

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Midweek Advent 1
December 3, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord

—Luke 1:46-55

Imagine you're sitting at home on a sunny Arizona afternoon when the doorbell rings. Parked on your front porch is the Publishers Clearing House Prize Patrol with balloons and flowers and an oversized check for \$1,000,000. What does that do to your day? Imagine that yesterday someone slipped you a lottery ticket for tonight's Powerball drawing, and just for laughs you watch as the balls roll out. One by one you check off every number on the ticket. Six numbers all match perfectly, making you the newest winner of tonight's estimate prize of \$775 million. How does that change your life? Or imagine your name is Mark Zuckerberg, and you're sitting around a table with a bunch of lawyers. It's time to take your wildly successful Facebook website public (to sell its stock on the stock exchange), and in a few minutes, with a few signatures, you go from being just a guy with a popular website to one of the richest billionaires in the world. How would your life change from one day to the next?

None of these examples compare to what the Virgin Mary experienced when she was visited by the Angel Gabriel in the little Galilean town of Nazareth. There have been many PCH prize recipients, many Powerball winners, and many entrepreneurs who have taken companies public, but there is only one woman who was chosen to be the mother of God, the bearer of the Christ child, the one who would give birth to the one Savior of the human race. I cannot imagine how overwhelmed Mary was when she heard the announcement of her Savior's birth.

So when Mary visits her relative Elizabeth—the mother of John the Baptist—she bursts into a song of praise: *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*. Mary had received the most astounding, wonderful, miraculous news that any human being could ever possibly receive. We don't know how old Mary was when the Angel Gabriel visited her in Nazareth and told her she would be the mother of the Savior of the world, but we imagine her probably to be in her teens. (We surmise that because we know that girls married younger in those days, and because Mary was around and involved in the Christian Church long after Jesus ascended into heaven.) She was almost certainly a young woman. She was a virgin; she had never known a man. She had no union with Joseph until after Jesus was born. The child conceived in her was a miracle worked by God himself. Gabriel had told her that her child was none other than the Son of God himself!

So Mary praises God. There are two ways we can praise God. We can tell God who he is: God you're majestic, awesome, gracious, powerful, almighty, loving; we can praise him for his attributes, his characteristics. And we can praise God for what he has done. This is what Mary does: she praises God for what he has done. Mary's song is proclamation. Her song is full of the gospel, the Good News that God is coming to save sinners and rescue his people.

Praise God! He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. We don't imagine Mary to come from wealth. She was not rich. She was a woman in humble circumstances, perhaps even poverty. But when Mary praises God for being mindful of the humble state of his servant, she's not just talking about being a humble girl from a humble family. She recognized that there's a lot more to being humble than how much money you don't have and what kind of chariot you don't drive and what kind of fancy house you don't live in and whom you know and hang out with. She recognized that the human condition itself is one of frailty and humility. The humble whom God is coming to save are human beings who recognize that we are born in weakness. We come into this world naked, we experience pain, disease, injury, loss. Finally, we must return to dust. Because of our sins we must die and answer to God. Talk about humility, death is the most humiliating thing that happens to a human being. The proud that God scatters are those who ignore this reality. They think this life is all there is. They live for now. For them it's about having more, getting ahead, gaining prestige in the eyes of the world. It's about money, power and pleasure. They proudly declare that they will never answer to anyone; they are the masters of their own destiny, the captains of their soul. How silly, foolish and shortsighted! As if money and power ever lasted for anyone! Mary herself was a humble girl from the backwater town of Nazareth, of no noble birth. But it didn't matter because she had God on her side, and all the wealth and power in the world couldn't begin to compare to having the power of the Mighty One do great things for her, choosing her to be the mother of the Savior of the world, coming to rescue us all from death and damnation.

"The Mighty One has done great things for me," Mary sang. God is all-powerful. He does whatever pleases him. And what pleased him in the fullness of time was to take on human flesh, to be conceived in the womb of a virgin, in meekness and in humility, and in this weakness and poverty to exercise all the power of his grace. That's how God flexes his power in the greatest, most wonderful way. God can split rocks and make the earth tremble. He can hurl thunderbolts and terrify the wicked whenever he feels like it. He can raise up empires and topple rulers from their thrones with a word. He can turn a star into a supernova. But when it comes to the greatest and mightiest act of deliverance, God does something completely unexpected. He is born and comes into the world naked like every human being. He knows poverty and pain, sorrow, thirst. Finally in utter humiliation he is nailed to a cross to be

mocked by every passer-by. On the cross the Mighty God dies, his blood poured out as the infinite sacrifice for countless sins. And in that ultimate act of shame, God wins the greatest eternal victory: Satan is conquered. Sin is paid for. Hell is stripped of its power. Death itself is swallowed up in life as God rises from the grave on the third day. In God's greatest victory, grace triumphs! God's greatest glory is in his saving grace. No wonder Mary sang, "*The Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.*" Grace like that makes you want to sing!

He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever. Was there every any doubt? Was there ever any question whether God would deliver on his promise, fulfill his covenant that he had made thousands of years before and repeated so many times to God's people through the prophets? God has remembered to be merciful to this stiff-necked and rebellious people descended from Abraham, and his mercy extends from generation to generation. We have a God who keeps his promises and delivers on his covenant and sends the promised Savior. Praise him for his faithfulness!

I know that everything is decorated for Christmas, the sights and sounds of Christmas are in the air, and the spirit of Christmas is all around us in the world, but in church it's not Christmas. Not yet. This season of Advent is a season of preparation and repentance. It's a time for us to pause and reflect, to search our hearts, to turn away from the emptiness of the commercial season and to marvel at the superabundant grace of God. Stop with me for a moment and consider: What are the great things God has done for you? He knows you by name and holds you in his care. He has loved you with an everlasting love and drawn you to himself with lovingkindness. He came from heaven to earth to rescue and save you. He still bends down to hear your every prayer, and he answers you with his sovereign power and his tender care. Take a break from everything that wants to stress you out this season. Get ready for the birth of Jesus. Relax in the tender compassion of your God, recline in his grace, and be at peace in his love for you in Christ. Amen.