

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.”

With these words Mary responds
to blessings bestowed upon her by her cousin Elizabeth.

They have been put to music in countless tunes and hymns
and sung for ages by generations of the faithful.

Many biblical scholars
feel that there is a strong possibility that Luke didn't write this song,
that he in fact worked this previously written canticle
into his birth narrative during the writing of the gospel.

If your church experience,
like most of us,
is limited to the Eucharist on Sunday mornings,
you probably get a chance to hear this canticle only about once a year.

Back when the Episcopal Church did morning prayer more often,
even on Sunday mornings
there was a greater chance of hearing this Song of Mary,
also known as the *Magnificat*.

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away,
when I was at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary
I had the great joy of attending evensong three times a week.
Since there are only two options for a canticle following the daily lesson,
the *Nunc dimittis* or the *Magnificat*,

I would sing these words at the very least once a week.

If you repeat something often enough,

you will remember the words.
If you sing anything that often,
it works its way into your soul.
What is it about songs that catch us.
Even if we can't sing
there is something about a catchy tune
that makes it easy to remember.
Almost since the beginning of time
we have used song as a way to organize us,
to help us remember things.
Important lessons are made into songs
to make them easier for us to remember.
Because of this,
music has a way of surrounding all that is important to us.
As I recite the words of the Rite I liturgy every Sunday morning,
the rich melodies of Healey Willan echo in my head
even after decades of absence.
Though I did not ask for it,
singing the Willan setting at Advent this year here at St. Christopher's
has been a wonderful holiday gift to me.
One cannot think of Christmas without a flood of songs and music coming to mind.
The *Magnificat* is perhaps the first Advent/Christmas carol,
and yet I don't recall ever hearing it sung during this time,
at least outside of Sunday worship.
There is not one "popular" version of this canticle that I am aware of.
Perhaps it is better that way.
For me the *Magnificat* will forever be associated
with waiting upon the Lord.
As I told you earlier,

at the Seminary we would sing the *Magnificat*

after the Scripture reading during evensong.

But between the reading and the singing there was silence.

To be precise, three minutes of silence.

If you have ever sat in enforced silence for three minutes,

you know it often seems a lot longer.

This silence was supposed to be a time for us

to reflect upon the readings we had just heard.

I remember in the beginning of my seminary career,

I would run out of things to reflect on pretty quickly

and become restless.

By graduation I was yearning for five minutes more.

Silence is an acquired taste.

It is the shadow side of music.

It is a place to wait upon the Lord,

and so it is hard work.

If you have not yet been to a Taize service,

I invite you to take advantage of it

as a place to become acquainted with the power of silence and music

working together to guide your soul.

As we, like Mary, await the coming of Christ,

I offer you both this morning.

A little Silence.

And a little Music.

First, remember the words of the Gospel.

“In those days Mary set out and went with haste

to a Judean town in the hill country,

where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.
And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry,
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?
...And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment
of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

(3 minutes of Silence)

Sing the Magnificat S-242

Antiphon

The Al - might - y has done great things for me,
and ho - ly is his Name.

1. My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices

in God my Sav - ior; for he has looked with favor on his

low - ly ser - vant. 2. From this day all generations will

call me bless - ed: the Almighty has done great things for me,

and ho - ly is his Name. 3. He has mercy on those who fear him

in every gen - er - a - tion. 4. He has shown the strength of his arm,

he has scattered the proud in their con - ceit. 5. He has cast down

the might - y from their thrones, and has lifted up the low - ly.

6. He has filled the hun - gry with good things, and the rich he has sent a - way

emp - ty. 7. He has come to the help of his ser - vant Is - ra - el,

for he has remembered his promise of mer - cy, 8. The promise he

made to our fa - thers, to Abraham and his children for ev - er. [Ant.]

(Gloria Patri may be omitted)

9. Glo - ry to the Fa - ther, and to the Son, and to the Ho - ly Spi - rit:

10. As it was in the be - gin - ning, is now, and will be for ev - er. A - men. [Ant.]