

Electronic tablets are quite common these days, allowing us to check email, watch a movie, or even read a book. When digital books first appeared for tablets, I resisted the idea of reading them, for I love the smell and feel of a new book. My library has rows and rows of books, some read thoroughly, others with bookmarks indicating partially read books, and others not yet started.

Sometimes a book I purchased years ago will seem to suddenly call me, inviting me to open whatever adventures lies inside. Turning the pages from one chapter to another offers the feeling of a journey, taking me from one destination to another. I wasn't convinced that e-books would offer the same sensation, but I discovered they could do several things a print book could not do. I found that I could read in the dark, for the backlit screen illuminates the type. While traveling, I could have multiple e-books without carrying an assortment of printed books. I also discovered I no longer needed glasses to read, for I could magnify the text to whatever size I needed. The magnified words brought the electronic

text to life, offering me the ability to have numerous books to read anywhere, regardless of lighting conditions. I was hooked on magnified words.

When Mary met her cousin Elizabeth, she sang a song about her soul magnifying the Lord, but she wasn't using an e-book to magnify a printed resource. Instead, she echoed an ancient text from Hannah, another pregnant woman in scripture from the book of 1 Samuel. In this story, when Hannah discovered she was expecting a child, she broke out into praise of God: "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exulted in the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:1a).

Many centuries later, when Mary discovered she was expecting a child, she met with her cousin, Elizabeth, who was also expecting a child, and Mary broke out in similar song: "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" (Luke 1:46b-48a).

If one compares the two women and their songs, we discover some similarities and differences in their

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lives and their words, which were separated by centuries:

- Hannah was married and desperate to have a child, but although Mary was engaged, she was not yet married and was certainly not wanting a baby at that point in her life.
- Hannah was very old, with gossip about her inability to have a child due to her barrenness, but Mary was a young teenager surrounded by scandalous gossip about getting pregnant before her wedding.
- Both women broke out in song about God caring for the poor and those who are hungry.

Just as one can jump today from links in one e-book to another, these women were linked through their praise of God. Hannah's heart exulted God, and Mary's soul magnified God. Even though their lives were filled with conflict and chaos, they were linked together in God's love. Their lives resulted in a magnification, a focus of God's presence in their lives. They remind us how God moves in ways we may not always recognize. When we don't know what is

happening, these women remind us that God is in the midst of drastically different times and places, moving during scandal and uncertainty, loving those whose lives are surrounded by gossip and scorn.

How often do we sometimes limit our view of God, however, thinking that God only moves in certain religious ways or in the lives of those with certain beliefs or behaviors? I often sense that God moves in surprising and unexpected ways.

Spiritual writer Richard Rohr suggests in his book *The Universal Christ*:

God did not just start talking to us with the Bible or the church or the prophets. Do we really think that God had nothing at all to say for 13.7 billion years, and started speaking only in the latest nanosecond of geological time? Did all history prior to our sacred texts provide no basis for truth or authority? Of course not. The radiance of the Divine Presence has been glowing and expanding since the beginning of time, before there were any human eyes to see or know about it.

Rohr suggests that we can sense God beyond our traditional ways, looking to even creation itself:

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Creation—be it planets, plants, or pandas—was not just a warm-up act for the human story or the Bible. The natural world is its own good and sufficient story, if we can only learn to see it with humility and love.¹

By looking with humility and love, we can see God more clearly, magnifying our view of God. Maybe that's what Mary was suggesting as she sang about her soul magnifying God. Mary praised God for scattering those who are arrogant, bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. The words echo Hannah who also celebrated that God makes the poor rich and raises the poor from the ashes and feeds the hungry.

1500 years after Mary spoke her magnifying words, mystic St. John of the Cross wrote an Advent poem, suggesting that we view our lives from Mary's perspective:

If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the Holy and say,

"I need shelter for the night.
Please take me inside your heart, my time is so close."
Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the [magnificent] intimacy,
the divine, the Christ, taking birth forever,
as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God, each of us.

His poem magnifies our role in the birth of Jesus, suggesting that not only Mary's life magnified what God is doing, but each of our lives magnifies God's presence in the world.

Through your words, God is magnified.

Through your acts of kindness, God is magnified.

Through your listening ears, God is magnified.

Through your love, God's love is magnified.

During this Advent season, may your soul magnify the Lord, helping focus the light of God's love as we wait for the birth of Jesus.

¹ Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ* (p. 58). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.