

From a sermon by St Bede (the “Venerable”)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour. With these words Mary first acknowledges the special gifts she has been given. She goes on to recall God’s universal favours, bestowed for ever on the human race.

Those who devote all their thoughts to the praise and service of the Lord proclaim God’s greatness. By keeping God’s commands, moreover, they show that that God’s power and greatness are their constant preoccupation. Their spirits rejoice in God their saviour and delight in the mere thought of the creator who gives them hope for eternal salvation.

All this is true of all the saints, but especially of the Mother of God. She was chosen in a unique way, and burned with spiritual love for the son she so joyously conceived. Above all other saints, she alone could truly rejoice in Jesus, her saviour, for she knew that he who was the source of eternal salvation would be born in time in her body, in one person both her own son and her Lord.

For the Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. Mary attributes nothing to her own merits. She refers all her greatness to the gift of the one whose essence is power and whose nature is greatness, for he fills with greatness and strength the small and the weak who believe in him.

She did well to add: *and holy is his name*, to warn those who heard, and indeed all who would receive his words, that they must believe and call upon his name. For they too could share in everlasting holiness and true salvation according to the words of the prophet: *and it will come to pass, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* This is the name she spoke of earlier: *and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.*

It is therefore an excellent and fruitful custom of holy Church that we should sing Mary’s hymn at Evening Prayer. By meditating upon the incarnation, our devotion is kindled, and by remembering the example of God’s Mother, we are encouraged to lead a life of virtue. This is especially fitting in the evening, when weary after the day’s work and worn out by our distractions, the time for rest is near, and our minds are ready for contemplation.