

2. Incarnational Power: The Magnificent

Objectives

- Reflect on the perspective of Mary, the young girl who became one of the most influential women in the biblical narrative at a pivotal moment in human history
- Prepare participants to engage in meaningful theological dialogue on this passage

(Estimated Session Time: 1 hour)

Session Flow and Description

Introduction - 10 minutes

- Present objectives of the session.
- Ask each participant to share one personal quality Mary must have possessed to successfully carry out the mission assigned to her. Each participant should identify a different quality.

Plenary Group Presentation: Activity 2.2a - 20 minutes

- Prepare two participants before the session to do a dramatic reading. Choose a man to read the background section. Choose a woman to read the Magnificat from Luke.
- Begin with the woman outside the room as the man reads the background. When he is finished, the woman will enter the room and read (or recite, if it is memorised) the Magnificat.
- After the presentation, ask the group to share any new insights about Mary's role and character. Does the Magnificat reflect qualities to add to the list generated at the beginning of the session?

Plenary Group: Small Group Debriefing - 15 minutes

"Implications of the Magnificat" (Handout 2.2a)

- Gather input briefly from the pairs or small groups.
- Incorporate insights from the group and review essential theological themes found on Handout 2.2a

Post-Session Assignment: Becoming A Gender Equity Witness - 5 minutes

Memorise the Magnificat

Materials

Handouts and Activities

- Activity 2.2a, Dramatic Reading of Mary's Magnificat
- Handout 2.2a, Implications of the Magnificat

Facilitator Preparation

- Prepare two participants to do the dramatic reading.
- Make copies of Activity 2.2a and Handout

2.2a for participants.

- If available, review theological commentaries on this text.
- If time permits, memorise the Magnificat.
- Prepare copies of discussion questions and assignments for small group work.

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Plenary Group Presentation: Activity 2.2a

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- Begin with the woman outside the room as the man reads the background. When he is finished, the woman will enter the room and read (or recite, if it is memorised) the Magnificat.
- After the presentation, ask the group to share any new insights about Mary's role and character. Does the Magnificat reflect qualities to add to the list generated at the beginning of the session?

15 minutes

Small Groups or Pairs

"The Magnificat and Gender" Discussion Questions

- How does the Magnificat speak to God's order and point of view on gender dynamics? On social structure?

Incarnational Power: The Magnificat

Dramatic Reading of Mary's Magnificat

Background

Mary and Joseph lived during a time when girls were engaged to be married as early as 12 years old, so Mary most likely was in her early teens. Both she and Joseph were in for big trouble, as their cultural and religious traditions observed Deuteronomy 22:23-24(a) and the law regarded an engaged girl who was pregnant to be promiscuous: "If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death."

In light of this, Mary's faith in God is indeed dramatic as she accepts the responsibility of being the mother of the Messiah. Joseph also demonstrated great faith in accepting the risk of this extraordinary situation, which was not of his choosing. There were gender issues! Both genders were challenged to see their lives and their realities in a new light. As you listen to this poem, keep in mind that Mary is a girl child in a male-dominated society. She is a rural girl, poor and pregnant under very "suspicious" circumstances. Keep Joseph's enlightened role in mind as well.

The Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55: 46 *And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever."*

Implications of the Magnificat

...For men's and women's equality

Both men and women can accept responsibility and take necessary risks. Men and women are on an equal level, morally (in God's eyes) if not societally (in man's eyes). The poor, the non-ruler and the hungry all have a God-given and intrinsic opportunity to live life fully. All have an equal place in the kingdom of God.

...For the equality of boys and girls

The Magnificat speaks directly to opportunities for girls, and Mary reminds us in this passage that the opportunity extended to her was to all generations. Mary was a young girl when God chose her for this role. In many societies, girls are still discriminated against. In some cases, girl children face the risk of being aborted before they are born. In many cultures, girl children are often considered a burden while boy children are considered a blessing.

...God's order - Mary's witness in the Magnificat

God shows a special concern for those who are humble, discriminated against and poor. He desires mercy and will magnify and uplift the humble. In places where men are the rulers and women are treated unjustly, God wants to change this order. By choosing Mary, God demonstrated the value and dignity of a poor peasant girl.

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