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Welcome to the second Sunday in Advent. This year we are looking at four "songs" sung by principal characters in the narrative of Jesus' birth. Last Sunday we delved into Zechariah's song. When he regained his voice after nine months of enforced silence, he named his son, John as the Angel said he should. Then Zechariah bursts into a song praising God, which we saw was deeply theological. I love the tender moment when he sang to his infant son, "*You my child, will be called **Prophet of the Highest.*** *You will go ahead of the Master to prepare the way for his coming. It will be your responsibility to give His people knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.*"¹

What a lovely blessing to give a child, a blessing in keeping with God's plan for him!

Today we examine Mary's song, known as the ***Magnificat***, Latin for the first word of the song,

"magnify", in the old King James' version, which in our time translates to "Praise!"

The ***Magnificat*** is often referred to as the very first Christmas carol, and said to have a powerful effect.

E. Stanley Jones, the famous Methodist preacher and scholar, called this Christmas carol, "*the most revolutionary document in the history of the world.*"²

¹ Luke 1:76-77

² Cited at multiple websites, including "The Baptist Studies Bulletin", online at <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin/2004/december.htm>

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William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, instructed missionaries going to India, *never to read the words of this Christmas song in public because it could incite riots in the streets.*³

The Magnificat is the original work of an unmarried teenage country girl who had just found out she was pregnant, a girl we know as Mary.

I don't know about you, but I am not aware of single, teenage girls bursting into song when they find out they are pregnant, but there was some-thing about Mary that made her different.

Like all the characters involved in Jesus' birth, the world did not know any of them by name, yet God chose each by name: the Angel addressed Zechariah by name⁴, addressed Mary by name⁵, and addressed Joseph by name⁶!

If your circumstances in life bring you to a point when you think you are nobody, remember God knows you by name, because He gave you life!

He knows **everything** about you, and He has a plan for you and your life. As we are beginning to discover in these songs, our attitude determines how we feature in God's plans and purposes.

This is the first thing we learn about Mary. Reading between the lines, we learn that Mary lived in a village in Galilee (Nazareth), most likely the daughter of peasant farmers, folk who earned a living, farming land they did not own.

Theirs was a Godly family. They may not have had much by way of material comforts, but they knew God was good to them and faithful in

³ Cited at Preacher's Magazine, online at <http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/pmol/pastissues/2000Advent/20001217t.html>

⁴ Luke 1:13

⁵ Luke 1:30

⁶ Matthew 1:20

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providing for them. Mary had a deep personal faith in God; in their worship they anticipated the coming Messiah. During that time, one of the marriage blessings was, *May you have many children, and may it please God to send His Messiah through you.* Every pregnancy carried this unspoken hope!

When the Angel Gabriel addressed Mary, *Greetings most favoured woman. Blessed are you among women. The Lord God is with you,* Mary was not startled as Zechariah was. Luke tells us she was, *Confused and disturbed. Mary tried to think what the Angel could mean.*⁷ In our world, words such as these spoken by a man, would be considered grounds for **grooming!** Although Mary knew she was special before God, nobody had expressed this to her. *Whatever did the Angel mean, calling me **most favoured**, ... **blessed among women. ME?***

When the Angel then describes that she will be mother of *the Son of the Most High, to whom God will give the throne of David, whose kingdom will have no end*, she does not doubt the Angel, instead asks a practical question, *but I am not married!*

The Angel Gabriel informs her of cousin Elisabeth's pregnancy, and ends by saying, *Nothing is impossible for God / the Word of God will never fail,* Mary responds, *I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true!*

It is her confidence in the person of God which shapes her attitude to life, and her attitude to life conditions her response.

This is the journey of life each of us is called to: to develop a relationship with Creator, Life-giver God which shapes our attitude to life, such that our response to circumstances, even when these are unfavourable and

⁷ Luke 1:28

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unwelcome, our response is based on our confidence in the person of God.

Mary's song is two stanzas. The opening words of the first stanza of her song (v.46-50) conveys her personal relationship and confidence in God:

MY soul praises God, MY spirit rejoices in God MY Saviour. Mary also demonstrates **true humility**: she does not identify herself as receiving a special favour from God - *He has done this great thing for me... He has chosen me above all other women.* Instead, she sings, *The Mighty One who is Holy (without sin), has done great things for me!*

These lines tell us, Mary felt totally unworthy to be chosen of God. She was just another poor girl among thousands who live ordinary lives in the backwater towns of a nation in captivity, **but** she is awed by *the Mighty One who is Holy*, who took notice of a lowly servant girl, and she recognises the privilege she carries ... *from now on, all generations will call me Holy*, spoken with awe, not entitlement!

You see, it is not the Immaculate Conception which makes Mary special; it is her relationship with God which makes her special!

The second stanza of her song, Mary sings of a radical turnaround from what our world values, so that God's justice for His people is magnified. Mary sings of three groups of people whose lives will be transformed:

The helpless God will rescue (v. 51) God permits the powerful to strengthen their position and exhibit their influence, but for a little while. But one day, He will say, *Enough! One day, justice will flow like water, and righteousness, like an unfailing stream⁸*, washing away the wrong and setting all things right. Bring your case to the Almighty. He is the Helper of the helpless.

⁸ Amos 5:24

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The humble God will exalt (v. 52) Jesus says it clearly: *Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.* (Luke 14:11)

The hungry God will fill (satisfy) (v. 53) What did Jesus say when teaching the Beatitudes? *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, because they will be filled* (Matt. 5:6)

Thirty years before her Son spoke these words and taught these Truths, Mary sang about it!

The church of Jesus Christ is for people who feel unable to manage the circumstances of life. When King David was on the run from his son who rebelled against him, we learn that, *every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented, rallied around him (David), and he became their leader.*⁹

In this world, those who feel they can look after themselves, tend not to want or need God except in emergencies. In response to their choice, God leaves them to their own means and resources.

God loves to make Himself known to the forgotten and the ignored. He pledges Himself to those who feel they are handicapped, the ones the world calls **nobodies** and losers. He chooses the humble over the proud, and He fills the hungry. God is on the side of those who can't take care of themselves.

Zechariah knew God as a priest and theologian, so questioned God's ability to deliver on His promise.

Mary experienced the sustaining love of God and had a personal relationship with Him; she didn't need proof, she had implicit trust on her side.

⁹ : 1 Samuel 22:2

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Which one will you be this Christmas? Will you allow doubt to cloud your judgement and question God at work in His world? You won't stop Him, because He will accomplish His plans!

Or, will you say, *He has done great things for me; He keeps His promises and there is no reason why I should not take Him at His word and trust Him!*

AMEN.