

5. Mary: My Soul Magnifies the Lord

Question to begin

- When was the last time you felt like singing? Did you?
- What is your earliest memory of praying?

The Reading: Luke 1:26-56

A Unique Call to Serve

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵ The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.' ³⁸ Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

Mary's Song of Praise

46 And Mary said,

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,
 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
 48 for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 50 His mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.
 51 He has shown strength with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
 and lifted up the lowly;
 53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 and sent the rich away empty.
 54 He has helped his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy,
 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
 to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

56 And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.

First Impression

Was there anything that surprised, impressed, delighted or challenged you in these readings?

Questions for Reflection

- Why does Mary visit Elizabeth?
- In what ways is Mary humble? What is the relationship between humility and prayer?
- Mary identifies deeply with her whole people but sides in a special way with those among them who are hungry and powerless and against those who are proud, powerful and rich (1:51-53). What does her example mean for your prayer?

- Mary sets an example of always trusting God yet always seeking to understand better His plans. Why is this difficult balance to achieve?
- The Holy Spirit inspires Elizabeth to welcome Mary with a blessing (1:41-45). How have you experienced the Holy Spirit leading you in your prayer? How could you be more open to the Spirit when you pray?
- Elizabeth celebrates God's goodness to Mary. Is there someone with whom you could celebrate God's blessing to them?
- Mary was awed by God's way of showing his mercy in the world. She focussed her attention on what God was doing to bring his kingdom to people. How can a person grow in focussing their attention constantly on God and on the good things that God has done? In what way does *your* prayer celebrate God's goodness?
- How could you grow in being constantly mindful of the ways God has shown his love for you? What could you learn from Mary's prayer that would help you in your own prayer to God?

Closing Prayer

Pray the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) with your own additions.

Begin by praying Lk 1:46-50. Then allow some time to call to mind and to mention things that God has done or is doing for you and for which you are grateful.

End by praying the rest of the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:51-55).

Conclude the time of prayer, by praying *Glory be to the Father*.....