

The spirit in which we preach

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*For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page, which includes Daniel's current Living by the Word column as well as past magazine and blog content. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.*

Like many pastors, I remember clearly the first sermon I ever preached. It was during my second semester of seminary, and I probably worked on it for 50 hours. Each detail was written and rewritten until I was confident I had produced the greatest theological document by a seminarian in quite some time. I trusted that God had given me a message to preach, and I was excited to get in the pulpit and begin.

But driving to the service that morning, I started thinking about how when we were children, my brothers and I always looked forward to the Sundays when the seminary intern was preaching. Those were the weeks we had the best chance of convincing my parents to skip worship so that we could remain at home and have fun.

As I drove , I pictured all the children in their pajamas using my preaching as the perfect opportunity to keep their parents from going to church. By the time I pulled into the parking lot I was convinced I might be the only one there. My negative attitude probably impacted the sermon that I delivered—because the spirit in which we preach is just as important as the words that we speak.

If you are preaching on the Magnificat, how will you prepare yourself to preach this glorious text of unbridled joy? I know you will work on the sermon content—but how will you prepare your heart and soul to deliver the spirit of the message? Here are a few suggestions:

- Mary's words describe a day when the powerless will be glorified. Take some time to remember when history has proven this to be true. Maybe re-read

“Letter From A Birmingham Jail” or look at pictures of the March on Washington.

- Spend the days leading up to Sunday listening to Handel’s *Messiah*, which spells out the magnificent glory of the coming reign of God. As Mary sang she was captivated by this vision, and we must be as well.
- Pray that God would consume you with a firm belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil—and of God’s love over the forces of hatred and injustice.