

Luke 1:39–56

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[0 : 0 0] In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judea, and she entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped into her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she explained with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me that the mother of the Lord should come to me?

For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy, and blessed is she who believed that there would be fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, and he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.

[1 : 2 9] And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Oh, good morning. And here we are together on Christmas Sunday, 2013.

At this time of year, it seems, no matter where you go, whether to house parties or to Treasure Island grocery store, or State Street lined with shoppers, you're going to be hearing Christmas music.

And everybody seems to have their own personal favorites, whether it be Nat King Cole's Chestnuts, Roasting on the Open Fire, or Bing Crosby, that kind of simple clarity of I'll Be Home for Christmas, or Ella Fitzgerald's entire album, Swinging Christmas.

Everybody has the music they enjoy hearing this time of year. Today, I want to introduce you to two of my favorites, A Spiritual by Elizabeth and A Song by Mary.

The musical score for Elizabeth is put down, if you have your text open in front of you, in Luke 1, 39-45.

[3 : 1 0] I call it a spiritual because of the words that are indicated for us there in verse 41.

She was filled with the Holy Spirit when she cried out this great text. Mary's song, of course, from verses 46 to the end, called the Magnificat, for in Latin, that word is translated in our text, magnifies, and it's the first word in the Latin text.

So, a spiritual, under divine authorship, sung by Mary, I mean Elizabeth, and a song that magnifies the Lord sung by Mary.

That both soloists in our text are women, will come as no surprise to those who are avid listeners of Luke's recording.

You might call Luke the equal opportunity gospel writer. Earlier today, we sang two Christmas hymns, God rest ye merry gentlemen, and good Christian men rejoice.

[4 : 3 1] Well, here you have, in reciprocal form, the songs of the ladies rising at Advent. Luke is known for this emphasis on women in his gospel narrative, and since we are going to be in Luke for all of next year, you might as well take a good look at it this morning.

And Henry Burton commented on Luke's text this way, the beautiful gate of the Jewish temple opened into the court of women.

And then he writes, as we open the gate of the third gospel, we enter the court of women. For more than any other evangelist, Luke records their loving and varied ministries.

And so today we have that unique perspective. Christmas music. The music of two women. Interestingly, one, Elizabeth, old.

An older woman. Long, barren. Her reproach, though, now a bygone with the conception of the child within her womb.

[5 : 56] The other, Mary, young, only betrothed, not yet in a married state, and therefore her reproach, at least in the eyes of others who she did not scorn, her reproach just now begun.

Both with child. Boys, they will be separated by six months, who in the full bloom of their life will both be cut down and killed by rulers of the world.

That all is yet to come. But here is a song while they are yet in the womb. Take a look. Elizabeth's spiritual.

Verses 39 to 45. The setting comes in verses 39 to 41. Let me read it. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Evidently, Mary had taken the angels' words to her seriously. She had taken them to heart.

[7 : 21] Turn back to chapter 1 and verse 30 to 33 where the angel greeted her with these words, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and he will be called Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.

In his kingdom there will be no end. And then in verse 36, And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son.

And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. So as this announcement came about this birth that was swelling within her by divine initiative, it was confirmed that even Elizabeth in her old age was now with child.

And so off Mary went knowing that if God was at work in her, it was consistent with the divine ways of bringing an older barren woman to conceive.

[8 : 41] And so young Mary heads to Elizabeth's home, in through the door, and calls out to her.

Some of you will remember Steve Gilbert, now passed away. One of his favorite poets was Rainier Maria Rilke.

And Rilke put Mary's journey to Elizabeth in verse. It's a poem called Visitation of the Virgin.

Let me read it to you. This concerns Mary on her way to see Elizabeth. She still walked easily at first.

But in climbing, sometimes she was already aware of her wonderful body. And then she stood breathing upon the high hills of Judea.

[9 : 43] But not the land. Her abundance was spread before her. As she went, she felt one never could exceed the bigness she was feeling now.

And she craved to lay her head on the other body that was further on. And the women swayed towards one another and touched each other's dress and hair, each filled with her holy possession. Sought protection of her kinswoman. Ah! The Savior in her was still flower. though the Baptist in her cousin's womb already leapt in transports of joy.

The revelation in the text that the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy upon hearing Mary's voice is a very powerful image.

It's repeated twice in that first spiritual. miracle. The image indicates that the destiny of these two boys is joined.

[10 : 59] Not only in birth but in life. Not only in life but in purpose. Not only in purpose but with eternal intent. They are not twins by blood.

But they are nevertheless born of the same spirit. In that sense they are of the same seed. They are united in fulfilling some eternal purpose.

Imagine it. Yet in the womb the Baptist leaping for joy at the sound of Mary's voice for within her is the Savior King come.

Elizabeth recognizes what has happened to her and the text seems to indicate that her spiritual is by divine initiative.

She is filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry and here is the text of her song Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb and why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me for behold when the sound of your greeting came to my ears the baby in my womb leapt for joy.

[12 : 22] The striking thing about the early occurrences in her spiritual is how they transfer the attention away from her and even away from her child and they place it upon the younger surprising virgin and her child.

This is no small thing for the older woman was the spouse of one who served as a priest in the temple through whom God was bringing deliverance into the world and yet immediately even before he is born the babe within her and the voice of her own lips is turning attention away from that glory and that majesty and that good news and placing it upon this young young teenage girl and the baby that is within her.

Blessed are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb and how is it that the mother of my Lord has come to me?

glory. It's the song of Elizabeth at Christmas not concerned with the glories within her but the glory of what God is doing for her through the seed of Mary who has come to visit her.

I do pray that we would put our attention upon this one that is being knit together in Mary's womb.

[14 : 12] To this point the reader has almost been able to walk alongside if you're reading along in the text it's almost as if we've slipped in the door we made the journey with Mary we came in the door and we've been standing watching this exchange between the two but with verse 45 all of that changes our presence as it were has been betrayed for it seems that Elizabeth has known all along that we were there in their midst sharing this intimate exchange take a look at the change in tense in verse 45 and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord it's moved from blessed are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb this second person singular this direct discourse to this indirect third person singular not you but blessed is she

I like to envision it this way as a reader we have been watching this exchange between Elizabeth and Mary and Elizabeth exclaims in her song and then at this point she turns to us to you blessed is she who believe what the Lord has said eyes once trained on Mary now fix themselves on the reader on you a declaration is made and a Christmas directive is given blessed is she who believed now what about you young

Mary believed the pronouncement that within her womb God was completing that's the real idea there of fulfillment he was completing or bringing to an end his promise to bring his savior into the world and Mary believed it blessed is she who believed and I ask us all this morning do you believe do you believe that the child within the womb of Mary is the completion the fulfillment the end of all the promises of God for your salvation if you do then you are born from above and if you don't well you are not yet a child of God may we come around Elizabeth's spiritual and embrace it for ourselves the text moves put one piece of music away and another one now comes before you Mary's song the Magnificat as Christmas music goes this is my personal favorite about 530 this morning I was listening to Bach's Magnificat a small portion played for us today during the offertory and I would commend it to you over the next two or three days to fill your soul with these words over and over and over again Bach had the incredible ability to write music that captured the pace of Mary's heart and the glory of Mary's text and at times in the piece you can almost envision the young one walking on air in recognition of all that God has done with Christmas the young girl sings Claire Rothschild was kind enough to remind me this week that epic tales in literature often open in song Homer and the Iliad the muse is put forward with the words sing the rage of Peleus son Achilles it opens with this epic tale opens with one singing of this hero figure that will emerge in this great Trojan conflict Virgil in the Aeneid the same thing the text opens with I sing of warfare and a man of war and here we are in the text young

[19 : 48] Mary not a muse being employed by a human author but here is one who sings concerning the one who enters into the great cosmic struggle over the salvation of our souls and she introduces him to the world in song a song that is elevated so far beyond almost anything we will hear in the coming days our savior king three brief observations about her advent hymn one notice she opens singing about what god has done for her very personal verse 46 to 49 mary said my soul magnifies the lord and my spirit rejoices in god my savior for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant for behold from now on all generations will call me blessed for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name this intimate full complete personal

exclamation of what god has done for her beautiful thing to be able to say what god has done for mary notice she calls him god my savior just keep it in mind because for luke this savior theme is going to roll through the weeks of the coming year god who saves but notice what she's especially grateful for he looked on the humble estate of his servant he looked he looked god looked of all the concerns in the world of all the management of the kingdoms he looked and his eye fell upon a young virgin in an out of the way place town of nazareth god's eye not only on the sparrow she says but it's on me what a beautiful thing to consider this time of year that he looked upon her and as he looked upon her through what he's accomplished from her indeed he looks upon you he has done great things for me she says indeed he does for all who are lowly of heart and humble and condition and plead with him to hear their case and be near to him what god has done for her her song then moves to consider what god has done for all who would fear him verses 50 to 53 and i want you to notice before i read it each of those verses is penned lyrically with contrastive parallelism take a look at verse 51 first the lines concern those who are proud he has shown

strength with his arm he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts he scatters the proud and this is for all those who fear him verse 50 from generation to generation her song says to you that if you fear the lord you can be assured of this he will bring a great reversal and those who are proud and arrogant and lift themselves up he will scatter one day he will be their undoing for indeed the lowly of heart will come under his mercy look at the second one it moves from the proud to the powerful verse 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and here's the contrast as it moves he exalted those of humble estate Christmas is not for the proud it's not for the powerful it's for the humble the contrite the needy the one who requires

God to attend to their need if any need is to be met and then he moves even she moves beyond that the third contrastive parallelism moves to those who are well provided for look at verse 53 for he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty the well provided for who are secure in and of themselves in God's sight will be sent away empty but the impoverished one the hungry one will be filled with good things I think of that at a level for Mary you know when they dedicate the Lord in the temple they bring the offering that they bring is of the poorest people according to Levitical law here's a woman that didn't have much and now she's filled with with the good she's filled with well she is the mother of our

Lord and so it is for all who are hungry you'll see this even move through Luke's gospel Jesus himself will come and will begin to feed those who cannot provide for themselves I've never seen the righteous go hungry says the Old Testament God provides this is what God has done for all who fear him finally what God has done for Israel look at verses 54 and 55 he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and his offspring forever this is what he has done for me 46 to 49 this is what he has done for all who fear him 50 to 53 this is what he has done for Israel it's the fulfillment of all of his promises and look they concern what in remembrance of his mercy it's the second time mercy has been used in the magnificat earlier it is there in verse 50 and his mercy is for those who fear him the mercy of God is the message of Christmas we normally think and associate

Christmas rightly with joy but in the magnificat mercy is the message of Christmas I think of it this way in regard to our traditional Christmas greeting if I were to say to you Merry Christmas you might return Merry Christmas indeed but when I listen to this recording this song it goes like this Merry Christmas to which Mary says mercy Christmas indeed mercy Christmas is the message of mercy that God will look favorably upon us even though we have strayed from him that he will save us even though we cannot save ourselves that he will bring us to his heavenly home that he would enter in that he would look on me of all the world that he would come to you that the banner of mercy would rest on your home

[28 : 41] Christmas morning for as he is born mercy arrives and oh don't you need it don't you want it don't you long for it don't you desire it don't you desire it when you consider that you will one day stand in the presence of the living God that the ministry of the baptists will have been complete for the baptists has stood like a young child in a large family at the window calling out to all who are in the house they're coming mom and dad are in the driveway they're walking up the sidewalk they're soon to be in the door get ready all the children scattering to put life back in order well the baptist message is clear today as it was then the way for the Lord must be prepared and he will come and if you're like me you look up and go well he's going to be coming in that door before I've cleaned it all up

I need mercy the message Christmas music what song are you singing has God this season put a song in your heart we've we've seen two of them this morning blessed says Elizabeth mercy says Mary a blessed mercy the birth of my Savior King welcome to earth thou noble child our heavenly father may we not merely be bombarded with external sounds of music but may there be a song that would well up from within us that gives praise to you for the birth of your son we celebrate him with all joy and especially so as we look back at this moment in history when all the world began to change in
Jesus name we pray amen to before