

## O Magnify the Lord

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. (Luke 1:46-50)*

What a joyous proclamation of worship! Mary has received the startling and miraculous news that she has been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. Upon hearing the news, she was first troubled and questioning (vs.29), but then as she further reflects on the news, Mary chooses to trust and to rejoice. She believed what was happening to her was ordained of the Lord, and her response is to burst into song in exuberant worship.

As we read the song of Mary, we hear her obedient acceptance and her joy. God has noticed her, a humble servant and has blessed her beyond what she could imagine. And her soul overflowed with praise.

She *magnifies* the Lord -- from the depths of her being, her soul's desire is to make Him greater in her life. She sings a song of awe and worship to the Mighty One whose great power has been exercised in her life... *the Mighty One has done great things for me*. As a grateful recipient of those great things, she rejoices in Him (vs. 47); she ponders the wonder that God's mercy has been extended to her *personally* and to *all* from generation to generation (vs. 50); she praises God for His powerful acts on behalf of His people (vs. 51); and she acknowledges His bountiful help and provision (vs. 53-54).

We too can sing this song of worship for He has also done great things for us! And He is worthy of worship. In our "me centered" society, God is truly at the center. He calls; we answer. He reveals; we reflect His image. He shows us His wonder; we adore. When we worship the Lord, our focus shifts to Him --His greatness, His goodness, His faithfulness, His absolute sovereignty. When we understand how high and exalted He is, our heart's response is worship.

We worship not just as a Sunday-morning activity or as something we watch from the sidelines. It is our lifestyle. We enter into it with all we have, honoring Him in all that we say, do, and think. We worship not only with words, but our worship is shown to be genuine by a life that reflects and shares the great things the Mighty One has done for us.

We worship Him when we do what is right. We worship Him when we reach out as the hands of Jesus to those who are hurting. We worship Him when we respond with His kindness in a world that is unkind. In *everything* we do, we keep God in sight. We talk to Him, thank Him, give Him all we are... we worship Him. And our lives radiate the light of eternity.

We worship Him for *what* He has done. He has filled our lives with wondrous things -- the beauty of nature, the provision of all we need, and of course, the marvelous and indescribable gift of salvation. And even more, we worship Him just because of *Who* He is. Our Almighty God... the only One who is awesome in glory, in power, in holiness. How can we offer Him less than our total, soul-deep worship? As Mary did.

Did Mary's song end that day? Mary worshiped to the end (Acts 1:14). She magnified the Lord with her entire life. Let us do likewise. Continually offering to God a sacrifice of praise -- the fruit of lips that confess His name. (Hebrews 13:15) The "fruit" that grows from what has taken root within us.

Let each of us proclaim, *the Mighty One has done great things for me*, and my soul simply wants to magnify Him.



## Prayer – The Key to an Evolutionary Faith

When asked to write about my faith story, the question was what would God want me to type? After some prayer came His nudge – write about my prayer life and faith life as an evolutionary process.

Growing up, we said “memorized” dinner and bedtime prayers. They didn’t seem impactful but saying them every evening started a prayer habit. If we forgot them - something felt missing. I needed to talk to God. With confirmation, I learned the Lord’s prayer. I don’t remember any discussions about the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray, but I do know our church made it a point to reverently say the Lord’s prayer each Sunday.

With my early workdays, there was a hole in my life where church attendance used to be. At some point, I realized going to church provided Christian community and a church home. During the sermons, the pastors would talk about prayer. Sometimes this led me to talking to God about my concerns – not necessarily as a conversation with Him but a hope for Him to take my cares away.

While my church life, prayer time, and faith continued to ebb and flow, I met Jim at Keesler Air Force Base. He decided we needed to attend chapel. We married and moved to England. There we fully engaged in the chapel (and a family of faith). We met a black Baptist pastor (Jim Callaway) who talked a lot about prayer as a conversation with God. Rev Callaway vibrated with the Holy Spirit when preaching and praying and he brought both of us much closer to God. Jim and I had other military moves and new churches which more deeply connected us to families of faith who deeply believed in the power of prayer and encouraged us to pray. With the more frequent prayer, came deeper faith and deeper reliance on God.



At our last assignment/church, one of our church families experienced a scary birth of their first child who coded during her delivery. A call went out to the congregation to pray. As I walked through the halls of the Pentagon the next day, I felt profound, palpable prayer for Katherine and her parents. It was an astonishing experience. Katherine survived and (while she is autistic) is flourishing. With this, my prayer life took off and my faith exponentially deepened. I also realized a need to dig deeper into God's direction for us on prayer. Fortunately, our pastor had begun teaching the deacons and Stephen Ministers more about prayer. The more I learned and prayed, the closer to God my life became.

Since moving to Memorial Park, the prayer/faith trend has continued. Pastor Kevin encourages the deacons to pray. Our Bible study group has prayer requests each time we meet, and I know I can count on them to cover me and my family in our joys and concerns. The choir prays at each rehearsal. The results have been miraculous:

- Joy over a new job that I loved after I was fired from my first Pittsburgh job with a huge balloon payment due on our mortgage on top of a new commitment to The Seventh Trumpet Campaign.

I had become arrogant and was ignoring my need for Him. He put me on my knees to remind me to turn everything over to him.

- A mostly painless full knee replacement. Many people prayed over my recovery which had minimal pain in spite of coming off the pain killers before I was supposed to.
- Prayers over our daughter-in-law, son, and grandson as she experienced pre-eclampsia, an early delivery, and needed blood transfusions. Today Anika and Louis are fine.

It's been amazing to know God wants us to talk to Him, that He will answer us, and He has a plan for us that will prosper us. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!!!

--Deb Gallo

## 2nd Thursday



No 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday lunch in January...

But we hope to see you on Thursday, February 9 for a special Valentine meal of hot roast beef sandwiches, coleslaw, and dessert. Then we will enjoy the Valentine Variety Show presented by Vaughn Hudspath. Prepaid registration of \$10 for this luncheon is due by Friday, February 3.

For all of the luncheons this season, our service project is North Hills Community Outreach. If you are able, please bring a non-perishable food item to donate to NHCO.

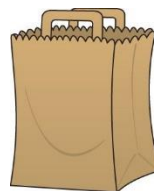
## Winter Bible Study

Come in out of the cold and into the warmth of our winter/early spring Bible study:

**Topic: Complete in Christ - A Look at the Letter to the Colossians**  
**Thursdays from February 16 thru April 6 at 10AM**  
**in the Edinburgh Room.**



## Paper or Plastic?



Remember when they used to ask us that at the grocery store? Well, I want to ask you that again. Ok... not quite “plastic.” But perhaps you would prefer to receive this newsletter via email rather than on paper through the mail.

If so, please send your email address to [dcuffman@mpcepc.org](mailto:dcuffman@mpcepc.org) and we will place you on the email distribution list.

## Canceled Stamps for Ministry



Just a reminder that MPC collects cancelled stamps. The stamps are sent to the Alliance Stamp Ministry where they are used to raise funds to support the spread of the Gospel in Spanish by radio and by printed material. So, as you receive Christmas cards, don't toss the envelope until you have cut off the cancelled stamp – please leave at least ¼-inch border around the stamp if possible. Please drop off your stamps in the basket in the Connection Corner or with Dee in the church office.

## Great Hymns of the Church

### O Little Town of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks / Lewis Redner

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie;  
above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years  
are met in thee tonight.*

*For Christ is born of Mary  
and gathered all above  
While mortals sleep the angels keep  
their watch of wondering love  
Oh morning stars together,  
proclaim thy holy birth.  
And praises sing to God the king,  
and peace to men on earth.*

*How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him, still  
the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray,  
cast out our sin and enter in,  
be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Immanuel!*

Phillips Brooks was the minister of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. This giant of a man, who stood 6-feet 8 inches, had a big heart that endeared him to old and young alike, but he had a special affinity for children. He kept toys in his office and it was a familiar sight to see

the beloved bishop sitting on the floor playing a game with children.

In 1865, Brooks went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On Christmas Eve he rode on horseback from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Near nightfall he was in the field where, according to tradition, the shepherds heard the angelic announcement. That evening he attended the Christmas Eve service at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, close to the spot where Jesus was born.

He described it as “the whole church ringing hour after hour with the splendid hymns of praise to God... telling each other of the wonderful night of the Savior’s birth.” The service lasted from 10 PM to 3 AM!

The beauty and simplicity of that visit stayed with Phillips Brooks when he returned to America. Two years later, when he wanted a new song for the children at his church, he reached back in memory for inspiration from his Holy Land visit. The poem he wrote painted in words the sights and sounds of that little town of Bethlehem.

Brooks asked the church organist, Lewis Redner, to compose a melody for the poem for the children to sing on Christmas Eve. Mr. Redner sat down at the piano to compose just the right tune to carry the descriptive words. But nothing he wrote seemed to fit. On the night before the Christmas Eve service, he felt defeated, so he went to bed. During his fretful sleep it seemed that he heard music. Immediately, he got up and wrote down the melody just as we sing it today. When he joyfully presented it to Rev. Brooks he said: "I think it was a gift from heaven that a little angel whispered in my ears." The children sounded like a choir of angels as they sang the new carol written just for them. “O Little of Bethlehem” quickly became a favorite after it was published in 1874. We are still singing it almost 150 years later.

Brooks died unexpectedly in 1893 at the age of 58. It was a child who put his death in a beautiful light. When told by her mother that Bishop Brooks had gone to heaven, she simply said, "Oh Mama, how happy the angels will be."

Within the poignancy and beauty of the text of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is one of God's promises from the prophet Micah: "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the little towns of Judah, but from you I will bring a ruler for Israel..." (Micah 5:2, GNB).



# Puzzle Page



Find the kinds of cookies below hidden in the puzzle.  
The letters that are left spell out a message for you!

P	O	P	E	C	A	N	T	A	S	S	I	E	S
I	A	M	B	R	O	W	N	I	E	S	A	E	T
H	T	A	Y	E	R	C	N	O	M	E	L	R	N
C	M	P	R	Y	C	H	O	R	I	D	M	S	I
E	E	P	R	S	N	O	B	N	O	B	O	P	R
T	A	L	E	T	M	A	S	O	U	U	N	E	P
A	L	E	B	S	H	U	D	T	A	T	D	A	B
L	R	C	N	P	G	R	T	P	R	T	J	N	M
O	A	H	A	A	E	E	Y	U	N	E	O	U	U
C	I	I	R	K	R	E	F	W	Y	R	Y	T	H
O	S	P	C	B	E	F	G	S	A	F	R	B	T
H	I	I	A	U	L	F	B	I	R	I	O	U	M
C	N	L	M	E	T	O	P	C	N	N	S	T	E
S	L	N	S	I	G	O	O	R	M	G	I	T	N
S	I	N	I	K	P	M	U	P	S	E	E	E	T
R	Y	F	U	N	F	E	T	T	I	R	X	R	X

ALMOND JOY

APPLECHIP

BONBONS

BROWNIES

BUTTER BALLS

BUTTERFINGER

CHOCOLATE CHIP

COCONUT

CRANBERRY

CUTOUT

FUNFETTI

GINGER

GOBS

LEMON

OATMEAL RAISIN

PEANUT BUTTER

PECAN TASSIES

PUMPKIN

SNICKERDOODLES

SUGAR

THUMBPRINTS

TRUFFLES



Merry Christmas

