



Sermon Growth Guide

December 20, 2020

Wonder – Great Things

Luke 1:46-55

Key Verse: Luke 1:49 "... for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name ..."

Big Idea: We are designed to magnify God.

Foundations

The testimony of the people of God is completely congruent in this aspect, when we are brought into the presence of God, our souls expand in awe-filled worship.

Our passage opens with Mary shouting from her heart's rooftop, "My soul glorifies the Lord!" God's presence descended upon Mary and she could not help but sing. This is what wonder-filled life finds, moment after moment of recognizing that there is something out there, or in here, that is worth getting excited about. God is and God speaks to us.

And God is faithful. His faithfulness is of the most consistent, pure kind. He will not fail. His will cannot be thwarted. It is the call upon us as the witnessing community to remember and testify to God's faithfulness.

Pastor Tim writes, "Remembering is an entire category of life in the Bible ... Remembering is resting on the promises of God for the future based on the knowledge of the character of God we have gained in the past." This week is about getting excited once again about the goodness and faithfulness of God, about remembering all that the Lord has done, is doing, and will do.

Gathered together with your circle, in-person or online, open your time of study in prayer. Ask the Spirit to guide and guard your spiritual formation, your growth in Christ.

Understanding God's Word

This week, walk together verse-by-verse, pointing out to one another what we learn about God's character from Luke 1:46-55.

Applying God's Word

We are designed to magnify God. Magnifying God is also a good way to perform a spiritual self-assessment. Can you point to times over the past week when your own soul magnified the Lord?

How can you increase your proximity with God so that your soul magnifies Him more and more?

Witnessing God's Word

The waiting and watching world doesn't so much need your theological answers to all the pain we see around us as much as witnesses moving around the city magnifying God. Imagine every churchgoer in Colorado Springs completely undone in magnifying God hour to hour, place to place.

Identify an area of your coming week where you will have the opportunity to magnify your Creator and Savior. Pray together to be faithful witnesses this week to God's unending and saving mercies.

I was about 10 years old when my Dad took me to New York City. I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center emerge from the window of the car as we drove near and thinking, “They’re not so big.” Then we got out to Ellis Island and I looked up. We climbed the stairs of the Statue of Liberty. Then I knew, “Oh, pretty big.” We got to the World Trade Center and my brother and I walked up to it and put our chins on the wall, looking up. That’s a sad memory now. But looking up that wall, “Oh, pretty big.” To magnify something is to make it larger in your view. There are two ways to magnify something. Look at it through a good lens—like with binoculars—or get up a little closer to it. See our **Wonder** image? See how big that tree is? It almost reaches the stars. It’s because that little guy there has gotten up close to it. Are you having trouble giving worship to God? Do you struggle to see why Jesus is such a big deal? Your Jesus is too small. Look more carefully through a good lens or get up closer.

Wonder. It’s the opposite of cynicism that invades our spirits and sucks the joy out of life. Cynicism says Christmas is a small thing, much smaller in the scheme of things than the stuff I care about most. Wonder recognizes that there is something here, something divine, cosmic and new,

something God is doing that is bigger than me. I would do well to sit before it in reverence, to enter this experience as one enters a cathedral, and let it wash over me. Wonder makes your heart say, Wow! Look at Mary here today. When Mary magnifies the Lord, her own soul expands. We sometimes think obeying God shrinks our lives. No. When she sees just how big God is, her life is filled with expansive hope, joy and wonder.

Mary is with child. But she is a virgin and not yet married. She took shaming glances from judgmental people who cynically believe they already know the real story. She sees the uncertainty in her fiancé’s eye. Her own family doesn’t believe entirely. It cuts. And what about her future? What about her plans? What about her life? When the angel spoke to Mary, she answered in faith, “And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38 ESV). That’s faith. That’s trust. That’s submission to God—the very model of it! Still, she must have needed some comfort and reassurance along the way. The boldest and strongest convictions of faith can fade day by day in the common moments, little trials and headaches of life. She went to visit her relative Elizabeth who was also miraculously pregnant, carrying John the Baptist in her womb in her old age.

Elizabeth has words of encouragement for her young niece (or cousin or however they were related). God speaks to us through one another, you know. A little word of encouragement might

unlock something. It's out of this moment of encouragement that Mary feels this rush of the Holy Spirit. What comes out of her mouth next is called Mary's Song, or in Latin "The Magnificat" from the phrase "my soul magnifies the Lord." Mary suddenly joins the ranks of famous women God used to pour out a song to His glory. Miriam the prophet in Exodus 15. Hannah the mother of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2. Now sweet Mary of Nazareth: "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'" (Luke 1:46-47). My soul glorifies, magnifies—the Greek is "megaluno"—the Lord. My soul makes much of God. My soul expands its view of God. My soul sees, oh, pretty big. Bigger than I thought. Bigger than me. Bigger than the situation I am currently in. Big!

For all that Mary has to be worried about—and there is stuff, she's got stuff, we could make a pretty good list of things for Mary to be worried about right now, couldn't we?—for all that Mary has to be worried about, her soul sees God is at work. God is involved. "For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). God is on the move in her life right now, in the present, to change the future, not just for her but for all humanity. "For the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name"

(Luke 1:49). God is doing
something! It
causes her
to

erupt into song. Singing. It's lyrical. It's poetic. It's emotive. Singing. Why do we sing? I have a chapter in my book, *Happy Church*, all about why the church sings. I've been thinking about that a lot these few months when we can't gather and sing as we wish. Singing is not "just like talking, except longer and louder, and you move your voice up and down." Sorry Buddy the Elf. It's not an extraneous thing. It's part of worship. It grabs us and shakes us clear-minded. It softens us emotionally to receive the Word of God into our hearts. It unites us when we sing together. It gladdens us. And it glorifies God. God likes your singing. God is pleased with your song—yes, even yours. Keep singing church, until we can gather in thousands to sing together again.

So, it's a song. God is up to something. What could it be? Mary immediately turns to what God has done in the past. God is doing something in the present that will totally change the future. What could it be? Look to the past. Mary doesn't look to the worst of her own past, as we are so inclined to do sometimes in our cynicism. She looks to God's past. The long past history of the enduring faithfulness of God. She sings of the character of God. "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50). God has been faithful over generations. Every generation at some point worries that faith will end with them, but it never happens. Jesus always

moves into the next generation. “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts” (Luke 1:51). In a world where people succeed and thrive on false external showiness and egotistical platforming, God sees right through to the heart. “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). It isn’t that God hates rulers and power and wealth. That’s not consistent with Scripture. The point is that God gets involved in every life, and all the systems and patterns that you think have everything locked down and set forever, God can turn them over with a nudge. Nobody is past the grace and mercy and help of the Lord. The starving sit down to a feast when the callous-hearted wealthy walk away hungry. The proud lose their seat of power; the humble rise by His hand and to His glory.

“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors” (Luke 1:54-55). It can be painful to feel forgotten by God. There’s a dull ache in the soul when we question if God remembers. We don’t take that word “remember” with anything close to the weight that Mary did. Remember. It’s not just mental recall. I

almost forgot. I almost forgot to get the butter, then I remembered. Remembering is an entire category of life in the Bible. God remembers us in our distress. We remember God’s faithfulness and find hope for the future. Remembering is resting on the promises of God for the future based on the knowledge of the character of God we have gained in the past—or that we have received from prior generations. God showed up, sings Mary. He did remember. He didn’t forget us. He has helped. Just as He promised. Now within her is the promise fulfilled, the Son of God, Jesus.

We get all tangled up in tenses through Mary’s song. Is it present tense? Past tense? Future tense? Yes. It’s all of these jumbled up. To speak and remember what God has done is to proclaim and trust what God will do. God is faithful. Also, with God, what is promised is so certain and sure that in these moments of full faith, in these moments of clarity like Mary is experiencing, when our faith in Jesus is full-flushed, we are so the Lord’s, so submitted to Him, so trusting, that His future promises are things we can talk about in the past tense. God has helped, saved, redeemed. “Well, not yet Mary. Your life is a little messed up right now.” No. God has been good to me. God has redeemed and used my life. God has done it, even though it hasn’t happened yet.

Mary gave herself over to God so fully that she remains a testimony and a model to faithfulness for us to follow. Let it be unto me. You might think submitting to God’s purposes makes your life smaller, narrow and limited. The opposite is true. The narrow gate opens to a

wide open place. Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). God does some things we never expect. Mary was open not only about what she experienced of God’s unexpected works, but how it affected her. It made her soul feel differently. It made her feel larger. Her heart was more expansive now. She could embrace more of the world around her. The sudden limitations on her life were a narrow gate opening up to fuller life. She could say with the Psalm, “When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place” (Psalms 118:5). The narrow gate is Jesus Himself, the Way, the Truth, the Life.

Do you feel forgotten by God? Do you worry that you might have forgotten Jesus yourself? Are you having a hard time worshipping the Lord with any kind of devotion, or seeing Jesus as higher, better, than the things you like and collect and pursue to comfort your soul? Mary magnified the Lord. There are two ways to magnify something. Look at it through a lens or get up close to it. Do you feel forgotten by God? Do you doubt that

God is involved and active in a year like 2020 and all we’ve suffered? Take this up as a lens. Look through the lens of Scripture. See the faithfulness of God.

Do you worry

that you are the one who forgets God, walks away from God acting like there’s nothing there? Get closer to Jesus. Get right up near. Worship a little more. Pray. Get around believing friends. Ask God to pull you closer, right up to the side of the building where you can look up again. “Oh, pretty big. Wow.” God is involved. God is at work. In the world, in nations and kings, economies and swings of history. God is at work. And He’s at work in your life too.

There is a star in the sky (December 21), a Christmas Star. It’s not really a star. Jupiter and Saturn are going to be so closely aligned that their light combines making one, doubly bright, shining light in the sky for us to see. The last time this was seen was the year 1226. Some say this sort of conjunction between planets and starlight may have been what got the Magi up out of their chairs in Persia to seek the birth of a new king in Jerusalem. Maybe. We get it this year on the longest night of the year, December 21, 2020. A little gift. A Christmas Star. Or, is it just the natural course? Planets move where they move when they move there, Tim. Well, sure. But why not look up, open your heart to a little wonder. Really, everything in life is a miraculous gift from God. It’s bigger than you thought. Lift your head. Oh! Pretty big. “Look among the nations and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told” (Habakkuk 1:5).