

Excitement overflows

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[0 : 00] Well, we turn then to look at that passage from Luke's Gospel that we read in our passage today. The two separate threads that we've seen over the past couple of weeks come together into one as Luke recounts for us at the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, and as he shows us there, two key things.

Firstly, we see John's role at the beginning. We see him pointing to Jesus as the greater and the more significant. If there was any doubt in the two preceding stories of the announcement of John's coming birth and the announcement of Jesus' coming birth, if there was any doubt about which of those births would be more important, there cannot be any such doubt by the end of this passage. And secondly, what we have is a much fuller response from Mary than we had last week to the news that she's received. Both of the elements of this story are overflowing with joy and excitement about what is happening to these two women, about the children who are to be born, or rather especially about one of those children.

So I wonder how you celebrate your joys and your triumphs. How do you rejoice at good news? Because I'm not sure we're all that good at it here in Scotland in the 21st century.

Maybe it's just me, but I see the pictures on the television and in the papers of people in other countries who go to celebrate a political victory, who celebrate the overthrow of a tyrant, who celebrate their personal triumph in their own lives, and we see them firing their guns into the air and dancing in the streets and shouting over joy.

[1 : 40] We just don't do that, do we? The closest we come is graduates throwing their caps into the air up for a fancy photo. And frankly, that's become so ritualised, there's an expression of joy.

I don't think it's all that significant anymore. It's just what you do, isn't it? So I think maybe there's something that we can learn from these women about how we are to express true joy in our lives. Not only generally, our joy of different things that happen, but also particularly our joy about what God has done for us. So if we look at those first six verses, if we look at what Elizabeth has to say, we see her excitement overflowing as these women come and greet one another.

So Mary has hurried over to see her cousin, to see with her own eyes what the angel has taught her, to see that Elizabeth, who was unable to conceive, is now in her sixth month.

And as soon as she arrives, both of them are concerned not with the miraculous conception of John the Baptist, but with the hope of the Saviour in Mary's way.

[2 : 43] So verse 44 tells us that the very moment that Mary opens her mouth, John leaped for John. John rejoices in the presence of his Saviour. It's certainly true that babies can and do make fairly dramatic movements at times, and sometimes for no particularly discernible reason.

And I'm told that it's not uncommon for a baby to move, particularly when the mother is feeling especially strong emotions. So I guess if you were so inclined, you could argue that maybe that's what's happening here.

That Elizabeth is delighted to see her cousin, and she reads that into the movements of the fetus in her womb. But I think it's pretty clear that that isn't how Elizabeth sees it, that that isn't how Luke sees it as he narrates it.

When we put together the statement back in verse 15, for he will be great in sight of the Lord, he is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

When we put that together with the reference to the Holy Spirit filling Elizabeth in verse 41, and to her interpretation of the movements in verse 44, I think it's pretty clear that we are to see the movements of this baby as much more significant than just a coincidence or just a response to his mother's joy.

[4 : 00] John leaps in his mother's womb because he is overjoyed, because the Holy Spirit, who already indwells this baby, enables him on some level to recognise who has come to visit.

Not just the woman standing there, but the baby in her bed. And he responds in the only way, Robert. He leaps for joy. Even before Elizabeth can respond to herself, John is leaping for joy. Now very soon, Elizabeth does get that chance to respond, and what a response it is. Because Elizabeth puts into words the joy that the baby cannot be shown by jumping up and down. Verse 41 says she's filled with the Spirit, and so the words that she now says are inspired by God himself. Elizabeth speaks with prophetic authority, with divine inspiration.

So it seems to me that not only the specific words that she uses, but also the very fact that she knows there's something to be excited about. Verse 39 tells us Mary hurried there, So I think we're meant to take it that this conversation is taking place well before Mary could possibly be showing any signs of her own pregnancy.

[5 : 09] And the phrase here is so immediate, that I think Elizabeth is rejoicing, before Mary can have even told her any of what has happened to her. God has revealed to Elizabeth that Mary is pregnant, and more than that, that she is the mother of my Lord.

Verse 43. And so Elizabeth's joy overflows, and she cries out, verse 42, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

There's a possible confusion there, isn't there? A phrase like this sort of sounds like Mary and her child are of equal rank. Blessed are you, and blessed is the child.

Or evenly, Mary is more blessed, being named first. Now of course it's unlikely that Luke would intend to convey such an impression, isn't it? And it seems that what's going on here is that this is a case where a word has a greater range of meaning in one language than in another.

So the Greek word *chi*, which 99% of the time just means and, sometimes does get used in other ways. And including especially in the sort of colloquial speech, where if you were doing it properly and formally, you might use a different word.

[6 : 22] And it gets used to refer to a broader range. So it seems that here Elizabeth, in her explanation, doesn't quite get as far as thinking of the word because, but just lands on and instead.

Blessed are you among women, because blessed is the child you will bear, does seem to capture, perhaps more fully, the sense of what she intends. I'm sure if she were stopping in carefully composing the poem, she'd have spoken with it a little bit more precisely.

But only in the case, that seems to be the meaning, doesn't it? Mary is blessed because she's carrying a blessed child. So the evidence that God's favour is upon her is found in her womb. Verse 43 clarifies that Elizabeth knows Mary is not the Lord, but the mother of the Lord. We sang that psalm 110 a few minutes ago, in which David says, The Lord said to my word, Jesus is the Lord.

Jesus has authority. And so again, in this word, Mary is blessed, as the one who has believed in God's promises. And then secondly, in response to Elizabeth's excitement, Mary's own joy overflows as well.

[7 : 35] Mary's song seems to be a bit more careful than Elizabeth's exclamations, isn't it? More structured, and certainly more full of Old Testament allegiance. But it is for that reason no less joyful, no less excited, because it shows evidence of preparation.

Surely there's nothing unpausable in imagining her spending the three or four days that the journey would have taken her, churning these things over in her mind, pondering how God was at work, reflecting on how God had acted in the past, and how best she might express her wonder and her worship.

Now her song seems to have a fair bit in common, particularly with Hannah singing praise after the birth of Samuel, as Hannah dedicates Samuel to God's service. That's why we read that passage before the section from Luke a little earlier.

Mary reflects on how God has acted in the past, and she uses that to inform her thoughts now. Some of you will have noticed that before the service, there was a version of this Mary's song playing.

I thought that maybe since this big chunk of our passage is a song, that it might help us to hear it in such a form. That's Keith and Christian Getty singing that one. We could have opted for you and Sebastian Bach, but as that was half an hour long and enlightened, I didn't think it would be quite as useful for us to get a sense of what Mary has to say.

[9 : 00] Now words that form poetry or a song in one language can sometimes lose something in the translation part. We look at the psalms and the poems in the Bible, and often they're not quite as convincing as poems in English, are they?

So I thought perhaps to take something that's gone to the effort of setting it into a musical setting would help us to grasp that. But of course it is less literally accurate, so don't worry, we're going to be sticking to the text in our Bibles to look at over the next few minutes.

I know if you find yourself moved to song regularly, given how utterly deficient my sense of rhythm is, and how deficient my sense of melody is, it is remarkable to me just how often I do find myself singing away to myself, or indeed, I have to call Joanne out with boys when they're unfortunate enough to be around me because I do sing.

Don't worry, I will not inflict a demonstration upon you. I only wish though that my off-the-cuff compositions had less to do with which child I'm going to tickle next, and more to do with what God has done for me.

Because singing should be a natural part of our worship, shouldn't it? Singing and worship should be a natural part even of our day-to-day lives, not just for what we do today, together, on a Sunday.

[10 : 18] Mary's song is a natural expression of her worship, a song of the worship of God. In verse 48, Mary does say, for now on, all generations will call me blessed.

But that's not to say that she's self-important, that she's puffing herself up. We saw last week, didn't we, that being blessed, being highly favoured, these aren't comments on Mary's virtuousness, but on what God has bestowed upon her.

So Mary is aware of God's grace given to her, not saying that she's favoured because she deserves to be, but noting that God has chosen to favour her. And she sees in verse 48 that her natural state is one of humility, that she comes from a loyal position in life.

She knows by love that she is not anybody important. She's just an ordinary girl, engaged to marry an ordinary man. You see, God needs absolutely nothing from her in order to be able to do his work.

He isn't dependent on her for any part of his plan. It doesn't matter that she is a nobody because God can still work with her. And similarly, of course, God does not need our high standing.

[11 : 29] He does not need our position. He does not need us to be great ourselves. God does not need our performance to work through us. It is so easy, isn't it, to think of ourselves as not quite good enough for God?

Not good enough to be that worth in saving us, but even more than that, not good enough to think that he could ever use us to do anything. We think that we don't have the right abilities, we don't have the right talents and gifts, we don't have the right qualifications, and so how could God use us?

Well, God chooses a humble, ordinary girl to be the mother or the saviour or the world. So what qualifications do you think that you need before God can use you?

Perhaps it's time to stop making excuses, to stop looking for the reasons why you can't and to get on with the tasks that God has given you. What then is Mary praising God for?

What is the content of this song? Because from her humble position, Mary worships God. Verse 47, she describes God as her saviour. Here is the reason for her rejoicing.

[12 : 38] Incidentally, her description of God as saviour should be more than enough just on its own to refuse the frankly baffling Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary's sinlessness before she gave birth to Jesus.

Because Mary sees that she is in need of God's salvation just as much as you and I. And because she knows she needs salvation, she rejoices in God as saviour.

And so too should we. Because worship is always the right response to God's mighty deeds. We saw that in Hannah's song. We saw it in Zechariah's song of worship that we'll see in a couple of weeks' time.

Zechariah's response there much more appropriate to God's goodness to him than his attitude of doubt that we saw a couple of weeks ago. Worship is the natural response to what God has done for us.

And I wonder whether singing in worship feels like that to us. Does it feel natural? Does it feel like an inevitable response to God's love? Or has it become for us just what we do?

[13 : 40] Because that's what we do on a Sunday when we come to church. Is our worship a response to the glories of what God has done? It should be. It should be joyous delighting by overflowing in song.

And we might do well then to look at Mary as a model of how to worship as well. Not just noting that she does worship but reflecting on how. This song then is rich in Old Testament allusions.

Mary, overflowing with joy, fills her song with the knowledge of what God has done. Now I'm not saying we need to know the chapter and verse of every part of the Old Testament in order to be able to worship God.

And in fact, whilst most of the commentators on this passage are unanimous that the song is full of Old Testament references, most of them are actually quite non-specific on what those are. They don't go through each and every verse and say, okay, so verse 52 rule down rules, that must be from 2 Kings 8 and 13, and verse 53 is from Jeremiah 5 and so on and so on.

They don't do that. It isn't that clear cut because these aren't so much Old Testament quotations as they are Old Testament allusions. The ideas behind what she says have clearly come out of God's word, even if not corresponding exactly to a specific verse.

[14 : 57] So we don't need to go and try and compose a spontaneous song to express our joy by quoting a chapter in a nurse's card, but we might bear in mind that Mary's scriptural knowledge is clearly so considerable that as she walks along on her journey, she could bring it to mind and use it to feed her soul.

But the more we dwell in the Bible, the more it will affect our inmost being, the more it will subconsciously mould our attitudes, and the more we will know his words and ideas.

So if you want a specific starting point, then you can do worse than look at the Psalms in the Bible. The Psalms are built also the less obvious ones from Moses of Miriam and David of Canaan. Just as being filled with the Holy Spirit drives us to worship, being filled with the Word drives us to worship.

Being filled with the Word drives us to joyous praise and praise him for the bicarious revelation of himself. So Mary worships God principally for his salvation.

She knows that the baby she carries you represents his salvation and she is overjoyed. That should be the biggest driver of our worship, shouldn't it? Does the joyous knowledge that God has saved you drive you to worship?

[16 : 13] it? If it doesn't, I suggest that you have forgotten the enormity of what God has done for you. I'm not saying that he should be floating around on a cloud the whole time.

I'm not saying that we should always have a beaming smile on the face. This isn't that kind of joy, if you like. It is okay at times to feel sadness and grief. You don't need to manufacture ecstasy at all times.

But there should be that deep and underlying joy, that bedrock of delight in the salvation that we have. So if you've lost that joy or if you've never experienced it, what are you going to do about it? Let me urge you to consider in what God has done. To take the time to reflect, to dwell on what God has done for you. You might consider spending some time reading through the book of Romans that is it out so clear, step by step, what God has done.

If you find it helpful to do that with someone else, then grab someone, ask someone to read through Romans with you. Come and grab me for that letter. I'd love to spend a bit of time each week reading through Romans with somebody. That would be wonderful.

[17 : 24] How will you recapture it actually? They matter. Think about it. So that Mary praises God for his salvation. And secondly, her praise encompasses God's judgment.

Verse 50 shows that her conception of salvation is broader than herself. His mercy extends to those who fear from generation to generation. His salvation is playable to all, at all times and in all places. But as ever, salvation requires something to be saved from. The angel told Joseph, Jesus was to save his people from their sins. God will judge people for their sins.

The latter verses of this song make that clear. And these verses are written as referring to events in the past. And there are instances of God doing those things in the past. But more properly, these verses are in what you can call the prophetic perfect tense.

In other words, they refer to events in the future. They are prophetic. They do so as if they were in the past, in the perfect tense, because it is so certain that they will happen.

[18 : 33] Some of you might know I spent a couple of years when I was growing up living in Romania. I've forgotten most of the language, but one of the few things that have stuck with me is the slightly unusual form of words that you use as you walk out the door.

How you say *amplikat*, which literally means something like I have left. I suppose we maybe say something like I'm out the door. And we're referring there as if it were in the past to something that hasn't actually happened yet.

I'm gone. I know. It will absolutely happen. I'm going to leave any moment now. It's that same kind of idea, the prophetic perfect, that refers to a future event as if it were in the past because it is so sure and so certain.

Mary sees here that the impending birth of Jesus is the beginning of the fulfilment of God's promises. Here it is. The very thing that God's people have been waiting for down through the ages has come, has arrived.

This is what they've been hoping and dreaming about. It is so certain that God will do these things. Judgment will surely come, just as surely as God's mercy extends to those who fear.

[19 : 45] Because the two are intertwined, aren't they? The proud are scattered and the humble are lifted up. The proud, those who are so full of themselves, they don't think they even need God. And the humble, those who know that they need God's help.

Peter exhorts us, doesn't he? Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. The proud are brought low and the humble lifted up.

The hungry are filled and the rich are left empty. Luke's gospel is full of this message of hope for the poor, for the weak, for hungry, for the needy.

Jesus said, the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

God's inevitable, unavoidable judgment is at one and the same time salvation for those who accept it and punishment for those who do not. Thirdly, Mary worships a God who does as he has said he will do.

[20 : 54] She worships a God who keeps his promises, a God who acted the same way towards her as he acted in the days of Abraham, and a God who continues the same way today.

Have a look at verses 54 and 55. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

Psalms 98 verse 3 stands in the background here. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Here what Mary and Elizabeth see God doing is exactly what they should have expected, isn't it? Because this is the messianic hope that has been sustaining the faithful in Israel through the ages. This is what they've been waiting for. This is what God said he would do. Once this is earth-shatteringly new, this is radical and different, there's also nothing more than a continuation of God's mercy to Abraham.

[21 : 57] God has remembered to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever. So God has taken the initiative. God, the Lord, the Saviour, the Powerful One, the Holy One, the Merciful One, God is worthy of Elizabeth's worship, of Mary's worship, and of our worship.

God is the ultimate reason why we celebrate that Christmas, while we celebrate throughout the year and throughout our lives. So I think let's play that song from Before the Service again.

And as you listen to those lyrics, as you listen to Mary's song on joyous worship, you take that opportunity to reflect on God's plan of salvation, to reflect on what God has done for each of us, to feel the joy that that knowledge brings, to consider what you might do to keep it fresh, or to recapture it, if you need to.

So let's listen. Let's listen. Let's move to online, I think.

Sorry. keep Hisr tenerÁng si ñ Entscheidung fourteen AUDIenz Amen.

[24 : 49] He was mindful of His servant. Every age shall call me blessed. The hope of the throne come in the giving of a son.

For He who promised His mighty in remembering His mercy. My soul will magnify the Lord.
For His great souls will fear Him through every generation. The crowd He scatters to the way.
As the ruler's strength is broken. And the rich are left with nothing. The humble lift and high.
And the hungry saddest fight. Our good sharing and treasure. Our home and hell forever.

[26 : 10] My soul will magnify the Lord.

I rejoice in God my Savior. In the wonder of His favor.

I rejoice in heaven. kangaroo'srated I ■ Be your boy and hell over me. Grizzlies? I lose everything. I will feel goat and good to ■. I will be Hey. Wo çe seviyes? Enchimaavoast water. All time ally iki annotation is here. My Brittany re speaks three things. Hygggium once in a while you size and mine with a patient in ■■ host. The hanging style of the altar.

której do valuable in these that ORCHESTRA PLAYS Lord our God, we praise you as our hope, as our salvation, as our salvation.

[28 : 01] We praise you as the one who sits in judgment over the whole earth. Lord, would you give us that deep and abiding joy that fills our lives in all that we do, moment by moment.

Lord, might it come bursting out in joyous expressions of praise to you. For the glory of your name. Thank you also, Lord. Amen.

We'll finish that by singing together again.