

Vespers I

30 November 2008

Concordia Lutheran Mission

Terrebonne, Oregon

“By the Gospel Christians Magnify the Lord.”

“My soul doth magnify the Lord....”

St. Luke 1:46.

Introduction

How could St. Mary magnify the Lord? Magnify means to make great. God is infinite. How, therefore, could St. Mary magnify the Lord? St. Mary magnifies the Lord by the Gospel. For the Gospel expands the universe of God’s communion with men.¹

All men, including St. Mary, are born in sin.² Sin alienates from God. God’s blessed presence is absent from the hearts of men everywhere because of sin. Hence, God is certainly not great in a blessed way in the realm of unbelief and its collateral darkness.

¹Luther: “For God is not magnified by us so far as His nature is concerned – He is unchangeable – but He is magnified in our knowledge and experience when we greatly esteem Him and highly regard Him, especially as to His grace and goodness.” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 21, p. 307.

²St. Mary confesses her sin when she admits she needs a Savior: “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” **St. Luke 1:47.**

The Gospel, however, absolves of sin, removing the alienation caused by sin. God's blessed presence then returns to the hearts of men and the universe of God's blessed communion with men expands one faithful heart at a time.

And through this blessed expansion of the Kingdom of God, men are saved, and gain eternal life and the resurrection of the body. All the faithful, then, including St. Mary, praise and give thanks to the Lord, once again magnifying the Lord by trumpeting His Name in the ever expanding universe of the hearts of believers.

By the Gospel and faith created by the Gospel, St. Mary and all men magnify the Lord because the Lord dwells blessedly with men through the Gospel and they praise Him by using the blessings of the Gospel and giving thanks for those same blessings and sharing them with others, to our neighbor's and our eternal benefit and to God our Savior's everlasting glory.

I. The Magnificat is a Christian Hymn Penned by the Mother of God, St. Mary.

A. The Magnificat is a hymn composed by St. Mary, the Mother of God.

During this season of Advent, we will be meditating on The Magnificat. The Magnificat is a canticle. A canticle is a little song.

A canticle is also a hymn. The word hymn comes from the Greek word "hymnos". The Greek "hymnos" is a song about a god or hero.

Christian hymns are about both simultaneously because our God is also our Savior and, therefore, also our hero.³

This hymn is significant because it was composed by St. Mary, the Mother of our Savior and the Mother of Our God.⁴ St. Mary's cousin and the mother of St. John the Baptist, St. Elizabeth, confesses St. Mary is the Mother of God when she greeted her:

And whence *is* this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁵

This confession of St. Elizabeth, of course, is the same truth and confession of faith we all learned in catechism. The Catechism states:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.⁶

³A hymn is an "... ode, in praise of gods or heroes ..." *A Greek-English Lexicon, with Supplement, 1968*, Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie eds., Ninth Edition (1940), rpr. 1982 Oxford; Clarendon PRes, p. 1849. Christian hymnody, therefore, has at its focus the Person and Work of its Hero (Hebrews 12:2) and God.

⁴Luther: "In order properly to understand this sacred hymn of praise, we need to bear in mind that the Blessed Virgin Mary is speaking on the basis of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, p. 299.

⁵**St. Luke 1:43.**

⁶**Second Chief Part, Second Article, p. 10.**

St. Mary, then, is the Mother of God.⁷ St. Mary is the Mother of God *not according to Christ's Deity* but rather according to His humanity. Because God has become man, He can be and was born of a woman.

With The Magnificat, then, we have a hymn composed by the Mother of God herself. Luther writes:

Now, in all of Scripture I do not know anything that serves such a purpose as well as this sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God, which ought indeed to be learned and kept in mind by all who would rule well and be helpful lords. In it she really sings sweetly about the fear of God, what sort of Lord He is, and especially what His dealings are with those of low and high degree. Let someone else listen to his love singing a worldly ditty; this pure virgin well deserves to be heard by a prince and lord, as she sings him her sacred, chaste, and salutary song. It is a fine custom, too, that this canticle is sung in all the churches daily at vespers, and in a special and appropriate setting that sets it apart from the other chants.⁸

B. God became man in order to restore communion between God and man.

⁷Luther: “Now, in all of Scripture I do not know anything that serves such a purpose so well as this sacred hymn of the most blessed Mother of God, which ought indeed to be learned and kept in mind by all who would rule well and be helpful lords.” *Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, p. 298.

⁸*Luther's Works*, Vol.21, p. 298.

And God became man in order to redeem man from his sin. St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.⁹

Christ was born of a woman in order to assume our place under the law or the commandments. Christ did that because we have not kept the commandments. We have not loved God nor our neighbor as we ought. So Christ loved God and neighbor for us. Now in Christ we have loved God and neighbor perfectly. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, past President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, writes of Christ’s obedience to the law for us:

This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ’s vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: “He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced.”¹⁰

⁹**Galatians 4:4-5.**

¹⁰*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

Likewise, Christ also suffered the penalty on the Cross for our not keeping the commandments. At Christ's presentation in the Temple after His birth, the prophet St. Simeon gives a moving account of Christ's death when he speaks of St. Mary's suffering, her Son's death piercing her soul. St. Luke writes:

And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this *child* is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.¹¹

St. Mary's soul is pierced because she loses her Son to a horrible death. Yet, this profound suffering of a mother was as nothing compared to the physical agony and torment of soul Christ endured for our sins. The prophet Isaiah writes of Christ's Passion:

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ... He shall see the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.¹²

And yet this was God who suffered rejection of men, pain, agony, and torment unto death, revealing God's great love and mercy toward men that He would so suffer to save us from our sins. The Lutheran Church states of Christ's suffering and death on the Cross for our sins:

¹¹**St. Luke 2:34-35**

¹²**Isaiah 53:3, 11**

Dr. Luther says also in his book *Of the Councils and the Church: We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if “God’s death” and “God died” lies in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: “God died,” “God’s passion,” “God’s blood,” “God’s death.” For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.*¹³

God became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, then, in order to reestablish the blessed communion between God and man. St. Paul writes:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.¹⁴

II. God Effects the Reunion of God and Man in Blessed Communion by the Cross of Christ through the Gospel.

¹³*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration VIII. Of the Person of Christ.*⁴⁴

¹⁴**II Corinthians 5:19.**

A. The Gospel effects the reunion of God and man won in the Cross of Christ.

God effects the reunion of God and men through the preaching of the Gospel. St. Paul has already spoken of how God reconciled Himself to the world through Christ-Crucified *and also committed to us the Word or Ministry of Reconciliation, i.e. the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments. For the Word and the Sacraments forgive sins, which forgiveness is the reconciliation won on the Cross.* St. Peter, for example, writes of the power of the Word and the Sacraments, i.e. the Gospel, to forgive sins when he says of Holy Baptism:

... be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins¹⁵

St. Paul, therefore, writes of Holy Baptism putting on Christ and, thereby, obviously, reunion and communion with God is effected:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.¹⁶

Clearly, reunion and communion with God is effected through the Gospel because by the Gospel we become children of God and put on Christ. Jesus says:

¹⁵**Acts 2:38**

¹⁶**Galatians 3:26-27**

If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.¹⁷

God, then, reestablishes communion with the alienated hearts of men by the Gospel.

B. The Gospel magnifies the Lord by faith and confession of the Gospel.

And plainly the Gospel magnifies the Lord because the Lord becomes greater amongst humanity one converted heart at a time. Hence, the Lord told father Abraham of expansive universe of the hearts of faith brought into communion with God by the Gospel:

And [the Word of the Lord] brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.¹⁸

And, again, this expansive universe of the faithful, i.e. the Church¹⁹, comes about through the Gospel. St. Mary states in her Magnificat:

¹⁷**St. John 14:23.**

¹⁸**Genesis 15:5.**

¹⁹The Church is simply the assembly of all believers in Christ: “Although *the Church* properly is the congregation of saints and true believers” *The Augsburg Confession, Article VIII.1*

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.²⁰

Thus we see how God is magnified or made great by the Gospel. First the Gospel creates faith and, thereby, reunion and communion of God with man. Man, then, by faith sings the praises of God for the joys of the blessed communion established by the Gospel. Hence, St. Mary says:

My soul doth magnify the Lord.²¹

The Lutheran Church states:

For they first say this, namely, that *the name of the Lord will be great*. This is accomplished by the preaching of the Gospel. For through this the name of Christ is made known, and the mercy of the Father, promised in Christ is recognized. The preaching of the Gospel produces faith in those who receive the Gospel. They call upon God, they give thanks to God, they bear afflictions for their confession, they produce good works for the glory of Christ. Thus the name of the Lord becomes great among the Gentiles.²²

Luther writes:

²⁰**St. Luke 1:54-55.**

²¹**St. Luke 1:46.**

²²*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII).*³²

For God is not magnified by us so far as His nature is concerned – He is unchangeable – but He is magnified in our knowledge and experience when we greatly esteem Him and highly regard Him, especially as to His grace and goodness.²³

And so St. Mary, like all Christians, praises her God and Savior who has called her out of darkness and into His marvelous light. St. Peter writes:

But *ye are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light²⁴

And because St. Mary magnified the Lord, this magnified the Lord by expanding the universe of faithful hearts through the Gospel. St. Mary says:

For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.²⁵

Likewise, by our use of the Gospel, we also magnify the Lord, to the blessing of others, ourselves, and to our Lord and Savior's everlasting glory.

²³*Luther's Works*, Vol. 21, p. 307.

²⁴**I Peter 2:9.**

²⁵**St. Luke 1:48.**

Conclusion

“Anima me *magnificat* Dominum.” That is the beginning of the Latin text of the hymn and the origin of the name The Magnificat. Anima me, i.e. “my soul”, *magnificat*, i.e. magnifies, Dominum, i.e. the Lord. Now we know *where* the title The Magnificat comes from.

And we also know what makes The Magnificat great: The Gospel.

By the Gospel God expands the universe of faithful hearts, vastly magnifying His Blessed Presence and the corollary magnification of His praise now and stretching magnificently into eternity.

Amen.