

**Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – August 15, 2019
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Perhaps like some of you, I have found that reading small print has become increasingly difficult. My eyes are no longer perfect. So I have resorted to reading glasses – the inexpensive magnifiers that you get from the dollar store. They work fine – except, of course, that they come in various strengths – 1.25 or 1.5 or 2.0, and so sometimes the print seems to be extra giant size and at other times, the print gets only marginally larger. The same can be said for a magnifying glass – you have to find that sweet spot – the place where the glass helps you to see perfectly without making things seem completely out of proportion.

In today's familiar gospel passage, we hear Mary say, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." At least that's the present English translation. I won't bother trying to pronounce the original Greek text of St. Luke's gospel – I couldn't do it even if I wanted to. But in the Vulgate, the Latin text produced by St. Jerome way back in the 300s, Mary's words are "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum.*" To this day, the prayer is often referred to simply as the "Magnificat," and a popular monthly prayer book has taken that word as its title. In former days, *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* used to be translated into English more literally: My soul magnifies the Lord. Now, the current translation – my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord – might be easier to understand, might add a bit to our way of thinking, but it cannot match the more ancient version in poetry, in imagery, in imagination. We hear the word magnify and we think of those simple reading glasses, of a scientific microscope, of the Hubbel telescope, of a magnifying glass that might be used by Sherlock Holmes. It intrigues us to think about: My soul magnifies the Lord. What exactly does that mean? How can a soul magnify the Lord?

Well, reflect for a minute on the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Here was a simple teenage girl – faithful in her practice of Judaism, born to saintly parents, Anne and Joachim. To the casual observer, this girl was not remarkable. She was not rich or famous. Her family had no political power or social standing. Mary seemed to be just a girl, like all of the other girls in Nazareth. Yet this humble, simple girl became the Lord God's obedient handmaid, the faithful servant of the almighty Father. When the world lay in darkness and sin, she allowed the eternal Son of God to take flesh within her. Through the soul of Mary, the immense power of the Lord God was focused in one unique divine person – with a divine nature and a human nature – focused on Jesus Christ. All of salvation history – all

of human history from the fall of Adam – came into focus at the incarnation. The love of God, the Spirit of the living God, overshadowed the lowly virgin of Nazareth, and through her was magnified to the world in the Incarnate Word of God. Prior to the incarnation, God was largely hidden, seen only in signs and wonders, in the story of his people. With the incarnation – with the unselfish “yes” of the Virgin Mary – God became visible in the flesh. Mary’s soul did indeed magnify the Lord – she brought to light the Light of the World.

In celebrating today’s feast, in celebrating Mary’s assumption – body and soul – into heaven, we rejoice that she has received what we are promised. Her entire being – body and soul – now dwells in eternal happiness with the Father, with her Son, and with the Holy Spirit. We too are promised that eternal reward. Each Sunday, we profess our belief in the resurrection of the body – not just the bodies of Jesus and Mary – but your body and mine. In our second reading, St. Paul tells us that Christ is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep – not the *only* fruits, just the *first* fruits. One day, our faith tells us, we too will dwell – body and soul – in the loving embrace of our Triune God. So how do we get there? In the same way Mary did. True, we were not preserved from the stain of original sin from the first moment of our existence as she was, but even in our small way – our souls can magnify the Lord. When people encounter us – in the home, in the workplace, in school, in our parish – when people encounter us, do they see the Lord more clearly? Do our words and actions make Christ more visible? Are we simple reading glasses, or a powerful telescope that others can use to see the Lord? Sometimes, perhaps, but too often we can be an obstacle to a vision of Christ. We are not reading glasses or microscopes – instead we can be cloud cover or blindfolds. When others encounter us – we hope that they see Christ more clearly, but all too often they only see us – our needs and wants and desires. Too often, we only magnify ourselves. That’s not what Mary did. That’s not what a true disciple does. Our job is to make Christ more visible – St. Paul says that we should decrease while Christ increases. But our society teaches us to do the opposite, to assert ourselves, to claim our fifteen minutes of fame and – by all means – to keep our religious beliefs to ourselves. Religion is a private matter, we are told. Yet faith is never private. If we believe in salvation through Jesus Christ, then that belief will color our every thought, our every action. If we say with Mary, *magnificat anima mea Dominum*; if, like Mary, our souls are truly magnifying the Lord – then his loving presence will be evident to all whom we encounter.