

Ambassadors of the Faith:

Sharing the Light and the Love of Christ

“My Soul Magnifies the Lord”

A Sermon by Fr. Thomas J. Paris

Do You Want to Know a Secret?

I have a secret that I would like to share with you. One might call it “an open” secret, but many people have stumbled because they ignored the truths in this secret. They have led sad, unfulfilled and many times wasted lives because they didn’t implement the wisdom hidden in this secret.

Here’s the secret. Hush; bend your ear close so that you will hear clearly. The secret of a happy, joy-filled life is *a grateful heart*. Without a heart filled with gratitude there is never a possibility of a life of happiness.

As we celebrate the Annunciation, we remember the earth-shaking news that God is taking on flesh. The Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, is going to enter the world as one of His creatures, to unite Himself with us, so that we can ultimately be united with God the Father.

It is a day that stumps the imagination. How? Why? Could God really do something like this? Could He actually become man and still remain God? What does that do to us? How does it change our future, yours and mine?

“My Soul Magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:46,47) is a paean gushing forth from a heart filled to overflowing with gratitude. It is the opening lines of the *Magnificat* sung by The Panagia, the Mother of God after hearing the following words from her cousin Elizabeth:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, but why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:42)

The young teenage woman was truly overwhelmed by the message brought to her by the Archangel Gabriel. “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” The Archangel’s reply was both comforting and yet overwhelming. “For, with God nothing will be impossible.”

And Mary’s response was the culmination of humankind’s long effort to accomplish. Mary on behalf of all humans gives the one response that is needed from all of us.

Yes Lord, I want to serve you. I do accept your offer of love. Change me so that I can be a clean vessel carrying you within me. Let the miracle of your birth in time transform mortals into timelessness.

Mary’s song of bursting praise is the manifestation of a heart filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. As we learn from the Orthodox Study Bible Mary knew her Scripture. The Bible was her inspiration and guide. “My soul magnifies the Lord” was a hymn first offered by Hannah who in her advanced

years uttered this inspired prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10). It was prayed by expectant Jewish mothers for centuries.

Her words echo thanksgiving and gratitude:

*“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.”*

Now this was not the only response that Mary could have given to the announcement from the Archangel and the words of Elizabeth.

She could have said, “Thanks, but no thanks. I really don’t want to be a spectacle carrying a child under these strange circumstances. I don’t need all that pressure on me to try to live up to some high standard that will curtail my activities, restrain my play, exercise program and entertainment. I don’t have time to raise a child. I don’t have the financial means, for I am so over my head in debt already. I didn’t ask for this honor. Give it to someone else!

Why is it always ME who is given the difficult problems? How come Miss ‘so and so’ gets off so easy and I am the one saddled with a child. I have so much more to experience in life before I need to take on the responsibilities of motherhood? Why poor me! “

Yes Mary could have responded in this or some other negative way, but thankfully she didn’t. She knew intuitively that a life of complaining, dissatisfaction, resentment, jealousy, grumbling and lament never brings happiness. Nor does resignation or indifference.

Happiness comes not when we reluctantly accept a new situation, a burdensome challenge or difficult responsibility, but when we embrace it and thank God for the opportunity to grow. Mary did not simply resign herself to her fate. She saw God acting, God loving, God offering, and she whole-heartedly embraced the new reality and burst into a song of praise and thanksgiving. She found true happiness in a life filled with gratitude.

Mary, the Theotokos, remains a model for all generations. She is the “Canon” the Rule or Measure by which all of us are to gauge our lives. She said YES to God’s offer of love. She gratefully worshipped and thanked Him. May we be wise enough to do the same.

Amen.

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