

Magnificat

2011 Advent Devotional
Based on JS Bach's Musical Masterpiece
Prepared by
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Nov. 27 – Dec. 26, 2011

PRELUDE

I began preparations for this devotional no where near Advent, no where near fall...it began the closing day of ski season 2011 in Colorado. As I was about to take my last runs as the time drew near for the lifts to close, I stood at the top of Winter Park. There are always many people about, the wind ever blowing, spectacular views.

Suddenly, there was no one around me, and the wind quieted. I looked all around at the beauty of God's creation and a verse echoed in my mind and heart – *“My soul waits in silence for the Lord”*. And, then another – *“My soul magnifies the Lord”*. A moment later I turned and carved down toward the base. Once there I looked up and took a deep breath. What a great end to a great season. A person then surprised me as they took off their skis next to me and asked a question: *“What was that you were singing? It was so joyful? I’ve been following you all the way down, and I kept hearing you and I just have to ask”*.

I hadn't realized it. I had been vocalizing the music I was hearing in my mind – Bach's MAGNIFICAT. As I told him, this devotional was born – the words of Mary, Jesus mother, expressing her willingness to be God's servant, and her spirit praising God.

As we explore this magnificent work we will also encounter JS Bach and his life. We will also consider the humble spirit of the one chosen to bear God's Son, the opportunities we have to be servants of God and the moments we are presented with for our spirits to be lifted up and to give thanks and praise for the gift, born of a young woman, through whom true life is given.

Come. Let us prepare our hearts to board the lifts and ascend to the peaks; to follow the trails – some easier, some challenging, some that take the breath away.

Come. Let us seek the child divine, and draw closer to the Lord of life.

INTRODUCTION

Friends:

It is my sincere hope that this effort will add meaning to your Advent journey. In addition to simply exploring Bach's masterpiece via listening, it includes musicological information, as well as insights gathered regarding Bach as a composer and as a person. It also contains thought provoking and sometimes challenging considerations, and closes with a daily prayer.

There are multiple translations of the Magnificat text. I have utilized several of these as a means to consider textual meaning and insight.

Also included are various paintings and visual elements to enhance your engagement with this season, this text and this musical work.

I encourage you to visit the web, if you do not (or, even if you do) to listen to each of the MAGNIFICAT movements as explore them together. There are many available on YouTube. Those conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt are highly recommended.

The season of Advent is often lost in the midst of the "holiday season". It is my prayer that in the midst of this hectic and activity laden time you will be able to carve out five minutes or so a day – that's all it would take to listen to a movement of Bach's work and to consider the daily readings enclosed. In doing so, I pray our focus will be adjusted upward and inward.

Blessings.

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THE NIGHT BEFORE

Job posting: Churches (yes, multiple) seek unwitting servant. Job Description: Organist, Choirmaster, Teacher and more. Must be willing to relocate to Leipzig (at own expense). Responsibilities include (but not limited to) composing and preparing music for multiple churches, multiple choirs, multiple rehearsals and multiple services weekly, composing new music, teaching music, teaching Latin, student bed checks and meeting numerous unremunerated and unreasonable expectations as usually found in church bodies. Pay: remarkably little. Work hours: remarkably many. Remember – it's for God, so buck-up. Submit resume's via courier a.s.a.p.

Now, if you came upon the above notice, would you be excited to pursue this position? Although a bit tongue and cheek, the above pretty well sums up what Johann Sebastian Bach faced and dealt with. He would marry a professional singer, and they would have thirteen children (how, one cannot help but wonder – he was never home!) He would begin to lose his eyesight, and then be blind following surgery. He would die of a stroke, and lie in an unmarked grave for 150 years. His music would be forgotten- some scores actually used in churches to start the fires in fireplaces and found stacked in basements long forgotten. Then another composer (Mendelssohn) rediscovered this man and his work, and brought the work of this true Minister of Music back to the attention of the world. Years later so was his grave.

I encourage you to visit the many places available on the web to listen to each of the movements of MAGNIFICAT as we explore them. They will give you insight.

Bach also wrote in his music these words: *Soli Deo Gloria*. It means “*To God alone be glory*”. Truly, Mary's words must have filled his heart: “*My spirit rejoices in God my savior*”, for Bach was God's servant, and his music a blessing unto us all. The opening movement of this work is filled with rejoicing and praise.

So. Let's take the opening chair up, and see what awaits us.

NOVEMBER 27 – FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden,

*For behold, henceforth all generations shall 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 those of low degree.*

*He has filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich He has sent empty away.*

*He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy;
As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham
and to His posterity forever.*

These words found in Luke I, verse 46-55, and are the words of Mary, Jesus mother, upon a visit to her cousin Elizabeth after the angel Gabriel's announcement to her. They are the basis of Bach's MAGNIFICAT, and they have a great deal to teach us, if we are willing.

But before visiting Mary, the angel Gabriel had visited the priest, Zechariah, and proclaimed that Elizabeth, his wife, would bear a child (who would come to be known as John the Baptist). He says their prayers have been answered. But Zechariah's response was less than expected, to which Gabriel has a response: *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."*

As we begin this Advent journey, I encourage you to read the text above and to consider – what would be our response if Gabriel appeared to us? What is our response when God presents us with a message – in whatever form. Would our mouths thereafter be filled with silence – or humble praise?

Prayer: Dear Lord, this Advent mold my heart in preparation for your daily messages. Amen.



The Angel Gabriel and Mary



NOVEMBER 28 – SERVICE

The Magnificat [Latin: magnifies], is also called the Canticle of Mary, and is Mary's joyous prayer in response to her cousin Elizabeth's greeting. This great hymn forms part of the Church's prayer in the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours). When it is recited as part of the Divine Office, it is followed by the Gloria Patri ("Glory be").

But before Mary utters the words of what is now known as MAGNIFICAT, Gabriel spoke to her in Luke 1:26 – 38. Here Gabriel tells her the news – and she responds with a reasonable question – *“How can this be? I am a virgin”*. Gabriel then says *“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”*. He tells her even Elizabeth is pregnant – and that no word from God ever fails.

Many times over the years I have thought of these words, and have sat in utter amazement at Mary's response: *“I am the Lord's servant...”* *“May your word to me be fulfilled.”*

It has troubled me that since Christ came into my life, and in serving His church in some thirty-five plus years thereafter, how many avoid Mary like the plague. They read the story, give a thirty second *“wasn't that nice”* glance over and put her and her words back in the closet till the next perfunctory emergence. I have always felt it is because of a theological and denominational finger-pointing activity. And, along the way, the immensity of what this young woman's response to God's call is missed, and the magnitude of joy that responding to His call, in whatever form, can bring.

Listen to the opening movement of Bach's work. It is filled with an energy, a joy that reflects on Mary's response and what her words mean – that all will see God's salvation come.

Prayer: O Jesus, you are the precious gift. Remind us to share the joyous good tidings with those who so desperately need to hear it. Yes, even me. Amen.

NOVEMBER 29 - JOY

When Bach assumed his duties in 1723 at the church of St. Thomas, much was demanded in the way of producing music. Every Sunday: two motets for the main service and another for the afternoon Vespers. In addition he had to write a Magnificat and Sanctus for each Christmas season.

The version we hear most often today is in D major. Bach originally composed it in E flat. Another, a solo cantata, has been lost.

Listen again to the opening movement, which contains this text:

Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul doth magnify the Lord

What word comes to mind as you listen?

To me – Joy!

Two questions then come to mind. When was the last time you experienced joy? Not happiness, but joy, that state which extends beyond immediate circumstance, that foundational element?

Read the verse above again.

The second is this – when was the last time the joy of the Lord filled your life, surrounded your day and caused your soul to be so full that you were filled with a song of thankfulness and praise?

Today would be a good day to focus on the joy of the Lord, don't you think? To focus on that One who is Joy, and in whom our spirits should rejoice.

Prayer: O Lord, help this to be a cornerstone of our Advent journey. A focus on you. And in doing so, help our souls spring forth in songs of thanksgiving and praise. Amen.

NOVEMBER 30 - DANCE

I am a fortunate man in countless ways. Among them are the years I spent in Atlanta performing and recording with Robert Shaw.

One year we were performing and recording **MAGNIFICAT**. Robert is known for his exacting personal preparations and for the same expectations of those on the other side of the baton. Over the years many of his pithy sayings were written into many a score.

Among his many quoted sayings is this:

"We've worked hard on musical disciplines. They aren't good enough. They never are. But all that we have accomplished is worth nothing at all unless it releases the spirit to sing and shout, to laugh and cry, or pray the primitive prayer. I earnestly believe, too, that the spirit— and only the spirit— can guide us to the sound. "

He also said this: *"If hearts hymn, then the sound is illumined."*

During the concerts and recording sessions I remember being very reflective on these and many other insights gained from working and talking with the Master of the First Art. I hold the score of **MAGNIFICAT** in my hand now, looking at all the markings I made directly from Robert's score. And I noticed something faintly written that I added during one of those moments.

Robert had studied to be a minister, and there were moments when those insights (or caustic evaluations of "the church") were shared with us.

But there it was – and I suddenly remembered that I wrote this in after a brief private conversation with him about the opening movement. He had said in passing that the way Bach wrote the opening was an introduction to the voices, which in the way they were written expressed *"A dance of grace"*.

Listen to this movement again. Let your heart hymn. Join the dance of grace.

Prayer: Lord, tune us make us instruments of your grace and peace – that others may hear your song and join in singing. Amen.

DECEMBER 1 - FOCUS

Bach composed his MAGNIFICAT in various ways unusual for the time. The performing forces are made up of five-part chorus, five soloists, and an unusually large orchestra. Initially it was written with additional choral movements specific to Christmas, which were later removed in order to make it suitable for year-round performance.

The work can also be viewed as divided into twelve parts, in groupings of three movements.

The second movement, for soprano, has this text:

*Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.
And my spirit rejoices in God my savior.*

The opening strings reminds one of a skipping heart at the news of something joyful. The vocal melismas also give the feeling of this joyous skipping.

This second verse of text gives us additional insight. Mary could have responded in many ways to Gabriel's astounding – and, yes, frightening news. But her attitude was that of openness to God's call upon her. And the text of this aria, coupled with the opening verse, provide us with something to consider – her focus. It was not herself, but upon God, not herself; His call, not her preferences. And Bach portrays this with exceptional beauty.

As a professional singer and conductor, as a Minister and Director of Music, I know what it is like to have people come up and offer their thanks and praise, which is so greatly appreciated. But, I also know that, as Robert Shaw said as he once conducted a four-beat pattern – *"This makes no sound,"* whereupon he pointed at the chamber chorus as we sat before him and continued: *"It's all up to you"*. It is up to us in how we respond to God's word to us.

What will we do today when He calls? Where will our focus be?

Prayer: Today Lord, teach me; help me to focus on you, to praise and rejoice in you, and to let go of the "mighty me" within. Amen.

DECEMBER 2 - BACKSTORY

Most are familiar with the concept of “backstory,” the “behind the scenes” motivations and impetus for almost anything.

Stop to think about Mary’s words. Interestingly, all that she expressed had Old Testament connection points. They provide the “backstory” and give insight. I encourage you to look them up.

Bach also had backstory. We generally think of Bach as a musical and progeny machine, subservient to those around and above him.

Not quite.

Musically he pushed the boundaries-much to the consternation of those same people around and above him. He once applied for a leave of absence for four weeks – and instead took four months. His musical settings stretched, and in ways, broke the shackles of confinement and dictate. One author explores Bach as a subversive, as one who undermined widely held views and assumptions about music – such as in the opening two movements of this work. His thesis in this area is that of *gaudium* – musical pleasure. At times this is making something like various fugal themes “ugly” and using all twelve chromatic tones. In other ways, overly joyful and excessive, such as these two movements could be considered.

Listen to these movements again in the confines of assumption, repetition, “*but we’re always done it that way*”.

Do you hear it now? The “over the top” nature of these movements? The poking at those assumptions, and the twitching in the pews that followed?

I remember one Pastor preaching on Jesus as a subversive – because he did not stay within the confines of assumption, repetition. That Jesus “backstory” and expectation was one of change.

I have to admit it...that makes me twitch a bit in my comfortable pew. What about you? Are we willing to be subversive for God?

Prayer: O Lord, help me to subversive – by putting you first in my thoughts, my actions. Help get out of my comfort zone - for you. Amen.

DECEMBER 3 - BLESSED

The third movement in Magnificat has this text:

*Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae;
ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent.*

*For He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden:
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

It is a soprano aria, with cello and now generally played by oboe. This movement is much slower, the cello giving an almost plaintive timbre with its slow separated skips, focusing more on the “lowly” aspect. The oboe in turn flows up and down, surrounding the vocal line, while the soprano, with exceptional expressivity, offers up Mary’s words.

Listen to the beauty of it, and consider the young women expressing it.

At one time this movement was actually the fourth movement. Before it came a Christmas choral motet – “*Vom Himmel hoch*” (From heaven above to earth I come to bear good news to every home). It was one of Bach’s favorites, and was the most popular German carol prior to Gruber’s *Stille nacht* (silent night).

I admit that to this day I cannot fathom why God reached out and touched my life. He has blest me in countless ways, yet my failings remind me constantly of the cost He paid. It also makes me think of this verse from MAGNIFICAT. He knew how lowly – how unlovable and unworthy. And yet, He chose to come to be among us, to pay a cost so dear. And it is then that I realize that all those who believe in, trust in, hope in the Child of Bethlehem, are called blessed.

He has come. Good news has been brought to every home. That knock on the door of the heart isn’t UPS with another Black Friday gift or goodie.

It is the Babe knocking on the door of our hearts.

Prayer: O little child of Bethlehem, be born in our hearts today. Amen.

DECEMBER 4 - SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today is the beginning of a new week, and we have just considered the third movement of MAGNIFICAT. Mary's words are beautifully set, and the closing words, "all generations shall call me blessed" seem to be coming to a close – but then a surprise.

Suddenly the choir enters with this text:

Omnes generations All generations

Over and over it repeats, as generation after generation recognizes the blessing.

One of my favorite poems is by John Donne (c. 1572 – 1631). It is titled NATIVITY and begins:

*Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves his welbelov'd imprisonment,
There he hath made himself to his intent
Weak enough, now into our world to come...*

A second favorite by him is ANNUNCIATION, and begins:

*Salvation to all that will is nigh,
That All, which always is All everywhere,
Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear,
Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,
Loe, faithful Virgin, yields himself to lie
In prison, in thy womb; and though he there
Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet he'll wear
Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.*

On this day, listen again to the opening three movements of MAGNIFICAT. Consider with them the words of NATIVITY and ANNUNCIATION.

We are the echoes of that first generation. What echoes will follow?

Prayer: God of grace and love, we thank you for thinking of us as worthy of the incarnation and the gift of salvation. Amen.



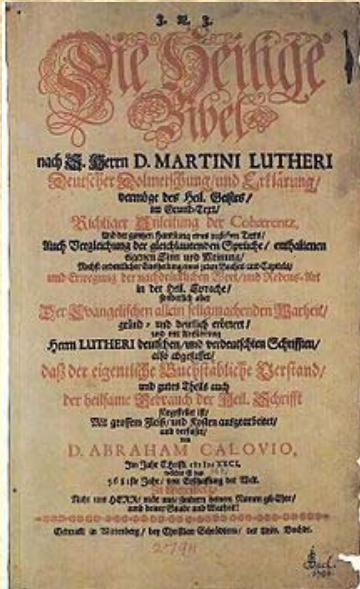
Botticelli – Madonna

DECEMBER 5 - LIFTED

Below is a picture of the front page of Bach's bible. In the lower right corner he wrote his name.

Bach served at Thomaskirche (St. Thomas Church) in Leipzig. Here, on May 25, 1539, Martin Luther introduced the Reformation.

Bach's bible contains some four hundred notations.



I cannot help but wonder at what Bach must have thought when he first read Mary's words. I also wonder how many times he re-read those same words as he composed this magnificent work.

The second grouping of movements opens with the text:

*Quia fecit mihi magna
qui potens est,
et sanctum nomen eius.*

*For He that is mighty
has magnified me;
and holy is His name.*

It is an aria for bass, and opens with cello and organ, and is set at a slower tempo. It resonates with a joyfulness, which the following movement picks up in an even more subdued tone.

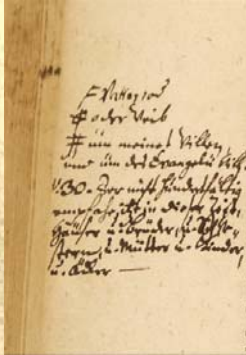
Listen to this movement. The solo begins on steady upper notes – then descends- the mighty hand reaching down to then lift up.

When was the last time you felt Him reaching down to lift you up?

Prayer: O Lord, you have reached down that I may be lifted up. Help me to lift my praise to you, and to lift others in need. Amen.

DECEMBER 6 - LILTING

Below is a page from Bach's bible, showing one of the notations he made.



As fastidious as Bach was (in addition to all the meetings, teaching times, student check-ins, services and rehearsals and practice his days were filled with, he set daily schedules for composition (from which he never wavered). I cannot but wonder at the “why” of these notations.

Someday I hope to study these pages to learn more of Bach and his faith – as well as his musical “a-ha!’s”.

I cannot but believe one of those moments came when he read the text he set for the sixth movement, a duet for tenor and alto.

*Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.*

This beautiful setting is lilting, filled with an undercurrent of emotion.

Interestingly, one author noted that Bach again pushes the envelope of the accepted normative- a “rhetorical error” – by having the music evoke a tragic pastoral. The author writes “*While it may seem obvious in retrospect that the Fate of a Lamb of God – an Agnus Dei – ought to be experienced tragically, Bach’s contemporaries didn’t see it that way...He’s almost whistfully mistranslating the words... we participate in a dance of misery...*”.

Listen. The lilt is a dance – and there is misery –and emotion. But it is also filled with mercy.

Prayer: O Lord, in the birth of Christ we celebrate the fulfillment of hope in the midst of a curse. Turn our lament into a dance of joy. Amen.

DECEMBER 7 - REALIZATION

Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.

*He hath showed strength with His arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

These words, sung by choir, are the 7th movement of MAGNIFICAT. In it Bach paints the words through the music- the choir begins the text unified – displaying strength. Then at “dispersit” the proud are scattered, depicted by the descending two note couplets. As you listen to this movement, notice how he paints the scattering of the proud, interspersed with the displays of strength, all building to a sudden and surprising stop. Then the choir proclaims together “mente cordis sui” with trumpet fanfare – the proud in the imagination of their own hearts (minds).

Where “Et misericordia” portrays mercy in a contemplative way with a lilting 12/8 rhythm and parts moving in thirds, here the choir and orchestra burst forth from the pastoral calm in torrents of sixteenth-note runs counterpoised with unison chordal punctuations; the text describes the scattering, the musical lines scatter into dispersed fragments. It seems that the music has disintegrated into chaos, and the voices just manage to gather themselves together for the closing cadence.

What fascinates me here is the tone painting – the proud, in their own self-serving “clickish” world don’t get it. The trumpet fanfare they think is to celebrate themselves – when in fact it is the fanfare of their own demise. The cadence a moment of realization – realized too late.

It’s like skiing through the trees – we think we know the path. And suddenly, reality hits. It’s not pretty.

What slope are you on today?

Prayer: O God, overturn everything that stands in the way of you in our lives, of being and doing that which you would have us be and do. Scatter our prideful thoughts and ways that your light may lead us and be seen in us. Amen.

DECEMBER 8- UP-DOWNS

Movement eight of MAGNIFICAT is an air for tenor. The text is:

*Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and hath exalted the humble.*

The text is an extension of the text of the seventh movement. It is jagged, contains demanding vocal melismas and is very dramatic.

As mentioned previously, Bach was not beyond “pushing boundaries” in his musical settings. Part of this is because of assumptions. Consider this:

- Composers are concerned about the words they are to set
- Composers compose within cultures that regulate their activities
- Listeners listen and hear within a culture
- The meaning of texts changes over time

In this movement Bach communicates through compositional tone painting the putting down of the mighty and the lifting up of the humble. He obviously has carefully considered the text. He is also pushing the listeners to listen – and think.

You don't have to go far today to see the proud on full display. While you may think I mean the faldral of politics, and yes, there is enough of that to make one cringe, I was thinking of other things, and of myself.

It's humbling to be put down. But, the Son of God humbled Himself that you and I might be lifted up.

Prayer: O Lord, stir up your power, and come. Help us to be humble in spirit, humble in service. Help us to be beacons of Christ to a world, a nation, a city, a neighborhood, a home. Amen.

DECEMBER 9 - MIDDLE

In reading various materials regarding Mary you can't go far without encountering clashes in both the theological and denominational realms, and in how Mary is viewed as a person. Read again the Magnificat text we have explored so far:

And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden,

For behold, henceforth all generations shall 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 those of low degree.

One author put it this way – Mary was in the middle.

"Mary was in the middle of both of the angelic announcements. Gabriel appeared to Mary and, when the angels spoke to the shepherds, the shepherds reported their Good News to Mary and Joseph. Mary had a dangerous story to tell that would subvert injustice and establish justice through her son, the Messiah of Israel. Luke says that Mary "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).

The traditional take on Mary's pondering is that she quietly reflected, perhaps in a corner when everyone else was dancing and clapping, and then humbly kept everything inside. But in Scripture, the word ponder denotes observing and thinking and then interpreting (Gen. 37:11; Dan. 7:28). The language of pondering refers to Mary's deliberating in order to comprehend the divine plan now at work. Mary was a subversive and she was dangerous, first, because she knew the identity of her son and, second, because she began to tell his story".

Uh, oh, there's that word again – subversive. But, aren't we in a similar boat? The truth of Christ changes, stings, stirs things up, causes people to think differently, act differently. We are put in the middle every day, like it or not. The question – which side will we choose to be on. Lift chairs take to you various runs on the slopes – and sometimes to ones beyond our abilities. Who then will lead us home?

Prayer: O Lord, make your ways known to me. Light the path before me, for I am a wanderer. Lead me out of the middle to you. Amen.

DECEMBER 10 - PERPLEXED

Bach, like us all, was a multi-faceted person. I stand in awe of his dedication to his craft and his focus upon the true intent of all that he did. In his works he would notate “Soli Deo Gloria” – To God Alone Be The Glory.

Now, read this:

“As a young teacher he got into trouble with the Arnstady authorities over a public brawl with one of his students. Bach, while walking across the market-place in the company of his cousin, Barbara Catharina, was confronted by J. H. Greyersbach and five fellow students returning from a christening feast. Geyersbach demanded to know why Bach had impugned his abilities as a bassoonist. As tempers rose, he called Bach ‘a dirty dog’ and lashed his face with a stick. Bach drew his sword and only the intervention of another student averted bloodshed.

When Bach complained, the Consistory determined that he had been principally at fault for having called Greyersbach ‘a nanny-goat bassoonist’. He was admonished to try and live in peace with his students. Bach’s reaction was to take a prolonged and unauthorized journey to Lubeck, to listen to the organ playing of Buxtehude.

With all Bach’s amiable qualities, he had a warm and hasty temper. On one occasion Gorner, the organist at St Thomas’, who generally played very well, struck a false chord, and Bach flew into such a passion that tore his wig off, and threw it at the unfortunate man’s head, with the thundered exclamation, ‘You ought to have become a cobbler rather than an organist!’

In an odd way I take comfort in these stories of this man. They reveal the reality of a person, of life. No one is perfect, except the One the words of Magnificat proclaim, and to whom this work of Bach is offered.

Perplexing, isn’t it. God came unto us and has chosen all kinds – including you and me. Not because we are perfect, but because He has seen something we cannot see – beyond the imperfection. And for one reason – for loves sake.

We are about half way through Advent. For loves sake, let us consider what He calls us not only to do, but to be.

Prayer: Jesus, you are the joy of every longing heart. Transform us by your love into the people you would have us be. Amen.

DECEMBER 11- THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

For many years Bach's faith was questioned. It was said that the reason he wrote sacred music, such as **MAGNIFICAT**, was simply because he was employed by the church. It was only recently – literally – that this view has taken a turn. And it is because Bach's bible was discovered. It now resides in St. Louis, MO, where I was born- and I did not know it. My next visit home will include an extended time around this remarkable find.

His bible has undergone forensic testing – ink, paper, and handwriting analysis. All confirmed it was his.

Bach's bible, with his signature, also has a date – 1733. His health would decline in 1749. He would become blind and could no longer read his bible, and would die in 1750.

Three of the some 400 comments made in the margins are these:

Exodus 15:20

"First prelude for two choirs to be sung to the glory of God."

I Chronicles 25

"This chapter is the true foundation of all God-pleasing church music."

II Chronicles 5:12-13

"In devotional music, God is always present with His Grace."

His bible (a bible and commentary, called the Calov bible, is actually three books, each signed by Bach) also contains many grammatical corrections written in by Bach – do you know God's word well enough to do this? The fact that he spent significant time studying his bible is validated by underlining and colored ink – the same kind of things we do.

Listen again to the opening of this work. With these insights about Bach and his obvious extensive study and devotion to it, doesn't it give you a new appreciation for not just the "how", but the "why" he chose to set it?

Prayer: O Lord, open our eyes, mind and heart to your word. Help us to dwell on it as did your servant Bach, so that in all our ways we may "compose" our praise. Amen.

DECEMBER 12 - SURPRISE

It is important not only to understand the text of the MAGNIFICAT, but to understand and appreciate the prelude to it – Gabriel’s message to Mary.

A favorite text of mine is found in a Basque Christmas folk carol. I am sure you know it – The Angel Gabriel:

*The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame:
"All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!*

*"For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honor thee;
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!*

*Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!*

*Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk through-out the world will ever say:
"Most highly favored lady." Gloria!*

I am listening to MAGNIFICAT now, and in my score I have a note - *"before this was "surprise!"*". I don't remember when or why I wrote it, but Gabriel's message was a surprise to Mary, and her response – *"To me as it pleaseth God"* – is one that I tend to overlook in this busy season. I'm listening to the second movement–

*Et exsultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.
And my spirit rejoices in God my savior*

I many times forget what it means to be surprised by God, to say "yes", and to rejoice in Him. I'm too busy.

Ever feel the same way?

Prayer: O Lord, this day, I wait for your surprise. Help me to learn afresh to say "yes" and rejoice in you in what you put before me. Amen.

DECEMBER 13 - MIRACLES

Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes.

He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.

With this text the ninth movement of Magnificat begins. It opens with a gentleness. Two flutes and cello begin and is for alto soloist. The quietness and wonderful lilt portray a pastoral quality. The alto line has much more movement than the accompaniment, and includes trills and a number of melismas. This quality remains throughout except for one moment – when the those who appear to be rich are suddenly confronted and sent away empty.

As I listen to this movement, which is less than three minutes in length, it struck me that a stop light is many times about the same length. And sometimes, when I am at a particular stop light near one of the churches I serve, there is a person standing there holding a sign: *“Out of work...need help...anything... God bless....”* Sometimes that stop light feels a whole lot longer.

I have pointed some of these people to the church for assistance. Almost none ever go.

One day I drove up and a woman stood there holding a sign. She was neatly dressed, and her face was creased with lines of worry. On it were these words: *“I need a miracle”*. My heart sank, and I was overwhelmed with emotion. I had no cash to give her, and I was in the outside lane – and then I saw a man reach out with a number of bills and what appeared to be a business card. They spoke for several moments. As we pulled away I saw her face – she was smiling, and she was looking at something – not the money, but the card, and I caught a glimpse of a green logo. Then the light changes and off we went.

A week or two later I stopped at a Starbucks near that intersection – and guess who waited on me?

To that woman the man in the car had been her miracle.

Who might we encounter today who needs a miracle?

Prayer: O Lord – be born in us today. Help us in your name to be miracles each day to those in need. Amen.



DECEMBER 14 - HELP

The tenth movement in **MAGNIFICAT** begins with the text:
Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae.
He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy.

It is written for two soprano and alto solos, with cello and oboe. The opening to me is contemplative, the solos building on each other, intertwining. The opening soprano line rises, as if looking upward for help, and the alto responds with a descending line, as if the hand of help is reaching down.

A sixteen-hour work days was not uncommon for Bach, and as one person noted, "*Bach plotted it all out with the precision of a military campaign*". He was devoted to his wife and ever growing family. He was also a man, as was noted "*did not suffer fools lightly*". The greatness of his art is on display in the structure of this work. He abandoned typical Baroque recitatives and da capo arias, wrote the work in twelve sections of paired texts, a joyous choral fugue, and the final chorus echoes music from the beginning with the words "*As it was in the beginning*". The architecture is cyclical. It's focus, single-minded.

Another writer noted that "*MAGNIFICAT combines the melody, grandeur and accessibility of MESSIAH with the profound majesty of High Baroque art . . . every invocation of the human voice sings not only of the Virgin's celebration, but of the magnificence of JS Bach*".

Given Bach's devotion to studying God and His word, is it any surprise that his dedication to using the gifts given him would be fully displayed?

I am confident that Bach believed in the words of this movement and that they had direct application in his life.

Read the text again, then listen again. Can you hear the personal recognition in Bach, through the music, of whom his – and our – help has come?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, hear the prayers of we who seek to be your servants. Help us and strengthen us by your mercy. Amen.

DECEMBER 15 - LAUDES

As mentioned previously, at one time there were additional movements in MAGNIFICAT which were removed subsequently to make it useable throughout the church year. A Leipzig Christmas custom was the introduction of four Laudes into the Latin text of the Magnificat.

The first followed movement two – and was *“Vom himmel hoch” (From heaven above to earth I come)*. The second came after movement five and was *“Freut euch und jubiliert” (Gladly rejoice today; to Bethlehem take your way, Where ye shall find the holy boy that shall be your promised hope and joy)*. The third came after movement seven and had the text *“Gloria in excelsis Deo” (Glory now be to God in the highest, and on earth be peace, And goodwill be unto all men)*. The final Laudes came after the ninth movement with the text *“Virga Jesse” Jesse’s stem is flowering, our promised Emmanuel proffering. Human form, so meek and mild, is taken by this holy child. Alleluia.*

The definition of Laudes (laud) is praise or acclaim, homage, honor, glory.

As you listen to MAGNIFICAT, at the moments where these Laudes once were placed, stop for a moment and “insert” these texts. Read the text and listen to what followed. They were, if you will, “road signs”.

Can you imagine an angel appearing to you and saying “plans have changed – God says take that road”. It’s a moment of shock and awe – and fear. Can you then imagine then responding as Mary did – with Laudes?

That is one thing I think we miss in today’s busy and angst-filled world- to give Laudes for not just the “big deals”, but the small things. We miss, don’t notice His hand reaching down. Listen again to *Suscepit Israel*.

What Laudes do we have to offer this day?

Prayer: Loving God create in us a fountain of joy, stir in us a spirit ready to dance, kindle in us the fire of gladness, set loose in us songs of praise, for You are the One who comes with healing and blessing. Amen.

DECEMBER 16 - EPITAPH

In the 11th movement of MAGNIFICAT, Bach included a common hymn tune that his Leipzig congregation would have recognized. The text of the movement is:

*Sicut locutus est ad Patres nostros,
Abraham et semini eius in saecula.*

As He spoke to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed forever.

As you listen to this movement, keep in mind that as Bach neared the end of his life he was viewed as “old fashioned” by his contemporaries, and obsolete by his successors. His own son, C.P.E. Bach said of his father, “*That old wig*”. He in fact lived for years in obscurity. One writer says of him, “*He saw himself as a humble craftsman whose sole purpose was to serve God to the best of his ability. . . personal glory was abhorrent to him*”.

Of the some 1000 compositions we know of, fewer than a dozen were published in his lifetime. He never traveled outside Germany, and rarely performed his music outside the cities where he lived. When he died he was buried in an unmarked grave and effectively forgotten.

At that moment it seemed there would be no epitaph for this faithful artist of the faith.

That is until 1829 when Mendelssohn “triumphantly revived” the St. Matthew Passion.

Richard Wagner said that Bach represented “*the most stupendous miracle of music*”, I would say that is quite an epitaph.

Now read the words of this movement again.

I have realized that epitaphs come in different “colors,” if you will.

Prayer: O Lord, help us that as we seek to serve you and your people, that we may remember Soli Deo Gloria, and that our epitaphs may one day read “*well done, good and faithful servant*”. Amen.

DECEMBER 17 - LIGHT

It was 1974. I had just begun my studies at the Conservatory of Music. I had never heard a Bach work before – and God had not been part of my life.

In October all that changed.

First, through a dear friend, God's light came into my life. Second, I began rehearsals on MAGNIFICAT. Talk about some profound moments occurring in a short time span! That is when I first began studying scripture – and encountered the text of this work. I was overwhelmed in many ways. But dear friends stood by me as my journey in disbelief had turned to an Easter of faith, and my musical abilities began to be directed.

There were so many who stood by me, and whenever I hear or perform this work, I think of that time and of them.

I love the entire work, but like most I do have favorite moments. One is the last movement, which opens with "*Gloria!*" and then moves into a recapitulation of the opening movement. The emotion that fills this movement echoes in my personal life. In the many times I have performed this work, there has always been an almost overwhelming sense of anticipation of that opening "*Gloria*" sung in a powerful, unified statement. Often it is the sheer anticipation on the conductors face. (I encourage you to go to YouTube and watch Nicholas Harnoncourt conduct it – THAT is what I'm talking about!).

The reason I say all this is because this work, to me, not only expresses the words of Mary, and displays Bach's genius and personal faith, but places before us in this Advent season a question: Are we listening to His call to be light and love to those – *all* those - around us.

Today may be the day to help reveal God's light to someone in a dark place. But...are we willing to be it?

Prayer: During this Advent, let your light of peace and love shine in our world. Give us eyes to see the signs of your presence in the world. Help us to prepare our lives and our homes to receive the One who said, "I am the light of the world." Amen.

DECEMBER 18 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

MAGNIFICAT opens with an ebullient orchestral introduction featuring heraldic trumpets.

But how do our days this time of year usually begin?

C.S. Lewis wrote this about “Listening to That Other Voice”:

“That is why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply of pushing them back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing back in. And so on, all day”.

John Edwards, an 18th century Pastor and key figure in the “Great Awakening” noted this in “Engagement of the Heart”: *“The kind of religion God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless “wouldlings”- those weak inclinations that lack convictions – that raise about a little above indifference. God, in his word, greatly insists that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and that our hearts be engaged vigorously in our religion: “Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11)”.*

If we are willing to really consider what Lewis and Edwards put before us, the beginning, middle and end of each day would probably be different. Each day would begin with trumpets of thanksgiving for the blessing of another day, be filled throughout the day with His pastoral presence and lauds of praise for the many blessings that come our way, and close with powerful ringing “glorias”.

As busy as this day will be for me – with very early risings, leading in worship services followed by rehearsals and then performances, I put in my iPhone reminders throughout the day – to stop, and remember the “why” of all that I do this day.

Want to join in, too?

Prayer: Lord, as we move through this day, let us remember the moments in our lives when you revealed peace, joy and love to us – and sing your praise throughout. Amen.



DECEMBER 19 - WORDS

The words of Mary have been viewed from various vantage points. One writer wrote the following:

“But her words move beyond the personal exultation of a poor, pregnant woman. They are a declaration—on the order of Luther pinning his 95 theses to the door—from a voice at the bottom of society. It is a voice crying from the depths that God’s Messiah was finally bringing justice for the poor (such as Mary, Simeon, and Anna). It is a voice proclaiming a new order—an order centered on her son, the One who would save his people from their sins”. And then he writes: “If we want to enter the world of the real Mary that first Christmas, listen once again to her song in the context of Herod the Great. Herod, we might recall, had assassinated members of his own family for anything that even smelled of treachery. That same Herod had taxed Israel—felt more by the poor than by anyone else—beyond its means. Hear her words in that context. They are words of subversion, words that reveal why unjust rulers might worry over their public recitation, words that tell the first Christmas story: His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 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. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors”.

Certainly Bach’s MAGNIFICAT does not present itself as a work shouting of change and injustice. Whether you agree or not with the words above, they do elicit thought provoking considerations for us as believers in this day.

One is – what, today, can we do to proclaim the change the Child of Bethlehem’s coming means- in us, to those around us, our communities- and yes, even our churches?

Prayer: Loving God, make room in our hearts for people who need us. We thank you for friends and strangers who have received us when we were lonely, afraid, or tired. May we be ready to receive the love you offer us and have the courage to share that love with others through loving action. Amen

DECEMBER 20 - PARADOX

This babe, this King, heralded by angels, would be a different kind of king. This newborn King – our Mighty God and our Prince of Peace – would establish an eternal kingdom.

He would turn the world upside down – dying that we might have life. Why was Jesus born? The ultimate paradox – born to die.

It is so easy to get caught up in our day-to-day lives, especially at this time of year, that we can overlook the things that are most important to us, the many ways we have been blessed.

Forgetting that which we know so well is also a paradox. We have received forgiveness, mercy, strength, love, peace, and joy. We have reasons abounding to rejoice in the Lord now and always! And yet, it slips our minds.

There is another paradox. That as we run about, oblivious to the blessings received and Him who gave them, He patiently waits for us to be quiet.

Listen again to the sixth movement of MAGNIFICAT – and be still.

Prayer: Loving God, we thank you for Your presence with us each day. Like the shepherds, we come to the manger to worship you, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the World. Help us to remember the ways in which you have and do bless us each day, and to rejoice in you always. Amen.

DECEMBER 21 - CONTEXT

What can you see, feel, throughout scripture?

Longing.

God's people longed for a Savior – and, one night, He came. In the midst of a context of being conquered and displaced the cry was heard: “O come, O come, Emmanuel”. Beyond the context of release from being a conquered people and the displacement throughout the lands, at the core is the desire to be reconciled to God.

There is no fulfillment outside a restored relationship with Emmanuel, for all else is emptiness. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. Said another way, our hope and true longings are met in the person of Jesus.

One man wrote this: *“Virgins don’t bear children. God doesn’t dwell in flesh. And we cannot be saved out of the sinful spot that we are in, except for the surprising deliverance of God: ‘the King of Kings salvation brings’ – so, people of God, prepare to be surprised as you raise, raise your songs on high! Revel in the fact that God does not work as we think He ought to work, but works out His love according to His plan”.*

His plan is in one sense simple – Christ is the Gift. He is the gift we long for.

The other side of the paradox coin is this: we have to accept the gift.

Prayer: O Lord, we love You and thank You for the precious gift of Yourself. You are the gift that continues to give from age to age, day to day. Remind us to share the good tidings with those who do not know you, that this Christmastime they too may come unto you. Amen.

DECEMBER 22 - RINGING

The last movement (the twelfth) of MAGNIFICAT has this text:

Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria et Spiritui Sancto! Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit! As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

For some reason another music piece has been ringing in my memory in addition to this movement – it's the Irish WEXFORD CAROL – and has this text:

Good people all, this Christmas time, Consider well and bear in mind What our good God for us has done In sending his beloved son With Mary holy we should pray, To God with love this Christmas Day In Bethlehem upon that morn, There was a blessed Messiah born

The night before that happy tide The noble Virgin and her guide Were long time seeking up and down To find a lodging in the town But mark right well what came to pass From every door repelled, alas As was foretold, their refuge all Was but a humble ox's stall Near Bethlehem did shepherds keep Their flocks of lambs and feeding sheep To whom God's angel did appear Which put the shepherds in great fear Arise and go, the angels said To Bethlehem, be not afraid For there you'll find, this happy morn A princely babe, sweet Jesus, born.

With thankful heart and joyful mind The shepherds went the babe to find And as God's angel had foretold They did our Saviour Christ behold Within a manger he was laid And by his side a virgin maid Attending on the Lord of Life Who came on earth to end all strife.

What is ringing in your mind today? Depending on what it is, you may have to tune in a different channel.

Prayer: Almighty and loving God, the whole world is about to celebrate the birth of Your Son, Jesus. Even as we rejoice in our remembrance of His birth at Bethlehem, we find greater comfort in His promise to come again. May our preparations for this wondrous season remain with us, increase in us, and become as much a part of us as our breathing and our heartbeat. Then, may we say, "Come, Lord Jesus, we are ready." Amen.

DECEMBER 23 - PAINTING

Have you ever considered that the hand of God remains creative and places before us beauty and majesty to communicate to us?

Consider: A color-filled Colorado summer sunset; the majestic view from the top of a snow-covered mountain peak; the quiet gentle rippling of water moving in a stream; a melody or musical work that in the way it is presented places before us the ability to experience God and His word afresh.

MAGNIFICAT is filled with it.

Mvt 1- the opening is among the brightest and most festive of all of Bach's works and has a regal, majestic feel, and gives the sense of "glorification."

Mvt 2 – describes Mary's awed rejoicing

Mvt 3 – contains many falling motifs that allude to Mary's humble ("lowly") state. Out of this comes the fervent swarming throngs of people.

Mvt 4 - Each of the five vocal parts sings "omnes, omnes generationes," over and over again; for the final 3 1/2 measures of the movement, then, the five come together to sing in rhythmic unison. The effect is this: initially, many generations -- all distinct from each, from different eras and regions -- call Mary blessed; the result is that throughout time, all generations shall call her blessed.

Mvt 5 – describes with grandeur in an unhurried stride, the mighty things He has done.

Mvt 6- contemplatively portrays mercy with a lilting rhythm

Mvt 7 – choir and orchestra burst forth out of a pastoral calm with torrents of 16th note runs – describing the scattering of the proud.

Mvt 8 – dotted rhythms juxtaposed against melismas give a purposeful righteousness to the business of casting down the proud and lifting up the lowly.

(continued on next page)

DECEMBER 23 - (CONTINUED)

Mvt 9 - The pleasant parallel thirds which dominate the two flute parts are symbolic of the Holy Trinity (as, I suppose, are the three solo parts together). The active parts which fill in the sound between the beats in the continuo (especially where the continuo only plays on the beats) are like the hungry being filled with good things. The sweet sound of the parallels reflects the "good things" God gave to the hungry.

Mvt 10 – a feeling that “all is right with the world” is portrayed. An elongated plainsong melody is set against the vocal lines representing mercy.

Mvt 11 – the sturdy fugue conveys God’s promise to the children of Israel.

Mvt 12 –The Gloria Patria opens in unison rhythm and then unfurls like flower petals, then mirrors the opening to suggest “as it was in the beginning”, and ends with exuberance and drama.

Bach’s MAGNIFICAT, depending on the tempos chosen, is between twenty-three and twenty-eight minutes. In that short span he communicates not just the text, but the beauty and meaning of the text, and places before us an opportunity to consider our response.

Beauty, as is said, is in the eye of the beholder.

Problem is, do we take the time to truly behold, reflect and respond.

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve.

Isn’t it time we took a few moments to thoughtfully consider what that fully means?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to paint the movements of our lives in Lauds of you. Help us to pause and see your hand moving in beauty. Prepare our hearts to fully receive Him who is Beauty. Amen.

It's time.

"Our rebellion, our stubbornness, and our proneness to letting our desires dictate our worship of the creation rather than the Creator resulted in an impassible divide between us and God. The only way for us to be made right with God was for all the fullness of God to dwell in a man, so He would reconcile all things to Himself.

It's easy to skim over these truths as we sing familiar songs such as "Joy to the World! The Lord is come!" But do you realize that the reign of sin and sorrow is passing? In Christ we are blameless, free from accusation! We are no longer under a curse. . . We pause today to celebrate the day when the Word of God became flesh, when light stepped into darkness, and when true joy entered into our world".

I know a man who lived in darkness, until one day when light stepped into that darkness, when sorrow passed, and from the deepest valley was lifted to a peak. It's name - Forgiven.

This night, as I watch my granddaughter sing of His coming, as I sit beside my beloved wife with our children, grandchildren and friends to worship, as I lead those who minister through music in the choirs I lead, I will be singing in my heart and giving thanks as I remember that moment.

They are not merely words, for they are real.

This night, who else is in need of hearing them- through us?

Prayer: Come, thou long-expected Jesus. Help us to declare "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!" not just this day, this night, tomorrow – but every day. Amen.



Good people all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done
In sending his beloved son
With Mary holy we should pray,
To God with love this Christmas Day
In Bethlehem upon that morn,
There was a blessed Messiah born

The night before that happy tide
The noble Virgin and her guide
Were long time seeking up and down
To find a lodging in the town
But mark right well what came to pass
From every door repelled, alas
As was foretold, their refuge all
Was but a humble ox's stall

Near Bethlehem did shepherds keep
Their flocks of lambs and feeding sheep
To whom God's angel did appear
Which put the shepherds in great fear
Arise and go, the angels said
To Bethlehem, be not afraid
For there you'll find, this happy morn
A princely babe, sweet Jesus, born

With thankful heart and joyful mind
The shepherds went the babe to find
And as God's angel had foretold
They did our Saviour Christ behold
Within a manger he was laid
And by his side a virgin maid
Attending on the Lord of Life
Who came on earth to end all strife

DECEMBER 25 – CHRISTMAS DAY

To day we remember and celebrate! Today, put on **MAGNIFICAT** and recall the texts of each movement.

Today we proclaim God's promise, spoken to a young woman, whose faith and humbleness has much to teach us, has been fulfilled.

He has come!

1 Magnificat anima mea Dominum. My soul doth magnify the Lord

2 Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo.

And my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

3 Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent. For He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth [all generations] shall call me blessed.

4 Omnes generationes All generations

5 Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius. For He that is mighty has magnified me; and holy is His name.

6 Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus eum. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.

7 Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui. He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

8 Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and hath exalted the humble.

9 Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.

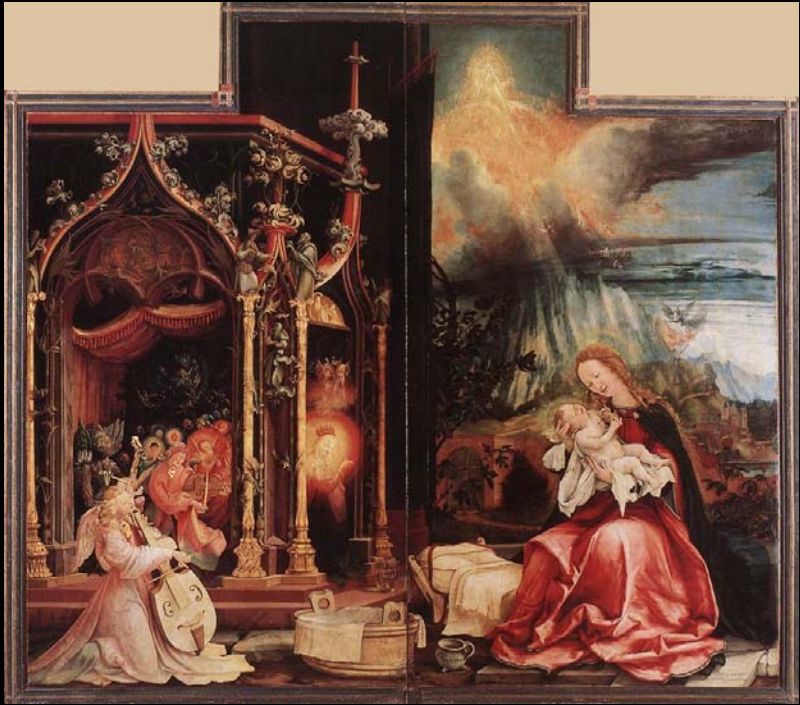
10 Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy.

11 Sicut locutus est ad Patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula. As He spoke to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed forever.

12 Gloria Patri, gloria Filio, gloria et Spiritui Sancto! Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit! As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Prayer: What shall we give to the babe in the manger, what shall we offer the child in the stall? Incense and spices and gold we've a-plenty- Are these the gifts for the king of us all? No, Lord. I give you my all. Amen.



Concert of Angels and Nativity



The Magnificat, the Cantic of Mary, can be a source of great devotion and spiritual strength. It teaches us about real humility that is rooted in truth. Each of us can say with Mary that He who is mighty “has done great things for me”.

God had a plan for Mary, the mother of Jesus who was there for Jesus’ first miracle, there at the foot of the cross. Mary had been called blessed and highly favored. When you are blessed, you feel, for lack of a better word, obliged to bless others.

“When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flock, the work of Christmas begins: to find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among brothers, to make music in the heart”.
Howard Thurman

*“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all”.*
Emily Dickenson

“If you want to make a difference, you have to be different”.
Billy Graham

“Advent is a love poem written to us from God, and in God’s poetry all words rhyme with love”.
Tony Neal

Prayer: Father, may the HOPE that is ours freely overflow into the lives of all we touch this and every day. May our lives be stanzas in your poem of love. Amen.

*"Music's only purpose should be
the glory of God
and the recreation
of the human spirit"*



*Soli Deo Gloria
"To God Alone Be Glory"*

