My soul doth magnify the Lord

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Preacher: Rev R.G.Mackay

[0:00] Let us now turn back to the first chapter of Luke's Gospel and we can focus our thoughts to begin with round verse 46 of Luke chapter 1 and Mary said my soul doth magnify the Lord.

This will be our last look at the first chapter of Luke's Gospel before we move on and we've seen of course that it is principally a chapter of preparation. Luke has written his Gospel primarily for the Gentiles, for those who will have had no prior knowledge of God's plan of salvation and it seems that what Luke is particularly doing in the first chapter is he is creating a build-up as it were before the final introduction of the chief character of the Gospel, the Lord Jesus himself. And although he hasn't yet fully introduced Jesus, although Jesus himself hasn't stepped on to the pages of this Gospel, he hasn't yet been born, yet the method that Jesus really uses in this first chapter is really to fill the chapter with Jesus himself. Jesus has still to come, Jesus has still to be born and to be clearly seen in the history of this world with the physical eye and yet he is here already.
Elizabeth and even the unborn John the Baptist in the womb are affected by the presence of Jesus in the womb of Mary, hardly conceived and yet they are affected as he comes in the womb of his mother, mother to that home. He has already been given the name Jesus, we have heard his name, although he is still to be born. God our Saviour is the name he is to be given.
And we are already aware that he is indeed to be a unique person. Because we have been given careful details also in this first chapter of the uniqueness of his virgin conception.
All these things we have seen already in this chapter and now we are coming towards the end of the chapter and the method that Luke finally uses to heighten this anticipation of the coming Jesus is to cause two of the characters in the early chapter to burst into songs of praise.
[3:29] And the influence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Because of the coming Jesus, because these folks have been clearly affected by the knowledge of his coming, they are moved by the Spirit of God to sing praises to God because they are now realising that for Jesus to come into this world means God breaking through into this world.

And they must react with songs of faith and songs of worship. And so I think what Luke is doing as he records these songs for us, the songs that the established church over the years has called the Magnificat and the Benedictus.
What Luke is doing as he records this book. What Luke is doing for us is challenging his hearers right from the beginning, even before they see the Jesus about whom the good news is to be written, even before they see him clearly.
He is challenging them early on. And he is saying, when you are confronted with this man, Christ Jesus, you are confronted with the living God.
Even though you have not had the traditions that the Jews have had, you Gentiles to whom I am particularly writing this gospel, he is your God also.
[5:10] Because he is the living and the true God, the only God. And that's whom we see when we look into the face of Jesus Christ.

And that who comes, that's who comes in power and in mercy and in grace into this world when Jesus comes. It's your God. And I challenge you, will you react in a right way to the coming of your God when you hear the gospel story?
Will you react as Mary reacted? Will you react as Zacharias acted?
That's the challenge of these songs to us this evening. Our God has come.
Our God has pulled back the veil finally and shown himself clearly, once and for all and forever, in the face of the eternal Son, Christ Jesus.
[6:33] And we are challenged to respond. What was Mary's response?

Well, the first thing she says in her Magnificat is this. It is a God of majesty who comes.

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It is a God of majesty who comes. From verse 46, and Mary said, my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
Verse 49, for he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name.
Mary says, my reaction must be, to make God great in my life and in my soul.
[7:42] My soul doth magnify the Lord. That's the reaction that Jesus desired.

That Jesus sought very often to engineer amongst his disciples, if they were truly to know him and to follow him.
Oh yes, so much of the glory of God was veiled in the human face of Jesus Christ.
But all with the intention that God from heaven, the unseen eternal spirit, might come into focus.
And we who are mere creatures, we who are sinners, might know him and understand him and see him.
And so that's what Jesus did one day with Peter when they were beside the Sea of Galilee. We may come to it later on in our studies in Luke if the Lord spares us.
[9:01] And Jesus engineered a situation and overruled a situation and created a situation so that there was that miracle that caused Peter to wonder and to be amazed.

When although they had fished all night when Jesus said put down your nets, there was there a huge catch of fishes.
Peter realized that when he was in the presence of the man Christ Jesus, he was in the presence of Almighty God.
And he said, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.
The disciples were slow, perhaps slower than Mary, to give this necessary reaction to the coming of Jesus.
[10:03] And although Jesus showed that he was none other than the Son of God amongst them so often, even after his death and his resurrection, Thomas, for instance, was still full of doubts and fears.

Oh, so slow to believe, so slow to magnify the Lord. Show me the nail prints.
And Christ showed them. It's only Christ who can reveal his glory to us. Oh, how much we need to pray that Christ himself, in his great wisdom and mercy, will make us aware of who he is.
And that we are in his presence, as we follow him. And we need to bow down as Thomas did, and say, my Lord and my God.
You see, this is one of the works of the evil one. As he seeks to work in our minds. As he seeks to use, perhaps, our familiarity with the Scriptures, and that will be the way probably with most of us, if not all of us here this evening.
[11:38] We have become so familiar with the name of Jesus, that the evil one will be tempting us to bring down our God, our Lord Jesus Christ, to the ordinary.

That's the reason why we surely have difficulties with our celebration of Christmas. We have difficulties with it because it brings with it awful temptations to squeeze God into our mould.
And so some feel that the only reaction is to not celebrate this time of year in a Christian way at all.
I think we have to allow them the dictates of their consciences. I don't think they can impose their consciences on us all.
It is good to emphasise family values. To emphasise kindness at this time of year. Good, perhaps, to emphasise putting the children at the centre of our activities for a while.
[12:57] But yes, it does bring dangers. It does bring dangers that we misuse the Scriptures, that we misuse the glory of the incarnate Christ.

And so, yes, we have to be careful. Yes, we have to be prayerful. And yes, we have to ask God to work by his Spirit in our hearts.
That we will not lose our sense of awe concerning whom our Lord Jesus Christ is. That we will not use our desire to bow down and to worship.
And to stand nervously in his presence. For who knows what he will do to us when we come to him.
And when we remember that he is majestic. And he has a right to do with us as he wills.
[14:17] Are these our thoughts as we approach Christ Jesus at this time? We must be careful that we maintain this sense of majesty and awe in our worship.

In our public worship. Match is said about whether or not to change this or that in our worship and in the worship that others become involved in.

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And it's quite a talking point in church circles in these days. We've got to look for the principles of God's Word. Yes, we've got to remember that when we meet for worship, we meet for public worship.
We meet not just in a holy huddle. We meet with the doors open that the public may come in. This is scriptural.
When the church in Corinth met for worship, they were to have an eye in their worship of God for the stranger who might come in. And they had to see that their language was relevant to the stranger.
[15:39] Some wanting to talk in the strange tongues that God sometimes gave in these days by his Spirit. But the stranger would not understand if there was not clear interpretation or clear prophecy.

And they had to see that their worship was relevant. That it might be seen as they worship God in this world. That there was but the one God who was a God for all men.
And yes, it may be that there will be changes to our worship that are relevant. In order to bring it up to date, the language we use, the version of the Bible that we use, there may indeed be room there for changes.
Because in our worship, we're not just to think about ourselves. We're to think about the man in the street who may have difficulties that we do not have. And we are to proclaim our worship in an understandable way that the stranger who may come in may not be hindered and duly.
And there are considerations there that we need to keep constantly under review. That therein lies a danger.
[17:02] And we must be aware of the danger as well. When we come here to worship, we come to worship the Lord, not to worship man.

We come first and foremost to please our God. And it's only as we please our God that we will have any authority and any power to please our fellow man, stranger though he be.
And sometimes what's happened when there is over much focus on what will suit man and what will suit the man in the street, that the worship loses so much of its sense of awe and its sense of wonder.
And worship can become trite and simplistic. And God, it seems, becomes like a pal that we sidle up to in the street and we're so friendly and palsy-walsy with the God who has created us.
The Holy One of untouchable glory. And it is only with the wisdom and the instruction of the Spirit, and it is only as we bow down low and confess to God our difficulties and our temptations, that we will be able to get that balance.
[18:42] And be able to maintain in our worship and understandableness, a relevance to the man of the street and a wonder and a awe in the presence of our majestic God.

You see, there is a way in which the man in the street ought to feel uncomfortable when he comes into Christian worship.
Indeed, there is a way in which we all perhaps should feel uncomfortable when we draw near to worship.
You see, this may be one of the reasons why sometimes we don't want to have any change. Because this is the way it's always been and we like it and we feel comfortable with it and we feel secure with it.
And maybe these are the only impressions we have about our worship. This is what we enjoy. This is what we remember from our childhood. This is the way we like things. And again, you see, it's so self-centered.
[20:00] But if we truly come to worship the Lord whom our souls must magnify, we ought to come with some discomfort.

We ought to come remembering our sin. We ought to come remembering again and again and again the need for our Saviour Christ to die so horribly on that cross.
And we need to recapture every time we meet in this place for worship. A new amazement.
A new amazement. That we can sit here in the presence of Almighty God and not be consumed.
O the wonder of the majesty of God, who invites sinners like ourselves to draw near through his Son Christ Jesus.
[21:24] Do we really know in our daily experience, in our quiet times for instance, our daily times with the Lord, that attitude that Mary knew when she thought of the coming of Jesus into this world,

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summed up in these wonderful words, my soul doth magnify the Lord.

It is a God of majesty who comes. It is a God of power who comes. This is introduced by Mary at the beginning of verse 51.
He hath showed strength with his arm. Mary's words are very much bedded in the language of the Old Testament, which she must have known so well.
There is no doubt that she was a spiritual young woman, Mary. Her whole song brings real evidence of a background, of real acquaintance with the Scriptures.
And she is thinking of the way that God so often in the Old Testament talks about bearing his arm and coming in his might and in his power.
[22:57] And this is what she sees as happening with the coming of Jesus into the world.

And it's this aspect of Mary's song that Zacharias takes up in his song. Mary saw a God of majesty coming.
She saw a God of power coming. And it's this God of power especially that Zacharias sees coming.
And if you move to his song, you can see the way in which he saw that power working.
We haven't time to go into it in detail, but perhaps you'll want to study it yourselves at another time.
Just notice the power of God in Zacharias' song beginning at verse 68.
Zacharias saw with the coming of Jesus the coming of God's power in deliverance. That's at verses 68 to 71.
[24:00] And of course this deliverance was given a magnificent picture in the experience of Zacharias himself before he gave out this song.

You remember the story how he had been bound, how he was in bondage to a damned spirit. He couldn't speak. But with his obedience and faith to the Lord and naming his son, not Zacharias but John, there came the deliverance.
And the freedom to speak and the freedom to praise and the freedom to serve the Lord. A beautiful picture of the deliverance that the power of God has effected through the coming of Jesus.
We were in bondage. We were bound by the power of sin. We couldn't move out into the freedom of living for the Lord in all the hope of his blessing and of the influence of his spirit.
But by his power through Christ, he has broken the bands. We have been able to escape as Psalm 124 describes it.
[25:25] We've been able to escape and to be free as a bird. We've been able to escape as a bird.

To help us in times of spiritual difficulty as Christians. Oh, there is still sin in our lives.
We all know it if we are the Lord's people. And the evil one you see will try to convince us that we're really as tightly bound with the old bands as we ever were.
And we need on the authority of God's word to remember in order to fight against that sin that remains. That the central reality of our lives is that we are free.
That we are delivered. That we are now in the strength of the indwelling spirit. And we can escape from the sin that remains and from time to time overtakes us.
[27:00] There is a way out of the indwelling sin that still remains. By the power of the deliverance that Christ has won for us.

Zachariah saw the power of the divine. Zachariah saw the power of the divine.
That came with the coming of Jesus. From verse 72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.
The favor of the Lord was at stake. Friendship with God was at stake. God's holy covenant had to be kept.
Only the divine Christ could do it. We could never enter into holy covenant with God in our sin.
[28:19] God must punish. God must cast us off in his holy justice and righteousness. But with Christ came the power of the divine.

To enter into covenant for us. To do all that the almighty holy one required.
And to bring us into the favor of God. That's what we rejoice in.
When we trust in Christ. We trust in the one who has won for us. The everlasting smile of God.
Upon our lives. That's what you have tonight. If you're a Christian. That's what you have tonight I have to say.
[29:27] Even if perhaps you are a backslidden Christian. Oh if you're a backslidden Christian tonight. God is not pleased with you.

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And perhaps that's the reason why your life is full of clouds. But behind that cloud of God's chastening.
There is a silver lining. Behind that cloud of a darkened face. That God is revealing to you. Because you are not right before him.
There is the smile of his faithfulness. For Christ's sake. And if you are his. He must deal with you. In that chastening way. Until you see again. That you can only know joy and peace. When you are walking in the ways.
[30:35] Of his holy covenant. The God of power comes. In the power of deliverance.

In the power of the divine. And in the power. Of discernment. Verse 77 of Zachariah's song.
To give knowledge of salvation. And to his people. By the remission of their sins. Through the tender mercy of our God. Whereby the day spring from on high. Hath visited us.
In the coming of Christ. There comes the power. Of the light of God. The light. That gives life.
We see this in physical terms. The light of the sun. Has the power. To give life.
[31:33] To the plant life. Of our world. This is the way. With the spiritual light. And enlightenment.

That Christ brings. In our sin. We are in darkness. We are confused. About the ways of God. We cannot see.
Where he is going. We cannot see. What he is doing. We cannot see. How it can possibly. Be helpful. To know God. To listen to God. To walk in his ways.
We're in darkness. That may be the way. With some of you. This evening. And although perhaps. You come but to church. Week by week. It's not making. All that much difference. And the reason. May be. That you are still. Not confessing. That you are in darkness. You're still. Depending on yourself. To work it all out.
[32:30] You still feel. That you have the power. To get to grips. With the Bible. For yourself. And you've got. All your own opinions.

About how it should be. And you need to see. What Mary saw. And what Zachariah saw. That you need. That you need. The power of God. Who comes. In Jesus Christ.
The power of discernment. The power by which God. Can enter in. With his light. And enable you to see.
And enable you to see. That the darkness. Comes from yourself. And that Christ.
Is the one. Who can bring you light. And understanding. And fit the jigsaw together. And enable you to confess your sin.
[33:29] And enable you to. Listen to the voice of God. And follow him. Oh. If you're not a Christian.

This evening. You certainly need the power. To see. The power to be convinced. That it is good. To follow Christ. It is good. To listen to God. And to have his word.
Order. Every area. Of your lives. It is a God of power.
Who comes. Mary brings it all together. In her soul. She says. This God of power. He can take the mighty.
[34:26] And he can cast them down. He can take the humble. And the poor. And the oppressed. And he can lift them up. In other words. Mary is saying. By his power.

When he comes. He can turn our circumstances. Upside down. What did that knowledge. Bring Mary to do?
It brought Mary. To trust in the Lord. Oh. What was God going to do. In Mary's life. He was going to cause her.
To be. To be. An unmarried mother. As it seemed. He was going to cause her.
Great difficulty in society. It would seem. Turning her life. Upside down. What did she say to him? Oh.
[35:26] What grace and favour. God showed to Mary of Nazareth. I'm your handmaid. I'm your servant.

As it seems good to you. You do it. God. The God of power. Has come.
Oh. What folly. To be against that God. Oh. What hope. Oh.
What may yet be for us. If we commit ourselves. To that God. If I'm a man of riches. If I'm a man of influence.
God could cast me down. With all my riches. With whatever influence I have. I am your handmaid. I am your servant.

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[36:31] Whatever troubles we may have. Whatever difficulties we may have. Whatever hard circumstances we may have in life. The God of power can change them in a moment.

If it pleases him. Because nothing's impossible with him. Lord God of power can. I commit myself to you.
I am your servant. Mary had one last reason for this reaction. She saw that the God of majesty had come.
That the God of power had come. That the God of mercy had come. From verse 54. He hath helped his servant Israel.
In remembrance of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers. To Abraham. And to his seed forever.
What was she saying? She was saying.
[37:35] God promised. To be merciful. Away back in the days of Abraham. And the patriarchs.
And he's kept his promise. Oh what a merciful God he is.

Look at the long history of our fathers. Look at the way we added sin upon sin. All through the history of Israel. The divided nation.
The exiled nation. The recalled nation. Oh what a poor people we have been. Through the history of Old Testament times. Mary could have said.
That he remembered his mercy. And he's coming. That brings hope for every one of us here tonight.
No matter our sin. No matter the secret sins that remain. God has come in Christ.
[38:42] And he has come in mercy. Will you trust him? Will you believe him? Will you bow down in humility?

Will I? And say it's mercy that I need. Without mercy I have no hope. But oh Lord if you will come with your mercy.
Then I will receive your power. And with your power. I will be able to acknowledge your majesty.
And I will be able to serve you. In righteousness. In righteousness. All the days of my life. Amen.

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