

Untitled (46)

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Date: 20 December 2015

[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. So one popular song that we hear a lot of this time of year is the song, Mary Did You Know? Everyone familiar with it? Okay, good. I was hoping you would say yes. Now maybe as we think about that song, the question that forms the title as we're thinking about it as a question is meant to be a sort of rhetorical question.

Maybe it isn't meant to be answered in the way that it's phrased. But, someone is asking a question and there is an answer and we know what the answer is.

Probably not a bad thing to say so. Now on Facebook recently, I shared a meme on this question. It was an excerpt from a classic Batman comic strip.

[1:06] With the word bubble slightly adapted, I guess you would say. In the meme, Robin starts to say, Mary, did you know? Batman responds by slapping Robin in the face and then saying, she did.

Luke chapter 1, 26 to 35. Now there is a point in my share in this, aside from the fact that I'm a nerd who likes comic books, and that is true.

But look with me at Luke 1, 26 to 35, because conveniently enough, for us, it sets up our gospel reading for this morning and comes right before it.

So in Luke 1, starting at verse 26, we read, And the angel said, And Mary said to the angel, Now looking at these verses, it's pretty obvious that Mary did know, unless she was just totally not paying attention.

Now since the Bible is pretty clear, and this passage reiterates that, that being visited by angels can actually be an utterly terrifying experience, I think she was probably paying attention.

[3:20] But our gospel reading, appointed for this morning, which contains Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat, as we call it, makes it clear that she was well aware of what was happening.

She goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, right? And then finds herself so overflowing with praise at what God has done, that the praise within her comes spilling out in song.

And this prayer, this song, the Magnificat, should be pretty familiar to us. It has a prominent place in the Book of Common Prayer. We probably pray it often.

But let's look at it again. Let's look at it in light of what Mary knew, in light of what God had promised. It says, starting in verse 46, 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.

[4:31] His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination 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, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

Now looking at that, brothers and sisters, what do you think did Mary know? Yes, she did.

If there were any doubt at all that she knew what the Lord was up to, that doubt is put to rest in the final two verses of the Magnificat. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

So Mary knew that in the child that she would bear, God was fulfilling the promises that he had made to Abraham. She knew that in her child Jesus, God would be providing what he had promised Abraham.

[5:44] And I want us to think about that this morning, because we can't have a full understanding of who Jesus is, in light of God's promises, without understanding what God promised to Abraham.

And to do that, of course, we have to hop back to Genesis. So let's do that. I want us to look specifically at a couple of promises that God made to Abraham.

Now, from the very beginning, in God's calling of Abraham, we see an incredible promise. We see this in Genesis chapter 12, starting at the first verse.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[6:52] Now here we see God calling Abraham, then known, of course, as Abram, and I will use the two names interchangeably, because it gets kind of confusing here. Now he's calling Abram to leave the country of his upbringing, right?

To leave the house of his father, to step out in faith, and follow God to the land that God would show him. While that journey of faith must have been a monumental undertaking for Abram, and think about this, it really must have been.

Not only is he being called to leave his father's house, he's being called to go somewhere he doesn't really know where it is. But it had monumental promises attached.

God promised to make a great nation of Abram, to bless those who bless Abram, and to curse those who curse Abram. Now if that wasn't enough, here comes the clincher.

God promised that all of the families of the earth, all kindreds, all tribes, all nations, would be blessed through Abraham. And what is the greatest way in which all the families of the earth would be blessed in him?

[8:07] Yes. The answer, of course, is that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abram's greatest descendant, Jesus. The child that Mary bore.

The child that prompted Mary to overflow with praise. The answer is found in Jesus, descendant of Abraham, who would by his blood redeem for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Redeem people for God. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise that God made to Abraham when he called him. Did Mary know that?

I think we'd have to say she probably did. Not only that, but another related promise that God made to Abraham must have been on Mary's mind as she remembered God's promises.

Let's take a look at Genesis chapter 15. Now as this chapter opens, we see Abraham lamenting, right, that he doesn't have an heir.

[9:19] And that's a problem because he and his wife are old. But God speaks to him to reassure him. To promise him a blessing beyond imagining.

Not only would he have an heir, but he would have more than that. Now as verse 5 opens, we see God taking him out to show him the night sky.

Night sky. Which in that time and place, night sky must have been so awe-inspiring, so beautiful, and so vast.

God shows him the night sky. And what happens? Look with me. He brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars.

If you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

[10:17] Again, in referring to God's promises to Abraham in light of Jesus, Mary places Jesus at the center of these promises. Jesus has something to do with God's promise that God will give Abraham more offspring than anyone can number.

As many offspring as there are stars in the sky. Did Mary know this? What do you think? Now in case we're wondering how all of this comes together, we find the answer in Galatians 3.

It started in verse 7. It says, Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed.

So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. So Abraham, it's important that we understand that.

understand this. Was justified by faith in the promises of God, promises which find their fulfillment in Jesus. And if we are among those who believe God and are justified through faith in Jesus, who are

like Abraham, then we are Abraham's descendants.

[11:48] We are among those of all the nations on the earth, blessed through Abraham, and the greatest of his offspring, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are among that number so great that it is as innumerable as the stars in the sky.

We are among those who have received the benefits of what Mary had in mind when she said, He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

Yes? So don't you think that Mary knew that the son she was to bear would be the greatest and the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of God?

If not, why would she have mentioned what God spoke to Abraham and what God promised to Abraham? The angel told her, of course, that her son would reign on the throne of David forever, right?

That he would be the fulfillment of what God would accomplish through the line of King David. But she takes it back even further than that to Abraham. And if we wanted to, we could take it even further back than that to Genesis 3, right after the fall, that initial disobedience that plunged the world into sin and death, where God promises that the seed of woman would one day crush the head of the serpent.

[13:18] The promise that Jesus, the God-man, would triumph over the devil. Are we starting to see a pattern here? It's a pattern that Mary recognized when she rejoiced in what God said to Abraham.

The pattern is this. God's power to save, God's mercy, God's promise to redeem. all of it finds its ultimate fulfillment in the Lord Jesus.

In the eternal Son of God who became a man, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, who was born, who was a baby, who lived and died and rose again and who will reign forever.

Jesus is where we find the fulfillment of God's promises. Mary knew, and so do we, that Jesus, this child she would bear, is what God had in mind when he spoke to Abraham, when he made promises to Abraham.

And so we know that if we have faith in Jesus, we are among those who are blessed in Abraham.

That we're children of Abraham in that great number of offspring that is as innumerable as the stars of the night sky.

[14:45] But let's remember something. We're called to do more than to be content with being blessed. The church has been given the task of helping to bring in other offspring of Abraham.

Abraham, those who don't yet believe, but who will through the testimony of the gospel. Could there be a better opportunity to go about that work than the Christmas season?

When people are more open to thinking about things that matter, when people are more open to coming to church? This week, let's try to take advantage of the opportunity to talk to people about that baby in the manger.

To invite people to worship with us and see what it's all about. Because all of the nations of the earth will be blessed through Jesus, the son of Abraham.

And that is news that is too good to keep to ourselves. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[16:01] Amen. Amen.