



NAC-USA
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INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

Mary's Song - The Magnificat | Isaiah's Prophecy

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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.

Bible References

Luke 1:46-55

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.*

*For He who is mighty has done
great things for me, and holy is
His name.*

*And His mercy is on those who
fear Him from generation to
generation.*

*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.*

*He has helped His servant Israel,
In remembrance of His mercy,*

*As He spoke to our fathers, to
Abraham and to his seed forever."*

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.

Discussion 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?

Going Deeper

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).

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?

PERSONAL TAKE-HOME: Try writing the Magnificat in your own words. This could be a creative way to express your praise to God.

Session 2: Isaiah's Prophecy

Hello again. Before we begin our session, let's read Isaiah 61:1-2 together:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...

While some of the most commonly quoted verses of Isaiah look to the future, the message of the book must first be understood in its own historical context. Isaiah addresses the sin and salvation of both God's people and the nations – showing the desperate need for a Savior. The book emphasizes both God's plan for judgment against the sinful Judah and the nations, but also expounds on God's plan for redemption. Isaiah anticipates the coming Messiah, His redeeming work, and the worship of God by all. The Messiah figure brings hope for redemption – He is the one who will redeem the people of God by suffering for them, bearing their sin, and lifting their iniquities. In doing so, the Messiah will remove the judgment upon the world for all who believe in God's work through Him.

Have you ever waited a long time for something? As you see it draw near, anticipation rises. For a long time, God had promised salvation for His people. Let's fast forward from the prophecy of Isaiah to the 4th chapter of Luke where he portrays Jesus's ministry, beginning in the temple. Have you ever wondered why Jesus would be asked to read in the temple? Isn't it amazing that He would be able to read His own prophecy in public, using the traditions and heritage of the Jewish people to proclaim His mission? In order to see how this came about, it might help to understand the order of an ancient synagogue service.

To have a synagogue service required the presence of ten adult males. At the service, the Shema was recited from Deuteronomy, followed by prayers. After this, the Scripture was read, beginning with another portion from the Torah, which is comprised of the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy, and moving next to a section from the Prophets. Instruction then followed. Often the speaker linked the texts together through appeal to other passages. The service then closed with a benediction. Jesus appears to speak during the reading of the Prophets. He reads from Isaiah 61:1-2, a passage that promises the coming of God's salvation.

Pause the video and read the account of Jesus in the temple, found in Luke 4:14-21.

In Luke, Jesus's reading of the prophecy agrees with how Isaiah wrote it, with three notable modifications. Luke does not include the reference to "the day of vengeance of our God," thus omitting the tone of judgement found earlier in the Gospel. Also omitted from Isaiah are the words, "to heal the brokenhearted." Further, Luke adds the phrase from Isaiah 58, "to let the oppressed go free," which taken together with "release for the captives," announces the ministry of Jesus as a ministry of freedom from bondage.

Echoing the songs and sighs for justice and redemption heard throughout Luke's nativity narratives, Luke presents the primary themes of Jesus's ministry. His ministry will encompass "good news to the poor" whom Mary, in the Magnificat, imagined would be lifted up. In days to come, Jesus will announce God's blessing on the poor and factor the poor into His teaching, more so in Luke than in any other Gospel. Jesus' ministry will further proclaim release for the captives from the various forms of demonic, economic, social, and political bondage that oppress them. Jesus will also restore sight to the blind, not only at a physical level, but also figuratively, reviving the prophetic vision of the year of the Lord's favor. The year of the Lord's favor refers to the jubilee, when debts are cancelled and slaves are freed, and represents what Jesus brings for those who respond to His message of hope. Jesus builds on the picture of Isaiah's prophecy, which also proclaimed such hope, and notes that He is fulfilling what the prophet proclaimed.

Jesus's claim that "today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" places both listeners and readers in the position of having to make a choice. Either you believe He brings and fulfills God's promises or you don't. This proclamation in the synagogue will become for Jesus the thread that follows Him through the entirety of His ministry. When messengers from John the Baptist ask the critical gospel question, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus will prove His answers by reiterating the substance of what He declared in the synagogue: *Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them* (Luke 7:19-22).

What about the verses in Isaiah and Luke are relevant to our lives? Jesus accepts His calling and fulfills it. He does this in two ways; through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, and through the guidance of His Father's will.

The prophecy in Isaiah starts with "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me." Isn't it interesting that Jesus, who is the Son of God, references the power of the Holy Spirit as being so significant to Him? In Luke we read that Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit after being tempted in the wilderness. Even as we live through temptation and weakness in our lives, we can also feel the power of the Spirit. What wilderness in our hearts must we confront to emerge strengthened by the Spirit? Our role in the Body of Christ requires more wisdom, strength, and talents than we possess on our own, but the Holy Spirit lives in us and equips us with spiritual gifts.

At times, do we attempt to live as Christians without seeking the guidance, gifts, and strength that the Holy Spirit brings?

Bible References

Isaiah 61:1-2

Luke 4: 14-21, 22-30

Luke's emphasis on the poor:

Luke 7:22, 14:13, 14:21, 16:20, 16:22, 18:22, 21:3

Going Deeper

The Shema
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The Shema is a prayer that is the centerpiece of Jewish prayer services. It is a declaration of faith in one God and is considered the most important part of the prayer service in Judaism. As an act of testifying in God, the recitation of the Shema discusses some of Judaism's basics: love of God, Torah study, the principle of divine reward and punishment, and the Jews' exodus from Egypt.

Jesus is guided by God's will to save mankind from their sin. Jesus's calling put Him in the middle of suffering, pain, and rejection, but He was not discouraged. This is also God's will for us. We are called to give of ourselves, especially in reflection of this Advent season. This will be challenging, but with God's guidance, Jesus as our example, and the power and gifts from the Spirit, we can take this prophecy of Jesus from Isaiah as our mission; *preach[ing] good tidings to the poor...heal[ing] the brokenhearted, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...to comfort all who mourn...*

Discussion Questions:

1. What about Isaiah's prophecy and the verses in Luke are relevant to our lives?

2. The Jubilee year in Jewish tradition is a year when debts are cancelled and slaves are freed. How does this symbolize Jesus' ministry? What would you like to be "freed" from?

3. The video asks the question, "What wilderness in our hearts must we engage to emerge filled with the Spirit?" How can we be filled with the power of the Spirit after engaging in a wilderness of temptation?

4. Can you be a Christian if you don't seek the guidance, gifts, and strength that the Holy Spirit brings? Why or why not?

5. If part of Jesus' calling was to be in the middle of suffering, pain, and rejection and he was still not discouraged, what are reasons that we become discouraged in similar circumstances? How can Jesus bring hope to us?

Going Deeper

To act well, and suffer evil, to praise God in all things, and never to draw vanity from his good gifts – such is the life of the just.

- Thomas A. Kempis

The book of Isaiah

Isaiah is the second-most-quoted book in the New Testament, preceded only by Psalms. Every book in the New Testament contains allusions or direct quotations from Isaiah. The Gospel of Luke for example, portrays the entire life of Jesus through the theological lens of Isaiah:

- Jesus is "God with us," like Emmanuel in Isaiah's prophecy, and born of a "virgin" (Luke 1:27-28, 31; Isa 7:14)
- Jesus is born into the "house of David," like "the servant, the branch" comes from Jesse – David's father – lineage (Luke 1:27; Isa 11:1-2)
- The angels' song echoes the song in Isaiah's vision (Isa 6; Luke 2:14)
- Zechariah is looking for God's salvation and finds it in Jesus (Luke 2:29; Isa 12:2-3)
- John the Baptist prepares the way like the voice of the one crying in the wilderness (Luke 2:4-6; Isa 40:3-5)
- Jesus uses Isaiah's words to defend His view against the temptations of Satan (Luke 4:12; Isa 7:12)
- Jesus cites Isaiah, and then says that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled (Luke 4:16-21; Isa 61:1-2)
- People marvel at Jesus' words just as people marveled at the Suffering Servant's words. They noted that Jesus seems ordinary, which also fits the description of the Servant (Luke 4:22; Isa 52:14-15; 53:3). They despised Jesus, like the Servant, shortly after (Luke 4:23-30; Isa 53:3).

6. What do you think the people thought when Jesus ended His reading with "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"?

7. Take a moment to read Luke 4:22-30. What do you think of the people's recorded reactions? Could they mirror your own?

8. How does Jesus's focus on the poor in the Bible affect you? How can you focus more attention on the poor?

9. *"Do not waste time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone you will presently come to love him."* – C.S. Lewis
How do you interpret this quote? What does it mean to you?

10. From the script: "Jesus is guided by God's will to save mankind." What kind of actions would demonstrate that a person today is guided by God's will to save?

11. How are we made more aware of God's faithfulness by studying the Old Testament?

12. How can you "preach good tidings to the poor"?

How can you "heal the brokenhearted"?

How can you "set at liberty those who are oppressed"?

How can you "comfort all who mourn"?
