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I recall when I was a child, I had a magnifying glass. I was fascinated that I could look through the glass and see things close up. I could see the legs on an ant, the veins in leaves, and my fingerprints close up. When I was about 10 years old, I received my first telescope, and its lens would help me see the craters on the moon. Through the use of glass shaped and polished in a certain way, the world came more into focus as the glass magnified objects to help me see more clearly.

Even though no one was using a magnifying glass in the opening chapter from the Gospel of Luke, the main characters were able to see more clearly. The story focuses on two women, cousins who both had mysterious pregnancies.

When Elizabeth learned that she was pregnant, she remained alone for five months, possibly hesitant to be out in public since she was supposedly not able to have children and was quite old. Mary's pregnancy was also surrounded by mystery, for she had not yet had a sexual encounter with her fiancé, Joseph. It may seem a bit odd that these two women take center stage in the opening

chapter of Luke's Gospel, for the narrator begins the story with two women who had questionable pregnancies in a day when women did not have public roles and pregnancy was considered a private matter.

When Elizabeth discovered she was expecting a baby, she proclaimed, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he *looked favorably* on me," as though God's view had been magnified to see her in a special way. When she made her first appearance after five months of seclusion, it's as though *her* view of Mary had been magnified as she greeted Mary saying, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Somehow, she was able to see more clearly, recognizing Mary's baby as someone special. This meeting was so momentous, that the baby within Elizabeth jumped for joy within her womb.

Mary proclaimed, "My soul *magnifies* the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." The Greek word **μεγαλύνω** [meg·al·oo·no] can mean

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to magnify, enlarge, to esteem greatly, or to celebrate.

On the one hand, Mary's soul magnified and celebrated God's presence, and yet, on the other hand, God's vision also seems to have been magnified while looking with favor upon Mary. Although she considered herself a lowly servant, God saw her more clearly, for God's vision was magnified to see Mary as blessed.

Did you notice how Mary's poetic words celebrated how God views the world? Mary praised God's mercy and how God had lifted up the lowly and filled the hungry with good things to eat. It's as though God's vision had been magnified to see the hurting places in the world, and through the coming birth of Mary's child, God's vision would improve, for God would enter the world through the birth of a baby in a manger, giving God a room with quite a view.

God would see through the eyes of Jesus, seeing the straw and cow dung all over the floor of the barn. God would smell through the nose of a baby, smelling the shepherds who had just come out of

the fields of sheep. God would hear through the ears of Jesus the songs of angels heralding this marvelous event. God would feel through the baby the loving embrace of his mother. Later when this child grew to an adult, God would taste through the lips of Jesus the bread and wine of the last meal with his disciples.

From God's entrance into a humble stable through the birth of Jesus, God could sense and see a lot! What a room with a view!

But can we trust that this view is real? How do we know that God continues to look through the eyes of Jesus, seeing the pains of the world and yet, also seeing the wondrousness of our lives?

Knowing what was real was a dilemma that two young boys struggled to discern. Listen as the older brother described what happened:

When I was 6 years old, my brother who was two years younger than me ... ventured out with 10 dollars in Monopoly money in hand, walked one block down the back alley and up half a block to the corner store. There he got a Popsicle out of the freezer, plopped down his Monopoly money and left.

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Now his older brother, that's me, met him and inquired: "Where did you get the Popsicle?"

He said: "I bought it at the store."

"Where did you get the money?"

He dug into his pocket and showed me another crumpled up Monopoly bill.

"But you can't use that money. It's not real," I sputtered.

"Oh!" he said with a quizzical look. Then, taking another lick of the Popsicle, he said, "this is real."

Years later ... [I] wondered what really happened. Did the storekeeper just break into a fit of laughter and let this little 4-year-old walk out with his Popsicle? Did the storekeeper start after him and a sympathetic bystander, not wanting to see the child embarrassed, paid for it? What really happened?

Now, over 40 years later, we don't know — we can't find out — but my brother still remembers that the Popsicle was good, it was real.¹

Maybe that storekeeper had a better view of the situation, seeing the event through the eyes of

compassion, wanting to encourage that young child's independence.

Just as the older brother may not know all the details about what happened on the day his little brother bought a popsicle, sometimes we don't know all the details of what happened on that first Christmas. We may have lots of lingering questions as we draw closer to Christmas Day. We weren't there to see the birth, the visit of the shepherds, or the star in the sky. One thing's for sure, though— God had a room with a view, and from that event, God sees us even better, as though Jesus became a magnifier, sharpening God's sight of humanity, and helping God love us even more. What a wonderful gift for Christmas Day, even better than my first telescope. The lens in that scope helped me see the moon more clearly, but Jesus magnifies our sight to see God's love even better [something to celebrate on this 50th anniversary of seeing God's blessings here in the building].

¹ David Martyn, on the *Ecunet* computer bulletin board, 2001.