3rd blessing means? It's a word that means "happy" ...not a forced, "paste-on-a-smile," kind of attempt at happiness, but a true, inner happiness, joy or contentment. To re-phrase: Elizabeth proclaimed, "[Happy] is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." Mary was already experiencing the fruit of inner happiness and joy that grows in those who believe God's Word and act on it.

And notice the true humility that's evident within Elizabeth as she speaks these words to Mary. She says: "***And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?***" In experiencing the miraculous reversal of her previous barrenness, Elizabeth hasn't concluded that she must be pretty special if God would do this for her. She hasn't allowed herself to think she somehow earned or deserved this blessing. Instead she's been living with a sense of humble awe and thankfulness that God would be so gracious as to perform such a miracle within an ordinary, old lady from the hill country of Judah. And now she's even more amazed that he has invited the woman appointed as the mother of her Savior to come and personally visit her and share her joy. And this deeply embedded and pervasive heart attitude of humility is what prepares the way for the Spirit to work powerfully within her, with the result that God and not Elizabeth is glorified.

For those of us here today who have humbly repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus Christ to save us, may I remind you that we have this very Spirit who powerfully filled Elizabeth living inside us permanently right now. Did you know he's no less powerful than he was when he filled Elizabeth, giving her boldness, revealing God's truth, and communicating his message to Mary? You and I have a great gift and privilege and blessing that God's people before Christ didn't have, and that's the permanent indwelling of God's Holy Spirit within us. He doesn't come and go like he did in Old Testament times. He's with us and in us at all times and is ready to fill us up, give us boldness and even words to say, guide us into God's truth, and give us the power and gifting to do things we could never do on our own. As we learn to walk with him in humility and simple trust, his power can work within us just as powerfully as it did in Elizabeth. Do you believe that today?

Well, in what we've looked at so far today, it's very clear that God is pouring out confirmation after confirmation to both Mary and Elizabeth that something big is about to happen and that the miracles he's promised to both of them are already being fulfilled. Mary didn't even need to explain to Elizabeth what had happened to her because the Spirit revealed it to Elizabeth as she spoke. Though Mary had done nothing except greet Elizabeth, Elizabeth by the Spirit already knew that Mary was pregnant, that the child in Mary's womb was the Lord, and that God had spoken a promise to Mary that Mary had fully believed. Don't you know that both Mary and Elizabeth were simply blown away by what the Spirit was doing in and through them?

V. A SOUL THAT MAGNIFIES THE LORD (vs. 46-56)

So now it's Mary's turn to respond to what Elizabeth had just loudly proclaimed by the Spirit, and she responds with a profound, poetic, God exalting proclamation we know as *the Magnificat*. In it, by the Spirit, Mary reveals how and why she is responding personally to what God has done for her, and then she boldly praises God for who he is and what he has done. Let's read Mary's response to Elizabeth in verses 46 through 55:

46 And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, 47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. 48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me

blest. 49 "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. 50 "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. 51 "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. 52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. 53 "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. 54 "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, 55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever."

So as we begin to look at this beautiful expression of Mary's heart of humility, flowing out of the Spirit's work within her, we notice first that Mary starts by sharing the personal responses of her soul and spirit to what God her Savior has done for her. She tells Elizabeth that her soul is responding to the Lord by exalting or magnifying him. The core of her being, all that is within her is focused on exalting the Lord. Do you know what that word "exalt" means in the original Greek? It means: ***to make great or magnify, to draw attention to, to make conspicuous, to esteem highly, to extol, to celebrate*** (*Blue Letter Bible*).

We get the picture of what we talked about in the beginning of our message: a cutting loose of all our inhibitions to fully celebrate God and point out to everyone just how great he is and what amazing things he's done for us...a jumping up and down...a loud proclamation...a "Woo-hoooh!"...and a pointing not to herself, but to God. The response of Mary's soul was uninhibited and fully focused on drawing attention to God and magnifying him. The response of her soul might also be described as taking a magnifying glass and telling everyone to come check this out...come see who God is and what he's done!

Mary also says that her spirit has rejoiced in God her Savior. In biblical thought, the spirit refers to that part of us that perceives and responds to sensations, and what Mary perceived and felt in her spirit was great joy and happiness in God her Savior. Notice how personal and intimate Mary's interaction is with God: my soul, my spirit, God my Savior. It sounds pretty possessive, doesn't it? All of her soul and spirit is engaged in magnifying and rejoicing in the God who has noticed her and cared about her struggles and invited her into his grand purpose and plan for providing salvation to the human race.

Listen again to the reasons Mary gives for her magnifying and rejoicing in verses 48 and 49:

**48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. 49
"For the Mighty One has done great things for me;**

Though by the world's standards there was nothing very special about Mary, God took notice of her and did great things for her personally. So much so in fact that from now on Mary realized that all people would remember simple, ordinary Mary of Nazareth and call her blessed. Has this prophecy flowing from Mary's lips come true? Most definitely. Our God is a personal God who sees and cares about our struggles and uses ordinary people who humbly recognize their need for him and call upon his name.

This truth becomes even more prominent in what Mary says next as she begins to praise God for who he is. In the last half of verse 49 and verse 50, Mary says:

And holy is His name. 50 "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

Mary first emphasis is that God is holy...meaning he is set apart, above all, on a whole different plane, and perfect in every part of his being and character. No one can even come close to being compared to him! *Vines Expository Dictionary* says it this way: God is "the absolutely 'Holy' One, in His purity, majesty and glory." And in the words of Scripture itself: Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."

Mary then moves on to quote a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures (Psalm 103:17 to be exact)...a passage that she has always known to be true, but has now experienced firsthand. And that is the truth that **God's mercy, in every generation till the end of time, is toward those who fear him.** God's not looking for perfection, for good looks, for intelligence, for wealth, for self-righteousness, or for any other thing that the world values. God's looking instead for those who will simply come in humility, recognizing their inadequacy and sin and call out to him for salvation, forgiveness and new life. He's ready and willing to pour out his mercy on all those who will come to him this way.

The *Blue Letter Bible* shares with us a wonderful definition of the Greek word translated, "mercy." It says mercy is "**kindness or goodwill towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.**" This means that God not only has kindness and goodwill to those who fear him, but that he also has the desire to actually do something about it...and he also has the power to actually help us and carry out his kindness and goodwill when we turn to him. God's mercy is always toward those who fear him, and Mary had now experienced an amazing example of how true this was in her own life.

Are you living with a strong belief and conviction that this is true in your life?...That no matter what challenges or difficulties you walk through, God's mercy is always toward you...that he has unwavering kindness and goodwill toward you, that he suffers and rejoices with you, and that he has a passionate desire and commitment to help you and empower you as you humbly look to him and learn to walk with him in faith? Hold on to that truth and keep it ever before you. You're going to need it!

Continuing on in verses 51 through 55...having praised God for who is, Mary now turns her focus to what God has done. And in this section she not only focuses on God's power and sovereignty and intimate involvement in the affairs of men, but she also highlights a key principle about how God operates in relationship to people. In the first part of verse 51, Mary proclaims that God "**has done mighty deeds with His arm.**" By his own power and might he has accomplished great and miraculous things right here on earth.

Read the Bible and catch up on the history of some of the mighty deeds God has done with His arm. Ask your fellow believers what mighty deeds he has done in their lives. Read church history and find out what mighty deeds God has done in and through those who have walked with him throughout the centuries. And consider the often unnoticed mighty deeds he's doing every day all around us...upholding the universe by the word of his power...giving breath and life to human beings everywhere...coordinating all the details of the universe to accomplish his ultimate will and purposes...and we could go on and on. Sometimes we just need our eyes opened to see all the miraculous things God is daily doing all around us.

And as we move on to the final verses of Mary's Spirit-led proclamation of who God is, we see an obvious pattern emerging that relates to differing ways God has related to people based on their attitude toward him. Some of them he has humbled, while others he has exalted. What we find out is that God has scattered the proud, brought down rulers and sent away the rich empty-handed, while he has exalted the humble, and filled the hungry. The clear pattern is that those who humbly recognize their need for God and look to him are raised to dignity, honor and joy in him, while those who rely on themselves, their power or their wealth are eventually brought low and humbled by God.

Why is this so? Well, the humble and the hungry recognize their need for God, while those relying on themselves, their power or their wealth often don't even realize they're spiritually hungry and in need. Again we see that God's mercy is toward those who humbly recognize their need and call on his name. Humility is front and center in God's kingdom and enables us to see our need for God.

And finally, as Mary closes out her magnifying of the Lord, we see her emphasize him as a merciful promise-keeper...the faithful One even when his people are unfaithful. In verse 54, she says:

***54 "He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever."***

Anyone who knows anything about the history of Israel knows that it's a history filled with disobedience, grumbling and repeated rebellion against God and his ways. And yet, in remembrance of his mercy, his goodwill and kindness toward them, and in remembrance of the promises he had made to Abraham and his descendants, God continued to help Israel and carry out his plan to send their long-promised Messiah...a plan which was now taking shape in the lives of both Mary and Elizabeth. Mary and Elizabeth were really getting to know personally the merciful heart of God their Savior, and what they saw and experienced was causing them to loudly proclaim his greatness and goodness!

VI. MARY'S 3-MONTH VISIT WITH ELIZABETH (v. 56)

And this brings us to our final verse for today, verse 56. It says:

56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned home.

Elizabeth and Mary had quite a long time to visit about and rejoice in the miraculous things God was bringing about within them, didn't they? And if you do the math, I'm thinking Mary must have stayed with Elizabeth until she gave birth to John. Elizabeth was in the 6th month of her pregnancy when Mary arrived and we're told that Mary stayed with her about 3 months. That's 9 months in my calculator, and it's hard to imagine that she left right before the baby was born!

VII. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Well, as we wrap up today, I'd like you to ask yourself: What difference does this account of Mary and Elizabeth make in my life today? As we walked through this passage, what did God point out to you or cause you to think about? The power of God's Word is so amazing that oftentimes as we study it you may get something out of it that wasn't even one of my main points. So as we close today, I'd like to encourage you to take note of whatever God drew your attention to in this study and consider what truth he may want you to believe more fully...or what lie you need to tear down in your life...or what attitude needs to change...or perhaps what action you need to take by the power of his Spirit to live out the truths of God's Word or root out sin in your life.

One big picture thing that stood out to me in this passage was a two-fold theme that God has just been showing us over and over again in our studies over the past year. And if it keeps coming back and keeps appearing everywhere in Scripture, I'd say that it's pretty important and that God really wants us to take it to heart. This two-fold theme is the crucial importance in God's kingdom of two heart attitudes: **humility and trust**. These are the 2 heart attitudes that must underlie everything if we want to truly walk with God and experience the power and transformation only he can bring...if we want to watch his mercy in action in our lives...if we want to be filled up with the Spirit like Elizabeth and Mary.

And it's important to note that we never move beyond humility and trust as we grow in the Lord. It's where we begin our relationship with him and it's where we must continue. If we ever find ourselves living in pride and self-reliance, we've gone way off track from God's plan. Ask God to develop and grow humility and trust within you and break down any pride and self-reliance that try to crop up...as they repeatedly will try to do.

Another truth that stood out to me in this passage is the incredible power of the Holy Spirit. I think too often we don't fully comprehend the amazing gift of the power and presence of God Himself living within those of us who've trusted Christ. Have you really comprehended and believed that the same Spirit who caused a baby to leap in a mother's womb, who caused Elizabeth to boldly and loudly speak God's word, and who led Mary to magnify God her Savior so beautifully and powerfully, is dwelling within you right now and ready to fill you up and empower you to carry out God's will and boldly proclaim him? May God teach us how to more fully walk by his power and gifting in humility and trust.

Thirdly, we need to comprehend the incredible mercy of God that is toward all those who fear him. He has unwavering kindness and goodwill toward us in our difficulties and needs and struggles and is constantly and actively working to give us the practical help we need as we seek to find it in him. And God's mercy toward us is an important reminder as well about how he's calling us to relate to other people as we grow to be more like Christ by the power of the Spirit. If we're becoming the people he's calling us to be, we're going to be growing in mercy toward others...not only sympathizing with and having good intentions toward those struggling, hurting and in need, but also actively doing practical things to physically and spiritually help them.

And finally, true inner happiness and joy is the fruit of believing and acting on God's truth by the power of the Spirit. We see joy and happiness throughout this passage. The baby of course leaped for joy. Mary's is also experiencing inner joy, happiness and gladness in God her Savior. And don't miss the happiness in God's exalting of the humble. That Greek word for "exalt" is used in Scripture metaphorically to describe the raising of someone "to dignity, honor and happiness" (*Blue Letter Bible*). My brothers and sisters in Christ, if you want true inner joy, happiness and contentment in your life through all its ups and downs, learn to believe God's Word and put it into practice by the power of the Spirit.

As God builds within us an attitude of humility and trust that invites the powerful work of the Holy Spirit within us, growing true inner joy, happiness and contentment, and leading us into practical acts of mercy toward others, let's magnify and make a big deal about and draw attention to our great God and Savior! Let's stop worrying about what other people will think and start boldly proclaiming and celebrating the truth they need to hear. The Spirit will give us the courage and freedom to do it. May we each have a soul that boldly and unashamedly magnifies our great and awesome God and Savior!