

“The Prince and the Pauper.” It's a favorite of many among Mark Twain's classic stories. Such that's it's been made into multiple movies. Even a couple of kids movies, featuring the likes of Mickey Mouse, Garfield, and Barbie.

The story is simple and timeless. A prince dreams of living life as a commoner. A pauper dreams of living life as royalty. The two meet, discover that they have more than a passing resemblance, and decide to switch places. Experiencing life from a whole new perspective.

It's something we've all probably considered at one time or another. What would it be like to live as one of the rich and powerful 'princes' of this world? What would it be like to live without worrying about money? What would it be like to live with every privilege and luxury we can imagine?

And at first glance, that seems to be the theme of our Gospel lesson for this evening. This passage is known as the Magnificat. The Song of Mary, sung after the annunciation of Christ's birth. After she ran to visit her cousin Elizabeth. After John the Baptist leapt in his elderly mother's womb, confirming to Mary all that the angel had spoken to her.

It's called the “Magnificat” because of the old church tradition of titling songs, canticles, and liturgies based on the first word or phrase from their Latin translation. In this case, “Magnificat anima mea Dominum.” “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

But that word – Magnificat / Magnify – actually sums up the central theme of the song quite well. Mary magnifies the Lord, because the Lord has magnified her. And by magnifying her, he has also humbled the mighty.

He has looked upon the humble estate of his servant and has done great things for her. He has scattered the proud and brought down the mighty from their thrones. He has exalted the humble and filled the hungry, but the rich he has sent away empty.

It's the original prince and pauper story. Because of what God has done, princes will become paupers and paupers, people like Mary and Joseph, will become princes. And they all lived happily ever after. The end.

Or not. Because there's one glaring problem with that interpretation. Mary was not exalted from her humble estate as a result of Jesus' birth. And there were no mighty men brought down from their thrones after the nativity.

In fact, as far as 99.999% of the world was concerned, absolutely nothing changed after that night in Bethlehem. Nor did it change after Gabriel's announcement to Mary. Nor did it even change much after the crucifixion and resurrection.

The poor remained poor. The rich remained rich. Paupers stayed paupers. And princes stayed princes. So what exactly was Mary talking about?

Well, I think you probably have an idea where I'm going with this. As far as the world was concerned, nothing had changed. But as far as heaven was concerned, as far as God's people were concerned, everything had changed.

Because when Mary talks about herself being poor, she's not talking about the amount of physical wealth she possesses. She begins this song by saying that her “*spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” Mary needed a Savior.

She may have been blessed above all other women on earth. She may have been privileged to be the mother of God. She may rightly and justifiably be praised for responding to this amazing miracle by simply saying, “*I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have spoken.*”

But, in the end, she was still a sinner. And, in that, she was as poor in spirit as you or I. She was as much in need of God's blessing and mercy as the thief who hung next to her son on the cross. She was as hungry for the bread which comes down from heaven as those people Jesus preached to over 30 years later.

She needed the very Savior she was blessed to carry in her womb. And she magnified the Lord, she rejoiced in her Savior, that he had remembered someone as poor as her. And made her rich. Rich in faith. Rich in holiness. Rich in eternal life.

As Jesus would later say, *“Where you treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Mary treasured the baby the Holy Spirit had conceived inside her. Her heart was with him and with the promises of God that he carried.

And so she was exalted. Not with the treasures of earth. But with the treasures of heaven. The treasures God had promised to his servant Israel, to Abraham and all his offspring, and to every one of God's people.

A treasure he had promised all the way back to our very first mother, Eve. That her offspring would crush the serpent's head. In many ways, if Christ is our second Adam, then Mary is our second Eve. For both women were given this great and precious promise that through them, God would bring a Savior.

So paupers do become princes, in the kingdom of God. But do princes become paupers? Yes... but in two very different ways.

Princes become paupers because, in light of God's great gift of eternal life, all their wealth comes to nothing. *“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? What shall a man give in return for his soul?”* Jesus asks his disciples. What value does anything in this world have in comparison to eternal life?

In Christ, God has devalued all the money of this world to mere pieces of paper, while the treasures we have in heaven will never be eaten by moths, will never rust or decay. As Peter tells us in his first letter, your faith has become more precious than gold.

Which means that a person who has only stacks of money and piles of gold is... a pauper. The poorest person on earth. And the only thing that will rot faster than their body on the day they die is the meaningless horde of wealth that they leave behind.

So this is all true. And worth our consideration. But, from another angle, this idea of princes becoming paupers has another, even deeper meaning.

Because in the birth of Jesus Christ, a prince really did become a pauper. Not a spiritual pauper, but a physical pauper. Jesus himself became a pauper.

The Son of the most High God, the king of all creation, came down and was born in a barn. The Mighty One really did come down from his throne. The creator of all riches really was emptied of all his richness.

In order that we might see the strength of his arm. Not by doing the great and mighty deeds of a prince. But by doing the humble and merciful deeds of a pauper. Giving his life as a ransom for many. Humbling himself to the point of death, even death on a cross.

And only then, being raised up and exalted to the very name that Mary and Joseph were commanded to give him. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, rich and poor, powerful and weak. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And so Mary's soul magnified the Lord. And our souls magnify the Lord. For we have not just beheld a child in the manger. We have beheld a great and blessed exchange. The prince over all creation has become a pauper, that we might become princes.

A holy nation proclaiming the mercies of a holy God with a holy name. Magnifying and exalting the one who keeps his promises and lifts us out of our sin. And makes us royalty in his heavenly kingdom. Amen.