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The Original Songs of Christmas – Mary’s Song (Luke 1:26-56)

Today, we read of the visitation of Mary by the angel Gabriel, and Mary's faithful response, "*May it be to me as you have said.*"

Next, we read of Mary traveling to a town in the hill country of Judea to see Elizabeth and Zechariah. When Mary entered the house, the text tells us that John the Baptist began his prophetic ministry in the womb of his mother and leaped at the sound of Mary's voice. Elizabeth understood the movement as her baby's joyful recognition of Mary as the woman who would bear Israel's Messiah, therefore, in a loud voice Elizabeth praised God, as well as her young cousin, Mary, who had believed that what the Lord had said to her would be accomplished.

In response to Elizabeth's gracious words, Mary sang her song of praise as her heart overflowed with gratitude toward God. This song of praise is commonly known as the Magnificat, and the name is derived from the first word of the Latin Vulgate translation of the passage. The Latin word literally means "enlarge," and in this context it speaks of magnifying or glorifying God.

The song is saturated with Old Testament concepts and phrases, reflecting as many as twelve different Old Testament passages. Mary obviously had a deep knowledge of the Word of God, and she brought that knowledge to bear in the song she sang that day. The song of praise can be divided into four stanzas.

God Makes A Choice

"My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble estate of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is His name" (Lk. 1:46-49). From the depths of a grateful heart and true to a soul at rest in the knowledge of God's grace, Mary offers her song of praise. She glorifies God who alone is sovereign.

Mary gives deeper meaning and a higher application to words that she borrowed from Hannah's prayer in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 2:1-10), and she anticipates what God will do in the world through the Son He has promised her. Her song announced that God's saving work had not begun with the great or the powerful, but rather it began with her - a simple peasant girl. Mary saw that choice as having eternal significance for all who like herself had waited in expectation for the Messiah to appear.

The Lord chose Mary, an unmarried teenager, pledged to a carpenter from the backwater town of Nazareth in Galilee, to be the mother of the Son of God. In that choice, God would confound those who thought themselves wise, and He would make foolish what had been seen as the wisdom of the ages. From the child that Mary would bear, God would create a new people, a people chosen not because of their intellectual ability, not because of their influence in the community, not because of the family into which they were born. Rather, God would choose them simply because of His great love for them in Christ.

God Scatters The Proud

"His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts" (Lk. 1:50,51).

Mary was confident that what God had done for her, He would do for all

who love and honor Him, for all who would come in humility before Him. Mary spoke of God's faithfulness, His steadfastness, and His glorious deeds of redemption.

Mary also said that God was full of mercy and abounding in steadfast love to those who were humble of heart. But to those who were proud, who exalted themselves and showed no concern for God, He eventually put them down by the strength of His mighty arm. Mary affirmed that the Lord had scattered those who in their arrogance had determined to make a name for themselves without regard for the Lord.

It has always been that way. God scatters the proud. The Emperor Napoleon was a man of pride and a man of force. He is credited with once saying; "God is always on the side of the heavier battalions." However, a few years later, after he had lost great battles in Russia and at Waterloo, Napoleon was sent into exile, and the once proud man then observed, "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself have founded empires. Upon force we founded them, and [now] they are gone. Jesus Christ alone has founded His empire upon love, and at this hour millions... would die for Him whom they have never seen." God scatters the proud.

God Lifts the Humble

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty" (Lk 1:52,53). What God had done for Mary; she anticipates He will do for all the humble of the world. The proud may succeed for a time, but in the end, it will be those humble before God who will be lifted up.

Eric Liddell was a famous track star in Scotland in the 1920s. The movie *"Chariots of Fire"* made famous his decision not to run the first heat of the Olympic 100-meter race, which he was favored to win,

because it was held on a Sunday. In that decision he forfeited his chance to win a gold medal. Later, however, in that same Olympics, he went on to win the 400-meter race, a race in which he was not originally scheduled to compete. Many years later he wrote, "*Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan of love.*"^[ii] Eric Liddell knew from personal experience that of which he wrote. God lifts the humble.

God Keeps His Promises

"He has helped His servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as He said to our fathers" (Lk. 1:54,55). Mary's song of praise concludes with a sense of restful confidence in the promises of God. It is as if she says, "Amen." "So be it." "Make it so." The prayer is complete. Her confidence was at Peace in the fact that God was true to His promises of salvation to Abraham and his descendants, and she sensed that those promises would now find their ultimate fulfillment in the birth of the Son of God.

Conclusion/Application

Mary's song of praise. What can we take home from a sermon like this? Martin Luther once said that the greatest miracle was not that Mary conceived, but rather that she believed. Her prayer of obedient submission, "*Let it be unto me according to your word,*" anticipated that of her Son later in Gethsemane, "*Not my will, but Thine be done.*" C.S. Lewis has written, "*The whole [of God's plan] narrows and narrows, until at last it comes down to a little point, small as the point of a spear - a Jewish girl at her prayers.* The fate of the world rested on the response of a rural teenager. The result of all this was a young woman

willing to do God's will, bearing the Son of God, and writing a song of praise.

As we close, let me ask you a couple of questions. First of all, how are you cultivating humility in your heart this Christmas? The Son of God descended to the earth that first Christmas over 2,000 years ago; He humbled Himself. How will you learn humility this Christmas and express that humility to others? Secondly, are you still able to praise God this Christmas, even in the midst of difficult circumstances like a pandemic, like the case numbers rising, perhaps a job lost or love ones who have died? This fall has been full of challenges – lost jobs, the failing economy, over 275,000 deaths. Think about Mary. She wrote her song of praise when she was pregnant out of wedlock, when her betrothed was planning to put her away quietly, and when she was surely the subject of gossip and speculation in her hometown. She could have been stoned. She could have died as one so young to have a baby. She could have lost Joseph's love forever.

Yet still she could praise God. That I think is the true test of the gospel in a person's life - the ability to praise God, even when life is difficult and uncertain. Mary wrote her song of praise in the midst of a difficult situation. Can you do the same today? By God's grace we can.
