
My Soul Magnifies the Lord

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Advent 4 – Year C**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. —Luke 1:46-47

As a child, one of the most fascinating Christmas presents I ever received was a large magnifying glass. It amazed me that such a piece of smooth, curved, glass could make little ants and tiny seeds look so much larger. And, yes, I learned to focus sunlight into crushed leaves and twigs in such a way that the magnified and concentrated light could actually start a fire!

Later, as a teen-ager, one of best Christmas presents I received was an amplifier. Surely every one of you budding musicians out there remembers amplifiers. The bigger the amp, the bigger the sound, with which we could drive our families crazy – and our neighbors, too. The vacuum tubes of those old amps magnified my little band's struggling and rudimentary rock music. In those days, I was certainly in to making things bigger.

Much older now, with my eyesight fading, I am back into lenses, fascinated with binoculars that help me see birds and stars. I want to magnify those delightful wings and feathers and tiny star clusters.

However, here's a curious phenomenon: in star gazing, in particular, it is not the magnification power that is always the most important. It is the objective lens, the second number on your set of binoculars. In the designation "eight times forty," the "eight" describes the magnification power, and the "forty" describes how wide the lens is, and thus, how much light the lens is collecting.

Yes, that second number describes the amount of light that gets in. Many bird watchers and star gazers prefer a larger and larger second number, the width of the lens that lets light in. In order to see, you've got to let a lot of light get into your eyes. In order to experience the magnification, you've also got to have light.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord," sang Mary, when she was only just beginning to realize the light that was coming into the world. The light was starting as only a faint glimmer, the tiny spark of a star inside her. It would be her role to magnify that light. And so she sang, more in hope than in promise, "My soul magnifies the Lord." We all sing that song more in hope than in promise.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary magnified the Lord. What do we magnify? Most of us magnify something, whether we realize it or not. What are you magnifying these days?

I acknowledge that there is reason to magnify our ills, our worries. Our pandemic days are not over, yet, much as we wish they were; and there is reason for concern. Some of us magnify that worry. Some of us magnify other travails. With the world jaggedly torn by division, some of us magnify the separations of the world.

By "magnify," I don't mean going outside and yelling things at the world. I don't even mean writing a letter or making a statement. The way we magnify things in the world can be ever so small. For instance, that magnification happens even if we just forward an email, or a website, even if we forward without comment. Everything we pass on to another person is a form of magnification.

Yes, gossip and messaging and texting are forms of magnifying. If someone forwards to me a provocative message, they have amplified it, even if they claim to be neutral about it. When I spread messages, of any sort,

I am amplifying them, especially the negative ones. I am making them bigger, like a magnifying glass does.

Where are you spending your money these days? Where are you giving your money? We call money "currency," because money carries a current, just like my old adolescent amplifier did. Where our money goes increases the current of that product, increases the current of that message, increases the current of that church! What are you magnifying with your money these days?

"My soul doth magnify the Lord," said sister Mary.

I used to sing a song that included the words, "One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small." It turns out, in this spiritual life of ours, that the things we choose to magnify affect the size of our spiritual health, too. We can magnify things that increase spiritual health, or we can magnify things that suffocate spiritual health. We can magnify things that heal us and enlarge us; or we can magnify things that decrease us and make us small.

Sometimes, as Mary knew, attention to too much clutter squeezes the light out! Clutter like riches and food, and pride and power (those things she mentions in her *Magnificat*). They make us small, and they make our God small. There are lots of ways to make the Lord smaller in our lives.

Worry, for instance, squeezes away the love of God. Anger, drives out God and goodness. Greed, allows no room for God. Even false expectations reduce the presence of God. Last week, we heard some of the mistaken expectations of John the Baptist, a great man, with mistaken expectations.

To magnify means to find that one moment of joy, even the tiniest moment, and expand it! To magnify means to find that one opportunity to give thanks, and to focus on it! Let some more light in on it! Set that thanks on fire!

Lately, in times of trouble, I have been working on a particular spiritual practice: in times of trouble, I try to focus my magnifying glass on what I can give thanks for, even the tiniest thing. In times of trouble, can I focus on gratitude? When I am able to focus on gratitude, a miracle occurs, almost like a virgin birth! When I focus on the tiny seed of gratitude, why, it expands! It even explodes, into a glorious fullness! It becomes a star! It grows, larger and larger, into life!

"Giving thanks" is maybe the most powerful way any of us has of magnifying the Lord. When we give thanks, we are allying ourselves with the ultimate Giver, the giver of all good things. If you want to magnify God and goodness, give thanks for somebody. When we give thanks for a person, we end up finding, and focusing on, and magnifying, the good parts of that person. And we make the goodness of the world that much larger!

"One pill makes you larger and one pill makes you small." Take the pill of thanksgiving. The thanksgiving pill makes others tall, and it makes you tall, too. The pills of complaint, and worry, and anger, and greed: they make all of us smaller.

"My soul magnifies the Lord!" sang sister Mary. And it led to her spirit being able to rejoice in God her Savior. In this season, stressed and anxious as it might be, we sing in hope, too. We give thanks for God, we give thanks for goodness, we pay attention to life, and we focus on love. By giving thanks for those good things, they grow! They are magnified! And in giving thanks for the good things of the world, we magnify the Lord. Our spirits rejoice, in God!

AMEN.

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