

The Song of Mary

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[0:00] The passage we read this morning from Luke chapter 1 verse 39 to 56 is a well-known text in Christendom, especially for Christians in the liturgical traditions.

Evening prayer. This is one of the few rare hymns or psalms of praise in the New Testament. And it is fitting that it should come from the mouth of Mary.

We know it as the Magnificat after the first words of the Latin translation. Magnificat anima mea dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord.

Now this song of Mary has been sung on a daily basis since the earliest days of the church. And as we examine the interaction between these two Jewish women in our text this morning, there is a lot in this passage to take in.

The customs and reversal of expected roles in their interaction. The words of both, especially that of Mary, dripping with the knowledge and familiarity of the Old Testament.

[1:28] Undoubtedly, Mary was a faithful and devout young woman. She is one who has stored God's word in our heart as a faithful, covenanted Israelite is called to do.

And also, we would note in this text this morning, this subversive, revolutionary nature of the song. So much so, I didn't know this until I was preparing for the sermon this week.

So much so that this song, this passage of scripture, was banned from singing by certain governments in the past. The British banned the singing of it during their colonization of India.

It's probably apparent why when you read the words that is contained in Mary's song. Argentina banned the singing or the recitation of this particular hymn in the 80s, under the totalitarian regime. And I think Guatemala, one of the South American countries, banned it around the same time. I can understand why they would. I'm sure you can too.

[2:43] The song is a scathing rebuke of the rich, the powerful, and the mighty. It was banned because they think, these governments think that it is a threat when people use it as an anthem of resistance.

But I think it's a failure of imagination on their part, on the part of these governments. This song is far more dangerous than a mere song to gather those who will rebel against human governments. This song is a declaration of praise to a God who has come down to fight for the downtrodden, to rescue and deliver the lowly, and to judge and condemn the proud.

This song is a declaration of what God has already done in Christ. And I think as we study Mary's song this morning, let us not be misguided as the British or Argentinian government were.

The song is much more powerful than a mere called celeb. It is an announcement, this song is, an announcement of a cosmic act of God in saving a people, delivering them from the clutches of sin and death.

[3:58] So far in Luke, if you're familiar with chapter 1, it's a very long chapter, if you're familiar with chapter 1 of Luke, we've been told so far of the angel Gabriel's visit to Zechariah, John the Baptist's father.

Now six months later, Gabriel appeared to a poor, young, unmarried virgin girl in the back country of Galilee, in a small town of Nazareth, to announce that she will give birth to the long-awaited Messiah.

She, unlike Zechariah, believed God at his word. And having been told by the angel that her cousin, old Baron Elizabeth, is six months pregnant, she traveled 80 miles, 80 plus miles from where she is in Galilee, about four days journey, to go see that indeed, as the angel Gabriel said, nothing is impossible with God.

Mary was a woman of lowly estate in many ways. And as we examine this interaction this morning, that would have been true about her, about Mary, even in comparison to her cousin, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was older, married. She's a wife to a priest in the temple. Mary is, although not yet showing, pregnant, unwed, young, and poor.

[5:40] And if you'd been a Jew watching these two women, you would have been surprised at the reversal of societal norms. Upon hearing Mary's greeting, the six-month-old baby, John, John the Baptist, in Elizabeth's womb, leapt for joy.

This is proof of Gabriel's word to Zechariah in chapter 1, verse 15, that this child will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while still in his mother's womb.

Elizabeth knows, Elizabeth knows, that the leaping of the child in the womb is not just the usual kicking that happens to pregnant women. It's not, what's it called, Ix, Braxton Ix.

It might be too early for that, six months. Anyway, she knows, she knows this is not just, you know, the baby kicking. She knows what it is. She knows that this is John, right from the womb, acknowledging is Lord Jesus Christ.

And Elizabeth seems to give voice to both mother and child in her greeting of Mary. She says to Mary, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

[7:06] And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? Luke shows us that this is not just a mere encounter between these two women.

There is more going on here than Mr. I. And we're told, it is the Holy Spirit, through Elizabeth, bearing witness to Christ as things unfolded.

And isn't that the work of the Holy Spirit at all times? Bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is what's going on here.

Notice Elizabeth's words to Mary. She greets her as one would a person of great esteem. One who's of a superior rank.

That's how Elizabeth greets young, teenage, poor Mary as she comes in. I want us to notice that for Elizabeth, it is her role, Mary's role, as the mother of God that Elizabeth honors.

[8:19] Elizabeth calls her most blessed and singular among all women in that she bears in her womb God incarnate. But there is, there's a second reason that Mary is blessed.

Right? First is that she, she is singular, most favored among women that she bears God incarnate in her womb. But, verse 45, she's also blessed.

She said, blessed is she who believes there will be a fulfillment of what has been spoken to her by the Lord. In the first instance, Mary's blessedness is unique.

But in the second instance, a blessedness is that of all of us who respond in faithful acceptance of God's word. In this, Mary is a model for us of faithful surrender to God.

She is blessed because upon hearing God's word, she responded to God. Let it be to me according to your word. And what a contrast she is to Elizabeth's husband, Zachariah, who upon receiving God's word, early on in this chapter, doubted.

[9:35] But let's not be so quick to condemn Zachariah. We're often most like him. How often do we, even as Christians, say, well, but God, you don't understand my situation.

Or you don't understand the context. Otherwise, you would not ask my obedience or my surrender in this area. How often do we say that in our mind, in our hearts?

How often are we tempted to be pragmatic in the way we operate the church? When in fact, the church is not a pragmatic institution. I want to repeat that.

The church is not a pragmatic institution. We worship a king who came to a poor virgin girl and went the way of death on a cross to secure salvation and establish this kingdom.

There's no, if it was, if the church was a pragmatic institution, all the things I've just said would have not made sense and would not have occurred. That is not pragmatic, right?

[10:40] The way God secured our salvation. Pragmatism is essentially often wordliness. Thinking the way the world thinks.

relying on the world's tactics. Whereas, God has given us marching orders with the operational protocol, which is his word here, for which we to follow.

And what we're called to do is listen to this word of God, to listen to it, to follow where Jesus leads in faith and to proclaim his gospel. As 1 Corinthians 1 says, it is true the folly of what we preach that God saves those who believe.

It is not by the world's wisdom, since God has made the wisdom of the world foolish. Mary is an example of this faith in God's word. And she who seemed to measure so low in the world's estimation turns out to be the highly favored one of God.

Upon hearing her cousin's words, upon hearing through the kindness of God, another confirmation for her of what the angel Gabriel has said, she was also moved to praise God.

[12:06] She hears and finds value and a status not in what the world thinks of her, Mary, she finds her value and she finds her status in her obedience to God and in God's kindness in choosing her to participate in his saving will.

So Mary says, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he is 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 first part of Mary's song is an acknowledgement by her of God's unmerited favor towards her. She of humble estate, she even acknowledged that God is a Savior in this.

Right? And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. Here is the biblical warrant for Mary's self-knowledge that her salvation, even her salvation, is through the child in her womb.

[13:26] We must reject, we must reject any notion that Mary participates in the work of saving us. She is not co-redeemer with Jesus.

She is not a mediator. She is not an advocate. The Bible tells us in 1 Timothy 2.5, there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.

So to view Mary as co-redeemer or even as an advocate or mediator between sinful humanity and God is to set her up as an idol. To in fact go against her confession in this hymn about God, her self-confession is that God is the Savior and that she stands humbly in receiving of that same saving salvation that Christ Jesus, the baby in her womb, comes to secure.

Mary's praise is to God. In her song, God alone, God alone is the divine warrior who accomplishes deliverance.

God is the mighty one who accomplishes great things, who shows strength and scatters the proud, bringing down the powerful from their thrones and sending the rich away empty.

[14:51] This is the God who engages battle on behalf of his people. This is the God that Mary is singing praise to. God is the God of the covenant.

He looks with favor and lifts the lowly, extends mercy to those who fear him, and fills the hungry, and helps Israel.

He acts in remembrance of his mercy, remembering his promise to Israel of old. God. This is why Mary continues and says, and his mercy, this God, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He, notice the main actor in this, in all of this, of Mary's song here, it's God himself. 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.

[15:59] He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, to his offspring forever. Mary goes from a personal estimation of God's kindness to her, of God's lifting her heart from our lowly estate, she magnifies this Lord who saves, who has looked upon her, a forgotten girl, a nameless woman in the northern region of Israel, in Galilee, in the backwards region, who has lifted her heart and makes her most blessed among women.

She praises God for this, but she doesn't only just look at herself, she looks beyond herself. She sees that even in this thing that God is doing in her own life, God is fulfilling his covenant promise to our nation and even beyond.

Mary would have had in mind the oppressive powers of her world, the Caesars, the Herods, the Annas and Caiaphas that we looked at last week and the week before, the proud, the powerful, the rich, those who set themselves up as gods in the world.

The child in her womb has come to claim his rightful throne as king of the universe. She knows the character of the god of whom she sings.

He has already been on the side of the downtrodden. He's always been on the side of the downtrodden. and our son points to God's faithfulness as a covenant keeping God to Israel.

[17:55] And we look, even as we look through the covenant keeping God, God's promises to Abraham, to David, even if we go further back, even as far back as Genesis 3.15, this child in

Mary's womb is the seed of the woman.

who will crush the serpent's head. This is the promise that God made. Bede, the venerable English monk, says this about Mary's son.

I quote, Now because the human race had perished at the touch of the plague of pride, it was proper that the time of salvation should first begin with the putting forward of the medicine of humility by which it might be healed.

Essentially, what Bede is saying is Mary stands in contrast to Eve. Pride was what led to the fallenness of humanity. Mary stands, stands, exemplifying humility, and she's exalted and honored because of it.

Our example, Mary's example, is that of surrender and submission to God. Even in this, she points, she points to her son, who Paul tells us, I want to repeat that, even in her humility, even in her surrendering, she's pointing to her son, who Paul tells us in Philippians 2, who even though he is God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but humbled himself to death, the death on the cross, and that God exalted him and placed him as the preeminent king overall.

[19:49] Mary's song is not a Marxist anthem, after all. So there's no reason for the Argentinian totalitarian government to be worried.

It's not a Marxist anthem. Mary's song is not a tool for our political march nations. It's not a revolutionary song against the corrupt and powerful totalitarian regimes of our world, at least not in the way that we would imagine it.

There is only one side here, according to Mary. There is only one side, and it is God's side. everyone else is part of those who are going to be scattered when this God comes under sin, when this king, the Messiah, comes under sin.

And then ultimately, Mary's song teaches us how we are to approach God. Do you approach recognizing your lowly and humble estate?

Do you come to God hungry to be fed by him? Or do you approach him with aughty eyes, proud eyes, as king of your world, refusing to surrender or submit?

[21:19] There are two options here, according to Mary. Those who are proud, powerful, and mighty. It doesn't mean necessarily though that, you know, if you're rich, you qualify, if you're, if you're, if you have status, you can not own much to your name and still be among the proud, powerful, and mighty.

The point, Mary, the truth that Mary is revealing here is our posture before God. That's what she's revealing. you can be wealthy, you can be king of your, you know, of a, of a, of a land.

You can be the queen of England. You can be renowned and yet be of lowly, humble estate, surrendering before this mighty king.

And you can be poor and still be haughty and prideful. So I repeat again, do you approach this God?

Do you come to him, hungry to be fed by him? Do you come to him, recognizing your lowly and humble estate? Or do you come with proud eyes as king of your world, refusing to surrender and submit?

[22:41] The warning for us is this, if we are too proud, we will be overthrown. But if we approach God hungry, humble, he will exalt us and fill us with good things.

It is a warning and a beckoning by Mary to come to Jesus Christ. He will fill you with good things.

He will exalt you when you come humbly to him, recognizing that you need him, recognizing that in and of yourself, you are hopeless. You cannot save yourself.

You are in need of a savior. This savior is Jesus Christ, Mary's child. Come to him, receive him, accept him as Lord over your life.

He will fill you. God will be filled. He will be filled. He will filled. That is the hunger and longing of the human heart.

[23:54] We see people who are powerful among us, who are renowned, who are rich, still yearning to be filled. Tells us that their wealth, their renown, their fame doesn't fill them.

some of them are the most miserable people in the world, broken. There's only one thing that can fill you and satisfy you.

It is Jesus Christ. Come to him. Call, beckon people to come to him in this season. This is the good news that Mary proclaims.

We ought to also proclaim this news. We ought to be singing this song. It should be fresh and alive in our mouths and in our lips.

This is the Lord who saves. This is the Lord and our soul should magnify him. I pray that he does.

[24 : 56] Let's pray.