

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 22, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
A Real Christmas Will Lift Up the Lowly
Luke 1:46-55 (EHV)

⁴⁶Then Mary said,

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, ⁴⁸because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones. He has lifted up the lowly. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, ⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Who are the most famous women in history? Don't think of women who are living now. Think way back into history. Some might think of someone like Cleopatra who was a powerful and savvy in Egyptian and Roman politics. What about Helen of Troy whose face supposedly launched a thousand ships. Of course, since we are considering the Song of Mary, the Magnificat, today, I'm going to say that Mary the mother of Jesus is the most famous woman in the history of the world.

Far more people have read the story of Mary giving birth to Jesus than have read the history of Cleopatra's life. There are more statues of Mary than of Helen of Troy. There are more painting of Mary than of anyone else with the possible exception of Jesus himself. Of course, this honoring of Mary has gone beyond calling her blessed. Some have taken to calling her the co-redeemer with Jesus. Some turn her into a source of grace and blessing to others. Some make her into an idol to be worshiped. We will not be worshiping Mary today or ever, but we do want to be like Mary.

Mary had a real Christmas, the very first Christmas, and God lifted her up from her lowly state by giving her a son who was also her Savior. We also have a real Christmas as the Lord lifts us up from our lowly state by giving us a Son, his Son, our Savior. Listen to Mary's Song again:

⁴⁶Then Mary said, My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, ⁴⁸because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

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Mary was not a powerful politician. Ancient Greek kings were not starting wars over her beauty. She was a young woman who lived in the mostly unknown village of Nazareth and she would have been unknown except to family and friends in the village. Mary was pledged in marriage to a regular guy named Joseph. He was a carpenter, a handy guy, but certainly not famous. It wasn't

like he was a rabbi or Pharisee or member of the Sanhedrin. Mary was living a regular, relatively lowly life that millions and billions in this world have lived.

It is the Spirit worked attitude of Mary that sets her apart. Though she has been chosen to be the mother of the world's Savior, she is humble. In our normal human thinking, when choosing someone for a very important job, we are going to choose someone with great qualifications for the job. Mary has not had any children yet. How is she the best one to raise the Son of God? Mary doesn't have powerful connections in society to protect Jesus when, say, a murderous king tries to kill him. Mary doesn't have wealth to provide the Son of God everything he deserves. Mary is young and doesn't have the wisdom that comes with age to deal with all the pressures she will face as the mother of the Savior. But our God lifts up the lowly.

That's what is so great about Mary. She knew she wasn't great. She confessed that she was lowly. She confessed that she needed a Savior from her sin. And she rejoiced that God was keeping his promise to send the Savior. Mary didn't take any credit or glory for herself. She praised, thanked and glorified God for the great things he was doing for her.

Those who think they are great will not be lifted up by God. Those who are rich and think they don't need any help from God will find out they actually have nothing. Those who are powerful will be brought down. For God lifts up the lowly but scatters the proud.

Are you humble like Mary or proud in your own thoughts? Are you lowly like Mary or boasting in your own power, goodness and wealth? Perhaps we look down on someone because of our intellectual superiority. Maybe we look down on others because of their poor financial decisions compared with our financial wisdom. Or we look down on those with different political view, different religious beliefs, or different cultural traditions. Of course, the only way to look down on someone else is to lift yourself above them, to consider yourself to be wiser and richer and better. When we lift ourselves above others, we are in danger of discovering that we really have nothing. We are certainly nothing like Mary when exalting ourselves.

Instead, humble yourself before the greatness of the Lord. Make yourself low in the presence of the Mighty One. Confess your need for a Savior to take away your sins and not just on Sundays, but every day. Live humbly before God and before others, seeking your Savior's forgiveness...and he will lift you up. God lifts up the lowly.

This is our God's standard operating procedure. Centuries earlier, Hannah sang a similar song when the Lord blessed her with a child who would be named Samuel. Mary says this is just how God does things. *"⁵⁴He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, ⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever."* The Lord always remembers his promises. He never forgets to show mercy. He will lift up the lowly.

He has lifted you up. He lifted you up from being dead in sin to being alive in Christ. He lifted you up from being covered with the filth of sin to being washed clean in the water and Word of baptism. He lifted you up from being a slave to sin to being a child of the Mighty God. He lifted you up from a life that ends in death to a life that never ends through the resurrection of Christ.

There is a secular song that goes around this time of year about someone making a list and checking it twice. He's going to find out who's naughty or nice. The implication of this song is that the main character is not going to visit your town or your house if you are on the naughty list. Mary, Joseph and the shepherds were sinners, on the naughty list, and Jesus came to visit them in the little town of Bethlehem. The wise men were on the naughty list and Jesus was there to welcome their worship in that same town of Bethlehem. The people who lived in Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethany and Jerusalem were on the naughty list and Jesus came to visit their towns. Jesus was born for sinners. The Son of God came to lift sinners up by his forgiving grace. No matter who you are, where you live or what you have done, Jesus came to save you.

Let us therefore be like Mary and rejoice in God our Savior. None of us are going to be as well

known as Mary. Very few of us will have famous artists painting us or sculpting our likeness into marble. Yet, we can rejoice and sing the wonderful songs of Christmas that bring the good news of great joy to those around us. We can look at everyone around us as equals. For the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the naughty and the nice are all alike under God. We all need a Savior, and our God has kept his Word. Christ the Savior was born for me and for you. Ponder this good news in your hearts as Mary did when her Son and her Savior was born. The Mighty One has done great things for us and for all.

Amen.