

The song of Mary

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church family. We're going to read God's Word together now. So if you can turn in your Bibles or devices to Luke chapter 1, starting at verse 26, and we're going to read up to verse 55.

So Luke 1, verse 26. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.

And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour 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 will be called the 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.

[1 : 1 3] And of his kingdom there will be no end. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. 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.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

And the angel departed from her. 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.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[2 : 2 9] 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 leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 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 away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

[3 : 48] Well, good morning everyone. I'm one of the pastors here, if you happen to be a visitor and don't know me. Well, we've really heard it multiple times this morning from the introduction from the children's address.

What makes you want to sing? Where do you find, when do you find yourself singing? So, sometimes it will be out loud, sometimes it will be in your head.

I'm always intrigued by, some of my grandchildren tell me that they have a song in their head all the time. Not sure necessarily whether it's a good song or not, but there's a song in there for them. Sing is an expression of emotions.

We've already heard that. A whole range of emotions can be expressed in song. And that means the songs we sing resonate with something in our heart, in our innermost being, the way we feel, the way we think, probably both.

And that means we'll actually get tied in most in our private playlist to the songs that describe how we're feeling, that describe the longings of our heart, the songs that reflect what we think will answer the longings of our heart.

[5 : 01] They're likely the ones that are to be in our head most often, and give an expression most often. They're the songs that we think will not only deal with the ache in our heart, or the longing in our heart, but actually help us celebrate what we believe, and what we think will satisfy it.

So, singing's a really big thing in every culture. And singing's a really big thing in the first chapters of Luke's account of the life of Jesus. There's a lot of singing around the birth of Jesus. There's perhaps the first and most bizarre flash mob in history.

This massive crowd of angels appear and lead a bunch of smelly old shepherds in song. And then they just as quickly disappear again. But that's not enough.

The shepherds themselves are on their feet yahooping and praising and singing at what they've just heard. The storyline in the first two chapters then is punctuated by the songs of Mary and Zachariah and Simeon.

And I think the point of these in the storyline that's moving so quickly with so much incredible stuff happening, these songs punctuate it and they actually cause us to pause and reflect on what's developing at such a great rate.

[6 : 19] So the question then is why? What is there to sing about? Well, this morning as we've been told a three week series we're going to look at some of these three great songs of Christmas.

And we do that to discover in depth to dig into the songs and see what it is that makes people sing. And these people in particular. And we do that in turn to help us celebrate Christmas as we ought to.

To come back to what we might call the basics of Christmas. And just before I go ahead for those who aren't into singing and you can read a little bit more of this in the bulletin article. These are called songs but if you're a person who says I don't sing ever don't get left behind.

Because they probably weren't put to music. It's more about an overflow. You remember that kids? That picture of overflow. It's more about just this bubbling up to the surface of praise and thanks to be part of what's happening in God's world at that time under God's hand.

It's an expression of excitement. And it just bubbles to the surface in words. And in that sense therefore I believe that everybody here has a song in them.

[7 : 40] In that sense. Something that gets you excited. Something that gets you on your feet. It might only be to yahoo and cheer and stomp around. But it's something that will actually just cause you to express your delight.

So let's look at what stirred Mary to overflow in praise to God. And I'm going to just give a bit of context which has largely been read here but not all of it. just to pick up the background to this magnificat as it's called.

This praising of the Lord by Mary. So Luke begins his biography the account of the life of Jesus by focusing on a group who are described as the faithful ones.

Ones who are waiting patiently for God to deliver on his promise of salvation. We've looked at that promise over the last four weeks in Malachi. So we've got a group here waiting patiently for that to come true some 400 years later.

In chapter 2 verse 25 you've got this guy called Simeon who's described here as waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[8 : 55] And in chapter 2 verse 38 we've got a lady called Anna a prophetess and she was waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. Those two terms I believe are used interchangeably.

This was a group of faithful people people as we'll see in a minute people who are described as fearing the Lord and remember that connects us back to Malachi as well. People who were waiting for the comfort and healing of God's long promised long awaited Messiah who would come to God's needy people and bring healing and restoration.

Now if you go back to chapter 1 verse 6 we pick up the story with Zechariah. Again another direct connection into the wording let alone the theme of Malachi because Zechariah is busy as a priest busy observing the statutes and the commandments of the Lord.

That's the language of Malachi those who feared the Lord. So here he is waiting patiently and faithfully with his wife Elizabeth as part of this other group setting their hearts to honour the Lord again reference to Malachi while they waited for the Lord to deliver on his promise.

And suddenly angel Gabriel appeared and announced that their prayers were answered. Promise would now become reality as they were swept up in a series of incredible supernatural events.

[10 : 41] And then back into the passage that was read to this morning chapter 1 verse 26 through to 38 essentially God says he would override the natural process of getting pregnant in Elizabeth's cousin Mary and she would be with child and she would give birth to the greatest figure the world has ever seen.

He would be truly human and truly God at the same time. He would be God's Messiah God's great King and Saviour who would rule God's world forever as promised more than about a thousand years earlier to King David.

And then we pick up the story even closer in verse 39 onwards. Mary then makes haste to visit Elizabeth who we're told is at least six months pregnant by this stage and that event is surrounded by more supernatural happenings and that's when the story becomes even more strange because you might well expect a very God-fearing woman like Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah to have words with Mary who remember is unmarried and pregnant at this stage.

A shameful thing in the society of the day. Mary but rather than that moved by the Holy Spirit Elizabeth actually praises Mary and even Elizabeth's baby in her womb supernaturally acknowledges the importance of Mary's baby.

so the background to Mary's song of praise is full of humanly impossible occurrences.

[12 : 42] It's full of God's activity it's full of God's Holy Spirit taking hold of people and moving them to do certain things and say certain things and remember that God's Holy Spirit is the enabler and the enforcer of God's plan and purpose.

This is exactly what the prophets had predicted. They said the age of salvation when it finally came would be the age marked by God's Holy Spirit and incredible actions of God's Holy Spirit.

A radical new work of God's Holy Spirit supernaturally in God's world. So everything points to the fact that this is God's age of salvation coming has arrived in this baby yet to be born.

And it's clearly God's Spirit that motivates Mary's heart to overflow in a song of praise and thanks for the arrival of Jesus. So let's dig into it now.

What is it precisely that overflows from Mary's heart? I want to just highlight two things. There's probably lots more that you could highlight. The first is delight in God's extravagant covenant blessing.

[13 : 55] So the words grace or favor, if you look back to chapter 1 verse 28, the angel describes Mary as O favored one.

And we pick that up again in the song. Words of grace and favor and love and mercy in verses 46 through to 50. If you look at verse 46, Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord.

Now, the tense of that verb suggests that this is not something new for Mary. This is just a lifetime habit of praising God, addressing him in the most personal of ways as Yahweh.

But now, she overflows with even greater delight as she tries to express her new sense of blessing from the Lord. If you look at verses 47 through 50 then, 47, 30, yeah, we've got to say on the one hand that there's no way Mary could possibly have understood everything that was happening to her.

And that makes the story even more amazing because, therefore, her concept of being blessed was simply being swept up into God's planned intervention of healing and salvation, being swept up into God's long-promised, long-awaited time of salvation, salvation intervention.

[15 : 25] And if you notice in verse 47 there, she delights to think that the Lord is committed to being her Savior. Savior. Now, again, step back and just think of it from a human perspective.

Humanly speaking, Mary's plight was terrible. Unmarried, pregnant, quite possibly shamed in her immediate family and local community, and technically in terms of God's law, eligible to be stoned to death.

Now, I don't think that law was enacted very much at that particular time, but that's what God's law said. Now, in that light, I think we could easily understand Mary being consumed with getting married, getting a husband, getting herself into a position where at least she could start rebuilding some sense of respectability in the community.

But that's not what we see of Mary, that's not what we hear from Mary. Instead, she's consumed, I think, with an even greater plight, that is, her relationship with her Holy Lord.

It seems to me that Mary's words reveal it. As she fears the Lord, she is very, very much aware of the fact that her greatest need is for Savior, without whom she could never be righteous or acceptable to the Lord, in spite of her best efforts of fearing God and trying to keep his commandments.

[17 : 21] So, in that context, therefore, Mary accepts the Lord's work through her yet-to-be-born baby. And I think this is the nub for Mary, thanking him that in this amazing, confusing, scary circumstance that's now entered her life, that God was giving her the Savior that she knew she needed.

she recognized she was a nobody. No doubt, she was scared and overwhelmed by her circumstance, but also had total confidence in God's promise, in God's character, his mighty power to save her, his undeserved favor towards her, his grace and love for her, his incredible mercy and kindness towards her.

In short, my friends, Mary was one who feared the Lord, setting her heart to honor him. Again, the language of Malachi. Setting her heart to esteem the Lord, to serve him, and she called herself a servant girl.

She knew her Lord, the Lord God, was holy. She knew that he could be trusted to do what was right.

She knew that he could be trusted to act in kindness and love towards her. But even then, I think, Mary's horizon is far, far bigger than herself.

[19 : 09] her joy is knowing that she was experiencing personally that which would become typical of God's desire to save his people generally.

And it just reflected what God had been doing through the generations. God loves to see his people fear him and he loves to save his people.

So I just want to pause there for a minute and sort of step sideways by asking the question, what is it to be blessed? What is it to be blessed?

blessed? Now, in our world's terms, blessing is actually a very, very common word. I'm hearing it everywhere.

But often in a very shallow and self-interested way. I understand, and I might be wrong here, I'm putting myself out here because I don't know about social media, but I understand it's a hashtag on social media.

[20 : 17] And it's used when things are going well, when people get what they want, usually associated with health or popularity, material possessions, or just warm, fuzzy relationships.

I'm blessed. Now, there's no doubt about it, all those things can be really good. But here's the problem, if we think of blessing primarily in those terms, those actual things may lead us away from the Lord into a position of self-reliance.

And autonomy. False security. And so, those things that we might call blessings may actually turn out not to be blessings at all.

At least not in terms of scripture. So, I think that's a really important thing to take into this, because when Mary speaks of being blessed, I take it she's not thinking about becoming a famous celebrity in history.

Now, that's what the Roman Catholic Church have made her. They've said, well, Mary's a special person in her own right, and she's worthy of worship in her own right. I don't think that's what Mary's trying to say here at all.

[21 : 34] Quite the opposite, in fact. I think she's in awe at being a total nobody, and yet, knowing that she's been swept up into God's unfolding salvation package in Jesus.

I think Mary's point is not that people will praise her in successive generations, but that successive generations will praise God for the amazing way he honoured her and nobody in his salvation plan.

The two are quite different, I think. I hope I've been able to make the difference clear, but they are quite different. So, I think for Mary, to be blessed is to be in God's hands.

To be blessed is to know that God has extended his favour to you in grace, mercy, and love in a saving way.

To be blessed is to be drawn towards the Lord, by the Lord, drawn to himself, in a greater understanding of his character, and his plan, and his promise, in a greater delight of him.

[22 : 55] If you look back at verse 38 and verse 45, 38 says, Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word.

Verse 45, Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. To be blessed is to be enabled by God's Spirit to be all in with God's purposes, no matter how confusing, scary, and hard they are to understand.

To be blessed is to be able by God's Spirit to trust God in every circumstance, even those circumstances which have consequences which threaten to overwhelm us.

To be blessed is to be so secure in God's care, as Mary was, that immediate circumstances of shame, confusion, fear, and uncertainty are trumped by that bubbling overflow of trust, confidence, in delight.

Lord, I have no idea what you're doing in my life, says Mary, but this I know, you're to be trusted. And in that action in my life, I delight.

[24 : 25] In your action in my life, I delight. Now, if I'm right in that, in sort of spelling out a little bit more about blessing, then surely such blessing is something to sing about, isn't it?

Surely that should get us on our feet, cheering and yahooping, even if we can't sing two notes together. Second thing then, Mary delights, in God's faithfulness to his promises.

The word mercy in verse 50 is the covenant faithfulness *hesed*. God's faithfulness, God's covenant faithfulness to his promises, verses 53 and 55.

Mary understands, and in part, I'll just make this point in passing, I don't have time to delve into it, but she understands because she has habit habit, she habitually has studied God's word and she knows it from back to front and she knows what God's character is like, she knows what God's promises are.

God's love. And therefore, she knows that what's happening around her and involving her, even though she can't really understand it at a micro level, at a micro level, is God acting to fulfill his promises in the age of salvation.

[25 : 57] salvation. And that's what produces her overflow of delight. And I think she understands in the connections made there that her own personal experience is God's showcase for salvation coming to all his people because the focus on the horizon gets bigger as we move into verses 50 following.

And that's God is going to bring the same salvation to his servant nation Israel, chapter verse 54.

Remember that servant nation Israel we've said over the last four weeks from Malachi, failed God in every way imaginable. And yet God intends to bring graciously, lovingly, and mercifully his salvation to that pathetic nation.

why? Again, another connection back into Malachi, verse 54. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance.

That's a key word. Remember back in Malachi last week, chapter 3, verse 16, 17, 18? The Lord remembered. That is, it's not as if the Lord's got a scratchy memory like me, but the Lord remembered.

[27 : 20] That is, he committed himself afresh to delivering on the promises he's made of old. God remembered or was true to his promise, a promise that was made to Abraham some 1800 years earlier.

A promise that said to Abraham, one of your descendants would finally reverse the effects of sin, finally save God's people, finally restore the Garden of Eden conditions where once again God's people would worship him in spirit and in truth.

And that would be a global restoration and reversal. So Mary's delighted because the stuff she's built her life on, the scriptures, is not just ancient history.

It's reality. And it's reality growing in her womb at that very moment. such is God's command of history and commitment to his promise.

And verses 51, 52, and 53 spell out in Old Testament pictures and concepts what this coming salvation would look like and mean for God's people. To understand these pictures, we need to go back to Isaiah chapter 49, verses 9 through 13.

[28 : 47] There's many, many places you could go back to. I'm just touching you down on one. Isaiah, where the spiritual state of Israel was described by Isaiah in precisely these terms.

So these words here are metaphors. The proud, the mighty, the exalted are those who have turned their back on God and rely on their own goodness for the future.

by contrast, the lowly, the hungry, the servant are those who know their sin, their inability to deal with it themselves and look to the Lord alone to deal with it.

So Mary's delighted because God's cabinet faithfulness to his promises would bring a great reversal. And that great reversal would also be a great restoration.

salvation, the reality of which would be seen in successive generations as King Jesus actively rules his world and rules his people, gathering them into a relationship with him forever.

[29 : 52] the relationship that he originally created them for as image bearers, the relationship that he's always intended them to have, and the relationship in this age of salvation that he now delights in creating for them through his own death, which we'll see coming in subsequent years.

Now again, I just stop and say, whoa, that's something to sing about, isn't it? God's faithfulness to his promise.

So, just let me wrap up then by saying that we need to get in the spirit for Christmas with Mary.

Now, hopefully, even though I've stumbled over my words multiple times already, that wasn't a stumbling over my words. I meant that in the way I said that. I didn't say, let's get into the spirit of Christmas as advertising and romantic nonsense encourages us.

That's a spirit of self-indulgence, a spirit that actually makes us lose sight of the true joy of Christmas. things. But we should get in the spirit for Christmas so that we might overflow, like Mary did, with joy and praise for all the reasons that Mary did.

[31 : 30] Again, I just want to highlight two, and there's multiple things I could highlight here, but time just allows me to highlight two. Let's delight in the supernaturalism of God's intervention in the birth of King Jesus.

Now, this might sound like a strange application, and maybe it is, but it works in my mind. We cannot understand God's world and God's salvation plan, we cannot understand the gospel without accepting God's supernatural activity in his world and intervention in his world.

God's method of delivering his promised Savior and King into our world is totally surprising. If it was left to us from a human perspective, Jesus would have come from a high-flying, a Jewish, a priestly family in Israel.

Or if he was going to have to be a Roman, he would have been the child of a senatorial family, somebody with clout, somebody with influence, somebody who was somebody. God's intervention in his world is totally surprising.

It doesn't use any of the categories that we would reach for or be comfortable with. And that's before we even start talking about the supernatural occurrences around about the birth of Jesus.

[33 : 00] God's delivery of his promise to renew broken, sinful people through the work of his Holy Spirit is, from start to finish, supernatural.

Now, here's the rub for us, you see. As Christians, we live in a world where anything truly supernatural is just rubbish. So our so-called scientific world says, unless I can see it and explain it, then it can't be real.

Now, of course, in reality, behind the scenes, our world is just as engaged in spiritual thinking as ever. It's just that we've gone into weird Eastern mysticism and First Nations occult type thinking.

But the general run of society says, you know, we're a scientific age. If you're going to believe anything, then it has to be fully understandable or it can't be real. Well, I say to you, as Christians, we mustn't allow our commitment to God's supernatural world and God's supernatural activity in his world, particularly when it comes to the events surrounding the gospel.

We mustn't allow that to be eroded. We mustn't give up on that. Regardless of what our world would push us to. We mustn't allow our confidence to be dismantled by an unbelieving so-called scientific world.

[34 : 35] Luke records these events as facts. Remember at the very start of Luke's biography, he says he researched. In other words, Luke is claiming to be scientific. He's done the research, he's talked to eyewitnesses, and he records these things as those things are beyond reasonable doubt.

They're fact. friends, the story of Jesus is not mythology. And we've got to be so careful we don't allow all the mythology and the romantic nonsense that overlays Christmas these days to rob us of the true supernatural reality of God's intervention in our world that we call Christmas, that we celebrate as Christmas.

we rightly reject the sloppy sentimentality of our world in respect to Christmas, but we dare not reject the supernatural occurrences that delivered King Jesus as a baby into our human world.

God came into our world to save us, to renew us, to take up residence in us forever by his Holy Spirit.

From start to finish, it's about God's supernatural intervention. intervention. Let's celebrate also being truly blessed, therefore, by God in Jesus.

[36 : 08] Ephesians 1, the well-known verse, we have every blessing in the spiritual realm in Christ Jesus. But do we believe it?

Jumping, sort of bouncing from Mary to us, we can ask the question, are we ashamed to be identified with either the supernaturalism that goes around Christ, or are we ashamed per se to be identified with Christ?

Because to be identified with Christ, to be identified with a brutal death, crucifixion, to be identified with the concept of sin and need and being bad people in a world that ravishes all those concepts.

It is actually easy, I think, to be ashamed of Jesus. I know there's been times to my shame that I've put my head down and been quiet, but I know jolly well there was an opportunity, I was interacting with somebody down the street or wherever to speak.

Why was I so old? Maybe lots of reasons, but one chief one might well be tired of a shame. The message at times can sound so weird.

[37 : 44] The big cry of society is to be on the right side of history. It's a very modern cry. The question we've got to ask is, are we convinced, I mean absolutely convinced, that we're in the right side of history in Christ?

Christ. If we are, then I take it we'll proclaim his name and his gospel in triumph, not slink around in defeat.

Are we convinced like Mary that we're blessed among mankind to be called brothers with Christ, brothers and sisters with Christ? Again, I would suggest that if we are, if we do believe that, then surely we'll be singing from the rooftops, determined also to model God's blessings in our daily lives.

If we believe that Jesus really is the Christmas gift that keeps on giving, keeps on giving identity and purpose and satisfaction and security and the pathway home to heaven.

Surely then, that ought to get us on our feet, cheering and yahoo. Pray with me. Lord, we're blighted by familiarity.

[39 : 24] Stories that we have, for the likes of myself, Lord, I've grown up with, I've never known anything other than parents who've taught me the Bible. And while, Lord, that's such a wonderful blessing in itself, it puts me in danger of familiarity.

And as the saying goes, familiarity can breed contempt. Lord, sharpen our minds, enliven our hearts to the beauty of your salvation intervention in the birth of Jesus.

Stir us up, Lord, by your spirit to overflow with joy, to have that private playlist in our minds that constantly thanks you for your grace and mercy and love and commitment.

And help us, Lord, to overflow, not in words in our mind or even songs in our lips, but help us to overflow into lives that model the grace and love and favor we've experienced.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Thank you very much for listening.