



The Magnificat

The Canticle of Mary

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.



THE MAGNIFICAT

- The Magnificat is one of the best known Christian prayers. It is Mary's Song of Praise filled with gratitude and praise to God as recorded in Luke 1:46-55 - spoken in response to her cousin Elizabeth's greeting and blessing. Finding herself pregnant after the angel Gabriel's visit, Mary went to Elizabeth's house to see if Elizabeth was also pregnant like the angel had said. Elizabeth was visibly pregnant, being six months along in her pregnancy with John the Baptist who leapt inside her womb when Mary arrived. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:42-45). The Magnificat is Mary's response.
- The reason Mary's poetic response is referred to as the Magnificat is because in Latin, *magnificat* (meaning "magnify," "glorify," "exalt," etc.) is the first word of her response. In this reply, Mary glorified God for blessing her and for His faithfulness to Israel. The Magnificat is a wonderful and hope-filled prayer. It is the prayer not of an innocent or sheltered girl, but of a mature young woman, who carries in her heart as well as in her body the hopes of a downtrodden and oppressed people. It is clear that Mary has reflected often and prayerfully on the social and political history of her people.
- Mary's response is one of four hymns of praise recorded in Luke in response to the birth of Christ. The other three are Zechariah's *Benedictus* ([Luke 1:67-79](#)), the angels' *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* (Luke 2:13-14) and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:28-32). Mary's Magnificat also echoes many scriptural passages from the Old Testament, most notably Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Even today, Mary's Song of Praise is often used around Christmas. Mary's glorifying God in this poetic way has stood for many generations. May it inspire us to similarly recognize God's work throughout history and within our own personal lives. It is printed below for that purpose.:
- *"putting forth his arm in strength and scattering the proud of heart; bringing down the powerful from their thrones and raising up the lowly; filling the starving with good things, while sending the rich away empty."*
- The God Mary praises with all her heart is, certainly, the Loving and compassionate God, *"ever mindful of his mercy"* – and of course the rich and powerful can receive that mercy if they are open to God's Word and willing to change their ways. But the God of the Magnificat is clearly a God who is on the side of the poor and downtrodden, those pushed aside and oppressed by the rich and the powerful. This is the God, whose Son Mary *"bore in her womb with love beyond all telling"* (as the Second Advent Preface so telling puts it). This is the God that Jesus Christ came to reveal.
- A very fruitful way of praying the Magnificat is to pray it along with Mary, identifying with her feelings. From the moment the Angel left her, Mary knew that Jesus was present within her. But she had nine months to wait – to wait for her child to appear, to show himself, so that she could see him, touch him, feed him, hug him, and kiss him. Women, especially mothers, can easily identify with Mary's feelings during her pregnancy, the joy and the pain, the longing and the anxiety – until her time was ripe and the child within her would be there before her. Then she could look into his eyes, hear his cries, and hold his body to her breast. She would experience her child with all her senses: eyes, ears, touch, taste and smell. Then her waiting would be over and her joy would know no bounds. If we let Mary lead us during this novena of prayer and stay close to her, we can be certain that Christ will become more alive for us too and we will experience something of Mary's joy.