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## The Magnificat: A Reflection

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# THE MAGNIFICAT:

## *A Reflection*

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior...*

I distinctly remember the first time I encountered those words. I'm sure I had heard them before, but the first time they really resonated with me was in my first week with a missionary community in Haiti back in 2012. I had sensed a call to international service since high school, and at 24, I had finally responded. Our community was of one heart, sharing all things in common and living on the margins of global society. Mary's words rang so true for me - my spirit rejoiced!

And I thought - this is IT. I have it all figured out.

It should not come as a surprise to anyone that, in fact, I did NOT have it all figured out.

As I return to these words six years later, I'm not so sure Mary did, either.

If we consider the scene, Mary is just about as vulnerable as she could be. She's mysteriously pregnant with a child who, despite being the very savior in whom her spirit rejoices, is also making her life very inconvenient. We don't know exactly why she's gone to visit her aunt Elizabeth, but it's entirely possible that she's been sent away out of shame.

But instead of shame, Elizabeth greets Mary with reverence. Their encounter produces a kinship that transcends bloodlines by virtue of their shared experience as unexpected and sacred vessels of new life.

What does it mean for Mary to hear Elizabeth affirm the sacredness of her experience? I imagine it means everything, but we can see it inspire Mary's Magnificat, which I want to invite you to consider as a moment of conversion - a turning point.

Even as the Magnificat foreshadows the ways Christ will upend systems of power, it also reviews the Hebrew Bible's theology of justice - a

mashup of psalms and prophecy from women like Miriam and Hannah. Elizabeth empowers Mary - in the midst of her fear and vulnerability and uncertainty - to connect with God's message in new ways. Mary then proclaims on a new, deeper, *embodied* level of knowing the plans that God has for the world and the ways in which God has ALREADY "lifted up the lowly." We are witnessing a threshold moment for Mary.

Moments of threshold, of vulnerability and openness to new understanding, are part of the essence of the Gospel, and part of the conversion of life into which Benedictine spirituality calls us.

Back in 2012, part of why I didn't have things all figured out was that I thought I *could* have things all figured out. Mary's wisdom and prophecy are profound, but they do not represent the end of her journey into knowing God and understanding her role in the history of salvation. They are a turning point.

In an institution of higher learning, even one dedicated to theology, it can be easy to fall into the trap of certainty. The trap of holding so tightly to our own knowledge or experience that we forget to see our neighbors, and to sit with them in reverence of the workings of the Spirit. Perhaps Mary and Elizabeth's encounter can remind us of the role we each have to play in accompanying one another on this earthly pilgrimage.

