

SESSION 1: THE MAGNIFICAT

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 1:46-55

QUESTIONS

1. How does being humble increase God's presence in your life?
2. Mary sets God apart from all other things by calling His name holy. How do you set God above everything else in your life?
3. The script talked about Mary's words turning the traditional understanding of God's favor on its head; the mighty are put down, the lowly exalted, the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty. What do you understand as God's favor? Has your understanding changed over time?
4. How does God's favor relate to blessing?
5. What are God's promises for your life? What is your role in the unfolding of these promises?
6. What do we learn about God by seeing Him work through Mary? Can you think of another person whose life taught you something about who God is?
7. What has God's presence made new in your life?
8. **PERSONAL TAKE-HOME:** Try writing the Magnificat in your own words. This could be a creative way to express your praise to God.

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: THE MAGNIFICAT

Welcome. Mary's Song, which is known as the Magnificat, was her expression towards God after she learned that she had been blessed by God to be the mother of Jesus. Through her words she magnified what God had done for her and others.

The Magnificat has found a prominent place in the Christian world as a recitation during worship. Mary's Song has also been utilized by several composers, most notably Bach and Vivaldi, as an inspiration for musical expression. For our session today, let's take a closer look at each of the parts of her song and find within it our own expression towards our God. Please follow along in your guide or in your Bible.

In Luke we read... *And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*

In this opening statement, Mary praises God and states how much greater He has become in her life because He found her in humbleness, and that through her, the greatest gift mankind would ever receive would be given. "Henceforth" means "from now on," so in a way she is saying that she recognizes that life will never be the same again for her or the generations that follow. Mary went from being a poor, unknown Hebrew girl to the most honored woman in the history of the world because of what God brought into being through her. As we take a moment to pause during this advent season to reflect on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ, do we recognize how great our God is? Do we see how He has changed our lives and how His gifts and His presence in our lives can make all things new? Will people come to see and know God through our lives?

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Mary continues to show her humbleness by expressing that it was through her mighty God that great things were done. Then, she sets Him apart from all other things by calling His name holy. God is unchanging. He is mighty and can do great things for us. Our God sees us, protects us, and fights for us. Do we recognize how mighty our God is? Does our worship reflect our humbleness in bowing before Him? God is merciful to those who fear him. This means that those who look up to Him with respect and with humbleness will be recipients of His mercy, which is God's loyal, gracious, and faithful love.

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

In the angel's address to Joseph that is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, the angel told Joseph that Mary "will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." This is the strength of the arm of God. It's the power of His plan of salvation that Jesus was displaying to the world. The Holy Spirit revealed to Mary that a time was coming when the traditional understanding of God's favor would be turned upside down. It is clear that Jesus did not come for those who were great in their own minds, who abused their positions of power and persecuted others.

In the second part of her song, Mary emphasizes the humble being exalted. Just as God exalted Mary, who was of lowly origins, He will also exalt the humble and hungry. Conversely, He will bring down the proud, the rulers, and the rich.

He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

In the book of Isaiah, the idea of Israel as God's servant is frequently found. In Isaiah 41:8, the prophet writes, "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend." The last expressions of Mary's song make it clear that God, in sending Jesus, was keeping a promise to His people. God's actions in the life of Mary were based on commitments He had made centuries before. Through the sending of Jesus and His establishment of God's kingdom, we witness God fulfilling His promises, and therefore, can grow in our trust and confidence in the Lord. We are God's people today. God will take care of us and He will fulfill His promise to send Jesus again.

Through our reading and study of the Magnificat, we hopefully can begin to form our own individual expression towards God. This expression is born out of the great things that God does in our lives. When we pause and look at all we have, however great or small, we can see the blessing of God and have reason to stand in awe of what He has done, is doing, and will do. Perhaps this advent season is the perfect time for you to sit down and write your own song in praise and worship of our great and wonderful God.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Magnificat

The name given to the first of the three hymns in Luke's infancy narratives (1:46-55), the other two being the *Benedictus* (1:68-79) and the *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32). The name derives from the opening line of the poem in the Latin Vulgate (*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*).

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