



AND *Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house. (Luke 1:46-56)*

The first Advent Song of Christmas is the *Magnificat of Mary*, page 26 of the Prayer Book, that begins with the words of Gospel of St. Luke 1:46-55:

One can sense the great joy and devotion of Mary in this instant of Thanksgiving Prayer. As I was driving to my office a few days ago in the pre-dawn darkness, the air was cold and pristine. The stars sparkled from a cloudless sky. I began thinking about the innocent young Mary who was visited by the Archangel Gabriel so many years ago in a village called Nazareth. I thought about her being at home doing her daily chores - all alone. She must have been shocked at the warm Light that illumined her in her solace, but she was not overly fearful. I believe the approach of God always gives us a great peace. As I was contemplating this scene, I wondered, What would have happened had her parents been present? I'm sure the Angel would have deliberately chosen a time that would be a quiet, solitary moment when He could approach Mary alone. I believe that is precisely characteristic of God and His Holy Spirit. I believe He most often speaks to us when there are no others to distract our attention. His voice is soft and still toward those of His own choosing. Had her parents been present, it is unlikely that Mary would have seen or heard the voice and presence of the great Archangel Gabriel sent from the Father. As I thought on these things, my heart melted

with love for her, and her Child, and the Father who demonstrated such great Love to us, and to her. (AOC Christmas Letter, 9 December 2006, Anno Domini)

The birds of the morning sing most sweetly at dawn, and after refreshing Spring rains, too. The dawn of the Gospel follows the shadows and psalmody of the Old Testament. It is quite natural that the shadow should resemble the image of the true form. When we read the Magnificat of Mary, we are reminded of those gentle strains and shadows of the same given in the early scenes of Israel.

Please examine with me the words of the lovely Hannah after God granted her the desire of her heart (the baby Samuel):

My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed. (1 Sam 2:1-10)

The most beautiful words follow beautiful experiences or thoughts. But beauty needs a purity of environment for its manifestation, and it has found its ultimate satisfaction in the gentle heart of a young Virgin. Her great joy could not have been fully realized at the abrupt revelations provided by the great Angel. But Mary has travelled into the hill country of Israel. On every hand of her journey, she has been reminded by the great and Godly heritage of Israel by the mementos along the way of prophets, kings, and mountains of exceedingly precious events. As she walks the rough terrain into these Great Lone Hills, her heart is fixed on the child conceived in her womb, of the Mighty Angel, and upon the Lord of her salvation! She is overcome with humility and love – humility because she is well aware of her shortcomings and seeming unworthiness for the great honor afforded her and, Love, because she has in her body the manifestation and meaning of Love Itself.

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Mary had a soul that magnified the Lord as a jeweler's lens magnifies the excellence of a diamond. Observe that the lenses of a microscope do not alter the structural appearance of its object, but rather bears out the true structure and detail of it. Her soul was open to the nature of the Lord and made it appear large and clear to those who met her. Do our souls do this? Our souls are made magnifiers of the Lord whenever we rejoice in God our Savior! Have you had moments of despair turned suddenly into wonderful experiences of Joy in Christ? If I am sad and down, I can alter that emotion at any time by singing the great old hymns of the church. After a few lines of singing those spiritual and biblical lines, I have forgotten my sorrow and bask in the light and love of God. Try it, my friend!

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Mary is perfectly satisfied to be only a handmaiden of the Lord. Did I say ONLY? Being a handmaiden, a doorman, a gardener, or a butler for the Lord surpasses the office of King in any of the great kingdoms of the world – past or present. Mary freely admits to her low estate and does not claim any higher position, but realizes her low estate has lifted her above the greatest of women in the eyes of the Lord. Though only a simple handmaiden, ALL GENERATIONS will call her blessed.

For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. No matter how low our station and esteem among men, the Lord our God can do great things in and through us. He is not only Holy, but His name, too, is Holy. He is every whit Holy.

And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. God's mercy is not confined to a single people, or a single period of time. It encompasses every nation, tribe, and tongue; and it is eternal in its application. Note that the fear of the Lord will always precede his mercy, for His mercy cannot be granted to those who presume upon His grace with scorn or cunning.

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. Should we ever forget how God's outstretched arm brought us over and through the waters to His haven of safety? And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. (Deut 26:8) Have we failed to witness the same on our own behalf? If so we have eyes to see and see not, and ears to hear and hear not. The proud He has scattered across the depths of the Red Seas of life. He vanquished the giant, Goliath, with a single smooth river stone from the sling of a young boy. He has confused the wisdom of the high and mighty and exalted the simple to the heights of His Love.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. Belshazzar was deposed in a single stroke of the Finger of God. Ahab has God humbled and Jezebel has He made to be food for dogs. A shepherd boy has God exalted as King in Saul's stead. A poor Moabite widow has He lifted into the line of Christ and of David. Fishermen and publicans has He called to the Office of Apostles, the leper has He embraced and healed, the widow's mites has He exalted to greater wealth than all the world can contain. If we shall be exalted, we must first and always seek the lower seats. Have you done so?

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. Our friend and brother, the beggar Lazarus, rest in the bosom of Abraham while the rich man of opulence begs for a drop of water in the fires of Hell where his money and filthy rags of sin will avail him no relief or comfort.

He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy. The evidence of His mercy permeates the Bible account from beginning to end: Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king. Then thou spakest in vision to thy holy one, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. (Psalm 89:15-19)

As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. Have you been granted the grace of being called by that great name – the seed of Abraham? If you have not had, it is simply because you have refused to accept the promise and become a true child of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and ultimately of God.

And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house. Can you imagine the blissful fellowship these two dear ladies enjoyed for those three months? It

is very possible Mary remained with Elizabeth until her child, John, was born for Elizabeth, we are told, was six months with child at the moment of the Annunciation and, having remained three months longer would take us to the nine months for the normal course of the pregnancy of Elizabeth. Whether she was present at his birth or not, she certainly lived to see John a great prophet in Israel and her own Son, Jesus, as the Mighty Savior of all time and Eternity! Have you lived sufficiently to have seen Him?