

**What Does My Soul Magnify?**  
**Sermon given by Deacon Colleen Spaeth, December 21, 2003**  
**Grace Church in Haddonfield**

Let us pray: Oh Lord, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts we form. Speak, Lord, we, your servants are listening.  
Amen.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

These familiar words from Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*, are true today, don't you think? I wonder, could it be they were also true in the days of Mary and Joseph?

It was and is, the best of times. And it was and is the worst of times.

Today we celebrate, we remember on this fourth Sunday in Advent, we light the fourth candle, now we have love to add to hope, peace and joy, and there is much to celebrate this day, just as it is a truth that there is something to celebrate every day, in spite of how bad the times may seem, or how worse we envision that the times have become.

The Christmas message is that God is HERE, among us, with us – Emmanuel, and all the grinchers in the world cannot steal that away. No matter how negative feelings and events may try to snatch it from our grip and rob us of the hope and peace and love and joy that God intends for us, that nothing can take from us all that is good and true and pure and full of love.

Call me old fashioned, call me corny, but God is a four letter word, and that is L – O – V – E

In fact maybe we can say that Jesus was born in a world like ours today, maybe even a worse world. Tyranny ruled everywhere, poverty and hunger and suffering were the norm for many.

And what did foolish Mary, mother of Jesus have to say? She sang for JOY to God for giving her a special gift. A strange gift of a dream, a vision, a pregnancy that ordinarily would be rejected by a prospective suitor, her betrothed Joseph.

It was a time that was going to get worse – and what do we hear this pregnant teenager say? “My soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit rejoiced in God ... he has looked with great favor on the lowliness of his servant...”

What in the world was there to celebrate?

I pondered those words this week as I carried this scripture with me. I've asked myself more times than I can remember this week, what does my soul magnify? As I worried about all the gifts that still need to be bought, as I thought about not having enough money to get all these gifts, as I clung to my need to hold on to a simpler Christmas, one

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that celebrates family and God, God and family, friends, neighbors, my church family, I wondered who and what does my soul magnify???

Sometime during this time my soul magnifies stuff, unimportant stuff! It is even possible that my soul is buried, if I don't watch it, if I'm not careful.

But the fruits of the spirit, joy, peace, patience, endurance, they are God's gift to me this Christmas season. All I have to do is open up the gift, put it on like a new Christmas sweater and I have opened up my soul for this unconditionally loving God to magnify my soul. It is God who magnified Mary that day two thousand plus years ago, and that same God wants to give me the gift of Life and Light, he wants to give you that gift. The question is will we let him, will we receive it?

What is there to celebrate?

People we love get sick and die – I am sure as you surround yourself with those you love, you, like me, will remember the ones missing, that's permanent hole in our heart, isn't it?

Our jobs and our security are continually threatened, our children's' futures are uncertain, and our men and women in the armed services are far away from their families protecting freedoms we take for granted, while we get up from the table stuff with wonderful food, there are millions still starving.

Yes, it was then, and it is now, the worse of times.

But my sisters and brothers, it was then, and it is now the best of times.

Why and how so? Because the Spirit that grabbed a hold of Mary and conceived in her a baby is here today.

And just as the Spirit working in Mary produced life and light to the world in the person of Jesus, so it still brings forth life and light to the world through its working in us and in those around us.

That is a light and life that cannot be taken away no matter how bad the times are. In fact, I dare say that light and that life often are seen as stronger the worse our world seems.

The Grinch who ran away with Christmas in the Dr. Seuss story by taking away from all the people his decorations, or their trees, all their presents, all their food, all the Stuff they liked so much, and yet Christmas lived in the hearts, Christmas flourished in spite of the Grinch.

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And just as it was so in Who Town, and just as it was so with Mary and Joseph and Elizabeth and Zechariah, so it is so in this place, Grace Church, in this town, Haddonfield.

We all know there will always be Grinches who will want to take Christmas away from us, there will always be people who chose to look at the bad things, the negative instead of the good things, but we must always remember that good things exist not in isolation, but right in the middle of it all, that good things can and must work along side the darkness, right smack in the middle of the bad things.

And there are good things right here to see.  
There are celebrations to be had.

Take a look at our very hard working director of religious education – Gretchen. She works so hard to open up opportunities for our kids to know their God, and to understand that God loves them, just as they are. This is a good thing, a good person, and one that should be celebrated. We have volunteer teachers who spend valuable time with our children teaching Sunday school. This is a good thing, and should be celebrated.

Take a look at our choir / music man Bill Lowden. Week after week he works to open our ears to God's presence in music. This is a good thing, a good person, and one that should be celebrated.

Take a look at the choir, small in numbers, but dedicated to serving God with their voices. This is a good thing, one that should be celebrated.

Take a look at our flower guild, a small number of volunteers that quietly bless the altar each week with beautiful arrangements. Our altar guild, a group that provides clean linens and silver on our altar each day.  
More occasion to celebrate.

Our cheerful office staff in Sue and Kate, our faithful Michael, servants of the Lord to be sure.

There are countless people here at Grace who work tirelessly in all kinds of way – that is something to celebrate!

And I would be remiss if I forgot Fr. Pat. You know, anyone else that lost their mom during the holidays, no one would begrudge them some quiet time, some time for mourning and grief, it would be understandable. But that can not be the case here, Fr. Pat serves this church family as a faithful father who knows he has a job to do, despite his personal emotions, he is there for us, and he is to be celebrated.

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So where is Christmas to be found? Christmas is found wherever there is caring and sharing, and nothing and nobody can steal that away from us, even when, and if, we live in the worse of times.

God has chosen to dwell here among us, his people, and a baby was born in Bethlehem, born to be a servant to many, rather than a King.

He spent his time with ordinary people, he healed and helped those that others ignored – and then he died. But his Spirit is not dead, love, hope, joy and peace, that is what makes Christmas what it is – for we believers it makes it the best of times.

The spirit of Jesus – the Spirit of Christmas is alive this year.

And so this Christmas what if we are called to ponder just a bit – consider how our own souls magnify the Lord?

It may not be an easy thing to ponder, we may have to go to that quiet small spiritual place, the center of our being – the place that God wants the most – our souls. It is a special place to God.

My brothers and sisters, the Good News is that God works through us today, just like the plan for Mary, that there is a plan for each and every one of us, and by considering God's plan, following HIS purpose for our lives, we also can give birth to Jesus.

Then through you and me, as through Mary, God will bless us, and we will be able to repeat those wonderful prayers,  
Our souls will magnify the Lord and our spirits will rejoice in God our Savior.

Amen.