

Mary's song

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[0:00] Father God, thank you that now we get to turn to your word and we pray, Father, that you! Father, that you would speak to each one of us. By the power of your word we pray this morning. Amen.

Well, the Christmas number one was announced on Friday. Does anyone know what it is? Last Christmas by Wham! Last Christmas, it goes, I gave you my heart, but the very next day, you gave it away. I'm not going to sing. This year, to save me from tears, I'll give it to someone special. We love Christmas songs, don't we? They're played everywhere. I certainly love them anyway.

They're songs about, like that one, about hopes of love, about disappointments of love in the past, hopes of snow falling all around me, hopes of war and fighting to cease, hopes of times to be merry and bright. Songs that put their hope on that one time of the year, on that one day of the year, being perfect, giving us all that we want it to bring. But the reality, as I guess we know, is that the world is quite different from what we hope it would be. War isn't going to stop.

Suffering isn't going to cease. Sickness will be there. Death remains a reality. People fall in love and fall out of love. Christmas songs may bring a lot of good and a lot of cheer that we can enjoy, and I certainly have, and I'm sure some of us have been. But the reality is, life feels rather broken and quite hard, actually. But I want to say to us this morning that Christmas gives us a better song to sing. That the first Christmas gives us a better song to sing. That Christians today, we have a better song to sing. A song to sing about a God who cares. A God who sees the poor and the humble and has mercy.

Who sees the proud and the arrogant and brings them down. Christians, we have a better song to sing this Christmas. Last week, we saw the news that Mary got from the angel that she would have a miraculous birth. A birth in the most impossible circumstances. But this birth is glorious good news. It shows us that God was coming into this world. God was coming not in judgment, but to save his people from their sins.

[3:17] And Mary sees just how amazing this news of this child that she will give birth to is.

And wants to sing praise to God. And she sees not only how good this news is for her, but how good this news is for the world.

So this song, Mary's song, is going to help us to sing a better song this Christmas about God's work in the story of our world, in the story of our lives. So we see first, sing of God's glory.

Sing of God's glory. This morning as we've met together, we've sung songs that give glory to God. And we have been praying to God through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But this morning as we've done that, there will be other people in our nation, other people in our world who may have been offering up prayers to her. But Mary shows us, I think really clearly in this song, that that's not what we should do. That it's God alone who must get the praise.

[4:53] Have a look, verse 46. Mary said, My soul glorifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

Mary shows us that God's the one to get the praise and the glory for all these things. Mary is an important part of God's plan for Jesus' coming into the world.

There is no doubt about that. She has the honor and the privilege that nobody else has had of giving birth to the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

But Mary knows she is not the one to be worshipped. My soul glorifies the Lord.

My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. Mary sings of God's glory. For he is the one who has chosen to make himself small, to be like you and I, to enter into the womb of this girl, Mary.

[6:13] Now from what I can tell, to be born is quite messy. It involves blood and pain. I don't know much, but I know that.

It is amazing. It's an amazing joy. It brings new life into the world, but it's messy. And Jesus, the Son of God, has chosen to come down into our mess.

Tomorrow, we may have hopes that it's going to be perfect, that it's going to be the most wonderful day. Think about all the money we've spent. All the time we've spent wrapping presents, getting food together, all the messages that have been flying back and forth, and family WhatsApps, all the phone calls made, arranging what people want for Christmas, where we're going to be for Christmas.

We spend a long, long time trying to get ready for Christmas, trying to make it as good as we can. But if your Christmases are anything like mine, they're not as perfect as we would like them to be. Disagreements about the rules of Monopoly or some other game. Half the family wanting to watch the King's speech and the other half not wanting to watch it.

[7:41] People not being thankful as we would like them to be for our presents that we're giving them. People complaining about the turkey being overcooked or dry.

Christmas is messy, isn't it? Every year, I'm reminded of broken relationships at Christmas.

My mum's in another part of the country to where my dad is. Christmas is messy. Life is messy. Christmas is messy.

Christmas is messy. He's come and stepped into the mess of our worlds to provide us with hope and with certainty.

To come and provide us with a way back to God. The Mighty One has come down to be with us.

[9:09] And Mary knows that. And she sings of his glory. Verse 49 says this, The Mighty One has done great things for me.

Holy is his name. She knows that this God, who has spoken to her through the messenger, the angel Gabriel, is a mighty, mighty God.

He sits on his throne in heaven. He's made this whole world. Not only this whole world, but this whole universe. He's a mighty, mighty God.

But she rejoices for he has done great things for her. He has come down into this world for little me. She rejoices in that. And that's true for us. He has come down into this world for little me and little you.

[10:17] Mary's conscious. She's little her. Verse 48, For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servants.

The humble girl from a little town called Nazareth. And yet for this little Mary, God has done great things for her.

Entered into her life story and come to say to her, Of all the people in the earth, I'm choosing you to give birth to my son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of promises made hundreds of years before.

Jerome read one of them to us in Isaiah earlier. The child's come. And so we can honor Mary, not as someone to worship and pray to, but someone we see who takes God at his word, who is trusting in the Lord and glorifying him, singing of his glory.

For his great works in this world. Mary's son, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has come down to be with us in the messiness of our lives.

[11:40] Here in this broken world, the mighty God has done great things. We must sing of his glory. We must move on.

Secondly, sing of God's mercy. Mary sings of God's mercy to her. Verse 48, we see that. Let's read it again. For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servants.

God's been mindful of her, of all people. I'm in a low, humble condition. I am small, but God has shown mercy to me.

And she goes on in that verse from now on, all generations will call me blessed. We call her blessed by God, not because she's the perfect woman, but because she in her smallness has been chosen by the almighty God.

God's. So blessed by God's to give birth to God himself. And she is from a place called Nazareth.

[12:53] And it seems to be that it's a despised town. One of Jesus's disciples called Nathaniel heard of Jesus and said, can anything good

come from Nazareth?

It was a despised place, a small place, not a great reputation at all. But God has been mindful of Mary in this little town of Nazareth.

His mercy has come down. And we'd never have heard of Mary. If it wasn't for what God had done for her.

And she now knows that from now on, all generations will call me blessed as they see the work of our merciful God. And she knows as well.

Mary knows her need of this mercy. She says in verse 47, my spirit rejoices in God, my savior. She needs a savior.

[14:03] She needs a savior for her sins. And Mary knows that this mercy is not just for her. She says in verse 50, that his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.

It's not just for her. It can be even for us today. We all are like Mary in a low condition.

Compared to our mighty, mighty gods. We are small, but God chooses to have mercy on people like us.

But perhaps though you, you're here in hearing that this morning. And actually you don't feel that small. We're in Brighton.

It's quite a big place. We've got a pretty good job. But you know what? Brighton itself is pretty small. 276,000 residents roughly.

[15:08] Compare that to London with over nine and a half million people. We're tiny. Compare that with Tokyo and Japan with 37 and a half million people.

We're tiny. Brighton, we're tiny. It's little us on the south coast. We're just a dot on the map of this big world. And compare that to the greatness of our God, the mighty one, the creator of all things. We are so small. And yet God has been mindful to us. Even in Brighton and Hove in 2023, he shows mercy from one generation to another.

And Mary knows that all so well. We can praise God for the mercy he's displayed to Mary, but it can be for you too today.

It says, Mary says, his mercy is extended to those who fear him. Those who fear him. Now maybe you think of fear a bit like this, a bit like the thought of going to the dentist.

[16:25] You're so nervous. You're quaking. You're thinking you're going to cancel the appointment. You're so scared. You won't go anywhere near. Or I think you could be fearful of the dentist in another way.

I've been to the dentist a few times these last few weeks. This is one thing about dentists. You could be fearful of the dentist in another way. Yes, you're nervous.

You're nervous about going. But you also trust that this dentist has all the wisdom and the skills that are needed to look into your mouth and identify any issues and do all that's needed to keep your mouth and teeth looking well.

And I think that's more the sort of fear of God that Mary is talking about here. You'll go to the dentist and you'll lie back.

You might be shaking a bit, but you trust that he has all the skills necessary to deal with your teeth. And so you can sit back and let him do his work.

[17:31] And before God, that's the sort of fear we can have. We tremble before a mighty God, but we also trust that he has the mercy.

He's a God of mercy, a God of great love, who's come down to be with us in our mess, who has all that is needed to forgive you of your sin, to give you life forever with him.

And so we stand in awe of him and trust him, the God of great mercy, who in his kindness, if we do that, will forgive us our sins.

So if you fear him this morning, even this morning, if you've never done this before, you can say to him, thank you that you've come for little old me and little Brighton. You're glorious, you're great, you're mighty, and I've sinned against you, but you're a God of mercy.

Please forgive me. And if you come to him like that, his mercy extends to you. This mercy gives us a better, better song to sing this Christmas.

[18:54] Maybe some of us have been following the Lord Jesus for years. We need to be reminded that we can sing of his great mercy this morning.

Reminded that we are before God sinful people. Reminded that we're like Mary in a low, humble condition before our mighty God, spiritually empty.

But he has all the grace and mercy we need. So the song we get to sing this Christmas is far, far better, far more exciting than hopes for love, disappointments of love in the past.

We get to sing of love come down to us. Of mercy shown to us in our poor and humble states.

That's the song that Mary helps us to sing, a better song. Finally, we can sing of God's reversals.

[20:07] Sing of God's reversals. It really is amazing how God works in this world. Read through the Bible and you'll see it.

Mary knows that. Looking back on the past, it's a wonderful song. Singing of God's work in this world. The big, the proud, the mighty, the arrogant.

God brings them down and he raises the poor and the hungry and the humble up. He's the God of great reversals.

So many of us, I think, will love kind of rags to riches stories. One that I've been reminded of just in the last couple of weeks. I watched the Wonka film in the cinema just recently and it reminded me of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.

One of my favorite stories. You've got Charlie, a very little poor boy in a very poor family. They live in a small house.

[21:13] Charlie's father works for very little money in a toothpaste factory. Charlie's four grandparents have to sleep in the same beds. Imagine that.

And all they eat is cabbage. Every day, cabbage. They're poor. And his father gets fired from the toothpaste factory. But a few days later, Charlie finds some money on the floor.

He goes and spends it on a Wonka chocolate bar. There's these five golden tickets in them right across the world to be won. And this bar had it.

He found a golden ticket. Big prize to be won. A whole chocolate factory. And spoilers, Charlie's the winner. It's really a wonderful rags-to-riches story.

And that's what God does in this world. Verse 52. We see he lifts up the humble. Verse 53. He fills the hungry with good things.

[22:23] And the opposite to that. Verse 51. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

Thinking of the Bible story. Thinking of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. People thought they could make a name for themselves. Build this great big tower.

But God. He scatters them. He confuses all their languages. And they're scattered away. And their efforts don't work. And verse 52.

He's brought down rulers from their throne. Maybe we think of Pharaoh in Exodus. The people in Egypt. So hard-hearted. He wouldn't let the people go.

Plague after plague came. And eventually. He let them go. But then. Sort of regretted what he was doing.

[23:25] And tried chasing after them. But God made up ways through the Red Sea. Parted the waters. And Pharaoh and his army drowned under the water. God brings about great reversals.

Brings down the mighty. The proud. The arrogant. And raises up the humble. He feeds the hungry. Verse 54.

He has helped his servant Israel. Remembering to be merciful. Of all the nations of the earth that he could have chosen. He chose little small Israel.

To do his great work in this world. Blessing us. With the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 55.

Of all the people in the world. He chose Abraham. To make special promises of salvation to. Verse 55. To Abraham and his descendants.

[24:20] Just as he promised our ancestors. Jesus is the promised descendants. Of Abraham. The one who's come to bring blessing to his people.

Blessing to the world. Blessing of salvation. Jesus shows us. God indeed lifts up the humble.

And brings down the mighty. That's what the Christmas story shows us. God come down. From heaven. From the heights of heaven. Not born in a Herod's palace.

But to a girl. From a despised town called Nazareth. Born in little Bethlehem. And he grew up. And he served his people in humility. He identified with the poor. The weak. The sick. He stooped down.

[25:20] Like a servant. To wash the feet of his disciples. And he himself was raised up. Not on a throne.

But on a cross. Wearing a crown of thorns. Not of gold. Remarkable reversal.

Truly God. Truly man. But come down. To take our place on the cross. To take our sin. He had no sin.

He took our sin. And bore the punishment for it. Remarkable reversal. That God would do that for you. And he's now exalted.

To the right hands. Of God. And rightly so. For he's done great things. The mighty one has done great things.

[26:16] Humbled himself. By coming here. Into our mess. For our salvation. And he did that.

So we might have. A better song to sing. See all of us before God. We're spiritually hungry. Spiritually weak. Poor.

Sinful people. We have nothing. But in Jesus. He has. All the mercy. All the grace. That you need. To save you.

And he will raise you up. To seat you. With Jesus Christ. In the heavenly realms. Remarkable. So Christmas is indeed.

A time. For giving. A time. For getting. A time. For forgiving. And a time. For forgetting. Christmas is love.

[27:15] It's peace. A time. For hating. And fighting. To cease. Christmas time. Mistletoe. And wine. Children singing. Christian rhymes. With logs on the fire.

And gifts on the tree. It's a time. To rejoice. In the good. That we see. It sure is. But Christians. This morning. It's far. Far better than that.

We have an even better song. To sing. One to rejoice. In the God. Who has been mindful. Of our humble states. A better song. To sing.

Not just in this Christmas season. But all. Through the year. And every year. And on. Into eternity. A song. Which this humble.

Girl. Mary. Leads us in. A song. Of God's glory. A song. Of God's mercy. And a song. Of his great reversals.

[28:11] And we're. Going to respond ourselves. By singing this song. Hark. The heralds. Angels sing. And then.