

Enjoy Christmas

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[0 : 00] At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished. And Mary said, My soul glories the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

For now all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is his name. 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 innermost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.

[1 : 06] He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abram and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months, and then returned home. Thanks very much, Ross.

Thanks. I haven't any sheets with notes, but there is a new sheet, which has got a great Christmas theme on the inside.

I wasn't very observant. I even looked at it and read it and didn't realise that it was actually in the shape of a Christmas tree. So, sorry about that. But it's very nice.

Yeah, but there are new sheets, and on the back there's a place where you can take notes. So let's look at this familiar song of Mary, often called the Magnificat.

[2 : 16] And we're going to look at that specifically this morning. But before we do, we're going to pray and ask for God's help. So let's pray right now. Our Father God, we thank you so much that we have a record of the story, the true story of the coming of Christ.

And we pray that these words that we look at, that may be familiar, maybe we've heard them sung already this Christmas, that they would penetrate deep into our lives, bringing a fresh understanding, but by the power of your Holy Spirit, that they would transform us and change us, so that we become the people that you intend us to be.

So we ask for your help in Jesus' name. Amen. Enjoy your Christmas.

Those were some of the words that I was writing in my Christmas cards to some relatives this week. It's the sort of thing that we say to our friends as we've been leaving work or we bump into somebody while we've been out shopping.

Enjoy your Christmas. Well, how are we meant to enjoy Christmas? Because for many people, Christmas is anything but joyful.

[4 : 02] Like how is the community of Newtown in the US who endured those terrible school shootings meant to enjoy Christmas? Or the families that we've heard about in recent days who are coping with the suicide of a father or a couple of daughters.

How are they meant to enjoy Christmas? You see, for many people, Christmas is anything but joyful. Perhaps you know somebody who's lost a job and it's, you know, it's financially tight and it's been a struggle.

Maybe somebody's been diagnosed with a serious illness. Where are we to find joy when life is turned upside down?

Well, Luke's account of the Christmas story is one that is filled with joy. Luke opens his gospel in chapter 1 with the announcement of two births.

The first birth concerns Elizabeth and Zachariah. We read about them in chapter 1, verse 7. They had no children because Elizabeth was barren and they were both well on in years.

[5 : 26] They were past the age of having children. But God had different ideas. Verse 13. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zachariah.

Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John. This would be John the Baptist. Verse 14. He will be a joy and a delight to you and many will rejoice because of his birth.

Now we can understand parents who get excited and who are joyful because they're going to have a child and their close friends would be joyful. But Luke tells us here in verse 14 that many will rejoice because of his birth.

Well, why would people who don't even know this family be filled with joy? Well, the answer comes in verse 16 of chapter 1.

This is telling us what John will do when he grows up. Verse 16. Many of the people of Israel will John, that's he, will bring back to the Lord their God and he will go on before the Lord.

[6 : 41] What will we do? Look at the end of verse 17. To make ready a people prepared for the Lord. John was to be an announcer.

He was to stand before the people and announce good news to tell people that God's Messiah, Jesus Christ, was coming. The long-awaited King, who has come to renew broken lives and restore this disordered world, was about to come and enter into this world.

That's why many people would rejoice. But then there was the announcement of another birth.

We read of that in verse 31 of chapter 1. Mary is told she's going to have a baby. And the angel said to her, verse 31, you will be with child and give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end.

[7 : 49] Here's the announcement that an eternal king with absolute power and supreme authority was going to bring justice and peace. And on hearing this news, Mary, who's going to have this child, goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who's also pregnant with John.

And we read of this meeting in verse 41. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Now we're told what the significance of this leap in the womb is. Look at verse 44. As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Even the unborn John, it's interpreted, was filled with joy. The kicking in his mother's womb was a kick of delight because God's eternal king, the rescuing Messiah, was about to be born into this world.

And all of this leads up to Mary's song, the Magnificat. It's a song that is bursting with joy. Let's look at verse 46.

[9 : 13] So Mary said, My soul glorifies, or my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

So Luke introduces us to this great theme of joy, and in particular, this joy with the coming of Christ. Now I think if we can get to the heart of this joy, we can, whatever we experience in life, not only enjoy Christmas, but enjoy every day of the year.

And that doesn't mean to say we'll all be jumping up and down and waving banners and all happy, happy, but a deep inner joy, even in times of hurt and struggle, that sustains us and keeps us.

That is the joy that is on offer. So we're going to look at this song together, Mary's song, and three things we're going to take from it. The first is this, the reason for joy.

The reason for joy. Mary's joy is found, look at verse 47, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

[10 : 34] So joy is not found in things, it's not found in the amount of presents we get, it's not found in people, our spouse or our relationships, it's not found in good fortune or success or how healthy I feel, no.

It's all found, look at those words, in God my Saviour. And Mary's song is telling us that this Saviour, the salvation that God has to bring to us, is not something that we have to achieve.

It's not something we have to do to be able to get. It's all something that has been done for you. Look at verse 49. She says, for the Mighty One, this is the Saviour, the Mighty One has done great things for me.

Look how the rest of the song goes. Verse 51. He, this is the Mighty One, He has performed mighty deeds with His arm.

Verse 52, He has brought down rulers. Verse 53, He has filled the hungry. 54, He has helped. It's all about what God has done for you.

[11 : 54] He has achieved something for us. And that's why Mary is filled with joy, because it's not up to her, it's all what God has done for her.

And we can have this same joy. And if we can grasp the joy that's on offer, it will change our lives forever.

Look at verse 48. He has been mindful of the humble state of His servants. From now on, here's the change, from now on, all generations will call me blessed.

Mary will be considered blessed by people, not because she's special, not because she's given birth to God's Son, but because she has received God's salvation.

The focus of her joy, verse 47, is in God my Saviour. And because of that, from now on, her life is never going to be the same again.

[13 : 05] Not because she has to get up and feed the child at night, but because God has intervened into her life with salvation. From now on, all generations will call me blessed, because I've received salvation.

her life has been changed and transformed. It's nothing less than a new beginning. And what happened to Mary can also happen to us.

We too can have this, from now on, joy in our lives. Let me give you an example of this that comes a little bit later in Luke.

Luke chapter 5, verse 8. As we think about how we can have this from now on experience. Luke chapter 5 and verse 8.

This is about 30 years later. Jesus, as an older man, has just begun his ministry. The men who would become his disciples are out fishing on the boat.

[14 : 10] They haven't caught anything. And he says to them, you know, put your nets over and they catch a whole load of fish. And then there's this encounter with Simon Peter and Jesus, verse 8.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man. He observes there's this kind of distance.

How can I relate to this person? Verse 9. For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken. And so were James and John and the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, don't be afraid. From now on, you will catch men. You see, this encounter with God's Saviour, Jesus Christ, has changed their life at a juncture, at a point in time where he will say, from now on, your life is going to be different.

You're going to catch men. You're going to bring people to God. And this is the same thing that is happening in Mary's life. If God intervenes and brings salvation, from now on, everything will be different because of the salvation, the joy that God has brought into your life.

[15 : 41] So the reason for joy, first of all, is found in God, my Saviour, who changes our life.

the joy is the joy that Mary has. The experience of joy. Because the joy that Mary has is something for us to experience every single day.

It's not just a kind of once off and that's it. This is to be experienced every day. Look at verse 50. His mercy extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation.

The word mercy means this. God's unconditional grace and compassion. That's what mercy here means.

God's unconditional grace and compassion. We see it again in verse 54. He has helped His servant Israel remembering to be merciful.

[16 : 48] This is the character of God. That He continues to pour out His grace. He continues to remember to pour out His grace and His compassion upon His people.

It overflows to His people. That's why Mary is filled with joy because she's come to experience God's grace and compassion in her life.

But what does this grace, this mercy look like in our life? Well, there's two things. First, the humble are lifted. In verse 52, the humble are lifted.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. Now, generally speaking, we think of those who are in positions of power and influence.

They get what they want when they want because they know the right people and they have the right resources. They just need to click their fingers or say this and they get what they want because of their position. Whereas those who fail and fall, they always lose out and they get overlooked.

[18 : 01] They're disregarded and they're rejected. But God completely reverses this way of thinking. God has a different way of working in our lives.

Look what it says in verse 52. He brings down the rulers from their thrones but he lifts up the humble. God takes people of a low position, meaning those who are spiritually weak and vulnerable and he lifts them up.

He forgives them. He welcomes them. And through his salvation we become children of the true king and become part of his eternal kingdom.

The low are the ones who are raised to become great in the eyes of God. And they are the ones as we read through the Bible story are given thrones on which to rule from in the new heavens and the new earth.

So God pours his grace and his mercy into people's lives to bring them up, to elevate them to becoming children of the true king.

[19 : 15] But not only are the humble lifted, second, the hungry are filled. Verse 53. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

Again, we think of those who are rich that they have everything that they want. Money isn't an object. They can go and buy their Apple iPod and Apple this and everything else. They can get everything they want.

But those who are poor, well they stay poor, they get nothing. They're ignored, they're isolated. But God again, he reverses this way of thinking.

God turns it all on its head. Verse 53, he fills the hungry, he fills them with good things but the rich are sent away empty. What does all that mean?

Well, it means those who are hungry in the sense that not so much the material wealth we're thinking here, but those who see their spiritual emptiness.

[20 : 22] And he fills them. He satisfies them with good things. He brings forgiveness into their lives. He fills their life with peace.

He pours into their life his grace and his compassion. He fills their lives with joy. Because in God our Saviour, we have everything that we need.

The perfect gift. It's never going to disappoint. We're never going to lack anything. Everything that we need is found in God our Saviour.

God's God's God's God's very own child. He fills the hungry with good things.

And this is a picture of the God who extends his mercy to us on a day-to-day basis. He pours in his grace and compassion. He reverses our status and our position in life.

[21 : 24] He fills us and he satisfies us. But before we move on, we also need to see that this salvation is what I call holistic.

And by that I mean God is concerned for the whole person. Not just the spiritual. He's concerned for the whole person and the whole world.

So God is concerned yes to reconcile broken spiritual lives. But he's come to reconcile a disordered physical world. This is part of Mary's celebration in her song.

Yes, God has come to deal with sins. He's also come to establish justice. This is Mary's joy and this can be our joy because the salvation of God is so extensive.

It's about the restoration of all things. It's about the ruthless rulers who care little for the justice and the peace of other people being pulled down.

[22 : 34] It's about the wealthy rich who care little for the poor and the hungry being sent away empty. Because God in his salvation reverses all of that disorder and he renews what is broken.

He fixes it all so the world is put right again. And one day we are going to see that in all its fullness. And this is what Mary is celebrating that one day God is going to put everything right.

And there will not be a hungry belly left. And there will not be a rich person who discounts the poor or acts with injustice.

God will do it. verse 54 he has helped his servant Israel remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Even as he said to our forefathers he's done this before and he will continue to do it. So the experience of joy comes as we know God's grace and compassion being poured into our lives.

[23 : 45] and the realisation that he is going to change this world into something glorious and beautiful. So we've got the reason for joy, the experience of joy and then the third one is simply this, the path to joy.

And it's great talking about Mary's experience and the joy that she has joy. But let's just focus this a minute more personally to ourselves.

How do we get this same joy into our own lives? How do we make it part of my day-to-day experience? Because sometimes Mary is portrayed as somebody who is above human, almost God-like status.

Well, Mary was special. She was chosen by God to bring her son, bring God's son into the world, but Mary was just like you and me.

And what Mary experienced can also be our experience. Let me show us how we can get this joy into our lives on a day-to-day basis.

[25 : 01] Look at verse 48. It's saying, God has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

Or look at verse 52. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. You see, the path to joy is humility.

It's only those who recognize their low position. It's only those who can see within themselves that they are empty, that they can be filled with joy.

And Mary was that kind of person. And so in this sense, she's a model example of how we receive joy. Now, let's face it, humility is not something any of us are very good at.

We want to be seen as self-sufficient, self-dependent. the world teaches us to manage all by ourselves. We don't need anyone and we don't need anything.

[26 : 12] In fact, if anything's broken, I can fix it. And if we are to admit that we need help or support, well, that's just a sign of weakness and frailty. But that's not how we come to God.

That's not how we find joy. In fact, pride has the opposite effect. Look at verse 51. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm, but he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

Rather than being welcomed in and filled and satisfied, the proud instead are scattered. They are brought down low and they are left empty.

The true sign of humility is to say that we have nothing to bring to God. We have nothing to offer to God. In fact, all we can bring to God is our emptiness and our weakness.

That's the only way we can come to God. And when we come in humility, God will fill us with his joy.

[27 : 27] God will be to God will be. When we were little, we had a very simple television. It was black and white, RTE1 and RTE2.

That was it. And every Christmas we would watch the same things. It was Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory and maybe in the afternoon, Oliver Twist.

Twist. And we would watch Oliver Twist all the time. And we come to that point, you know the story, little Oliver, the homeless orphan in that boarding school.

And there he comes where they get their slop of porridge or whatever it is into the bowl and they all have their fill. Well, not really because they're still hungry. And Oliver goes forward, doesn't he, with his empty bowl and everybody stops their silence as he makes his way up to the front to the boarding master and he holds out his bowl before him and he goes, please sir, can I have some more?

And then the great big bellow, more! And then the riot takes place as they go chasing after Oliver, running through the legs of all the kids and under the tables.

[28 : 43] But I want you to take that image and that picture of Oliver. That's how we're to come before God. To come with empty hands, to come before him, please sir, fill my life, fill my life.

And the difference here though is not that we get a bellowing roar more and being chased out and kicked out, but we come before a gracious, compassionate, merciful and loving father who will fill our lives with joy.

Fill our lives with joy because in God we find our saviour. We come with our emptiness, we come with our poverty, and he fills us like nothing before till our lives are overflowing with joy.

A joy that we can bring to the world in which we live. So as we think about Christmas, think about the joy that is found only in God our saviour.

How we can experience it and how we receive it every day. Come in humility with your open hands asking God to fill your life.

[30 : 24] Let's pray. Our Father God, we thank you so much.

that in you there is everything that we need. That you fill us and you satisfy us like none other. And without Christ in our lives day to day, we will always be in want.

But we thank you that when we humbly come before you, you fill us with your joy. You give us the joy of salvation, the joy of your grace and compassion every day, the blessing of a future, of a world that will be put right.

Help us as we come before you right now. We hold out our hands, our lives before you, humbly admit our emptiness and our weakness and pray that you would fill us like only you can.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing angels from the realms of glory.

[31 : 57] Come and worship, worship Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.