

Editor's Notes for Magnificat

The Magnificat is the Virgin Mary's hymn of praise to the Lord, often called the Song or Canticle of Mary. It is traditionally incorporated into the liturgical services of the Catholic Church (at vespers) and of the Eastern Orthodox churches (at the morning services), but the text and music based on the text is often used during the Christmas/Advent season. It is one of the eight most ancient Christian hymns and perhaps the earliest Marian hymn. The Magnificat has had numerous musical settings from the likes of Palestrina, Bach and Mozart, but Eslava's version here is completely different, and really quite spectacular with its double choir and Spanish musical nuances.

The text of the canticle is taken directly from the Gospel of Luke (1:46–55) where it is spoken by Mary upon the occasion of her visitation to her cousin Elizabeth. In the narrative, after Mary greets Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist, the latter moves within Elizabeth's womb. Elizabeth praises Mary for her faith (using words partially reflected in the Hail Mary), and Mary responds with what is now known as the Magnificat.

Working from a scan of a poorly-preserved handwritten manuscript (my cover images show a couple of the pages), this piece was extremely difficult to transcribe, but well worth the effort!

For more about Eslava and his music, see <https://hilarioneslava.org/home/home-en/>

The title "Magnificat" comes from the incipit (first line) of its Latin lyrics ("Magnificat anima mea Dominum"). An English translation follows:

My soul magnifies the Lord
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior;
Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid;
For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed;
Because He who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His name;
And His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear Him.
He has shown might with His arm,
He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and has exalted the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has given help to Israel, his servant, mindful of His mercy
Even as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.