

Increase in Rejoicing (Carol Service)

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[0 : 00] Good evening. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Matt.

I'm a ministry trainee here at the church. It's great to be with you. Please keep your Bible open to page 831, that passage that was just read for us by Naomi. Do you ever pay attention to the words of songs?

Or like lots of people in shopping centres, particularly at this time of year, are you busy and distracted, just going about your business and you don't really notice the songs being played in the shopping centre around you?

Perhaps there's only so much silent night and I'm dreaming of a white Christmas you can take in a day, so maybe after a while you become immune to it the more you go to shopping centres, maybe. But do you ever pay close attention to the songs we sing at Christmas?

Now, I love Christmas carols. Not all of them. Some are a bit dodgy. I don't like the idea of mummy kissing Santa Claus. I don't really care about a partridge in a pear tree or bells that jingle or that Santa Claus is coming to town.

[1 : 10] I still have no idea who King Wenceslas is, what he was doing on the Feast of Stephen and why there's a song about it. So some songs I do hate, but there are some absolutely brilliant songs that I love to sing.

Words like, Hail the heaven-born prince of peace. Hail the son of righteousness. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity.

Now that is solid gold Christian biblical theology right there. And have you ever noticed that these songs get played all over the place?

School Christmas carol nights and shopping centres. Lots of people sing the words. Even non-Christians sing these songs. Do you ever wonder if they ever stop and think about what they're really saying?

They're singing about the divinity of Jesus Christ and his saving work, reconciling sinners to God. Even the most unbelieving non-Christian sings these words at Christmas.

[2 : 13] Do you ever think that they ever stop and think about the words to these songs? Because songs are powerful. Songs teach us things.

Songs in the Bible especially teach us powerful truths about God. And there are songs all the way through the Bible. Tonight we're going to look at one of those songs in the New Testament.

It's Mary's song. It's also known as the Magnificat. It's called the Magnificat because in Latin, when the Bible was in Latin, the first word of this song, the first line begins like this, Magnificat anima mea dominum, which literally means my soul magnifies the Lord.

It's there in verse 46. So because of that, this song came to be known as the Magnificat. Before we look at the song though, we need to know what's just happened before this.

So far in Luke's historical first century account of Jesus. Now an angel has told a man, Zechariah, that he and his wife, Elizabeth, will conceive a son and call him John.

[3 : 22] Then the angel appears to Mary, a young girl, pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, and that she will also conceive and bear a son and his name will be Jesus.

So there's these two families paralleled at the beginning of Luke. Elizabeth is very old and she's infertile. Mary is a virgin. So the fact that both conceive and bear a child proves that God keeps his word.

And there's this parallel between Mary and Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband. So at the beginning of Luke chapter 1, there's an announcement to Zechariah that he will give birth to a son. Next, there's an announcement to Mary that she will give birth to a son.

Then we have Mary's song we're going to look at and then following after this is Zechariah's song. So they kind of mirror each other. There's these parallels going on in Luke. In verse 39, before Mary's song, she goes to visit Elizabeth.

In response to the news of verse 36, the angel says, Now your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son. This is the sixth month for her who is said to be barren, for nothing will be impossible with God.

[4 : 34] So Mary goes. Elizabeth is six months pregnant. And when she meets Elizabeth, Elizabeth's response not only confirms God's word to her, but also to Mary.

Elizabeth is pregnant, just as the angel of the Lord has said. But Elizabeth doesn't get caught up in throwing a baby shower for herself. She blesses Mary.

She puts all the attention on Mary, not herself. And then in verse 46, we begin, Mary bursts into this song of praise.

She says, My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. She goes on to say in verse 49, For the mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

Now the words in this song are not meaningless. Every line is steeped in Old Testament language and the Old Testament background. Mary's song actually very closely parallels the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 2 in the Old Testament.

[5 : 41] Now in 1 Samuel, Hannah was infertile. She couldn't conceive, but she prayed to the Lord that he would give her a son. The Lord heard her and enabled her to conceive and she bore Samuel.

And she sings a song and the words are so similar. Mary's words here are so similar to Hannah's. Mary knew her Bible very well or at least knew it well from oral tradition.

Hannah's praise to God has become Mary's praise to God and it is this great song of joy. And there's really two points to this song I want us to look at tonight and they are Who God is and what he has done.

That's what Mary sings about, who God is and what he has done. How sad it is that so many songs at Christmas try to take the attention away from God.

There are songs about reindeer, snowmen, Santa Claus, chestnuts, presents, even the Christmas tree gets its own song for crying out loud.

[6 : 46] I mean, it's a tree. And there's nothing wrong with singing about reindeer or a snowman or a tree, but have you ever noticed how many songs, especially at Christmas, try to squeeze God and Jesus out of the picture?

Well, not Mary, not this song. This song is all about God. Mary rejoices in God. God is the centre of attention in this song.

It is God's work, God's action, God's attributes, His character, His power, His promises. Notice the recurring words throughout the song. She keeps saying words like Him, He, His.

It's all God. Look at verse 46. My soul magnifies who? The Lord. She goes on to say, My spirit rejoices in who?

In God, my Saviour. The Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is His name, His mercy. He has shown, He has scattered, He has brought down, He has filled, He has helped His servant, Israel, and remembered His mercy, the promises He made to Abraham.

[8 : 06] Notice that it is all about God. God is the object and focus of her worship. And Mary just doesn't sing about God, but she rejoices in God.

Mary is not like the millions of people who walk around shopping centres singing great Trinitarian theology like, Hail the incarnate deity and have no idea what it means. She knows what she's saying.

She means every line. She believes in this God. And the song is just bursting with joy and praise. Notice we don't sing, Joy to the world, I've got a plasma screen TV.

We say, Joy to the world, the Lord has come. We sing that because it's true. Real lasting joy is found not in material things, even the peripheral things of Christmas, although they're good to enjoy.

Real lasting joy is found in God. Mary models that for us. Real lasting joy is found in God.

[9 : 13] And Mary tells us who God is. Verse 46, My soul magnifies the Lord, God my Saviour. She calls Him in verse 49, the Mighty One.

He is the Lord, the Saviour, the Mighty One. Mary's God is the God of the Bible. He's the God who made the universe and everything in it.

He's the God of Genesis who created everything just by speaking. He rules His creation as Lord and King. He is also the Saviour because in the great salvation story of the Old Testament, the exodus out of Egypt, God delivered His people from their enemies.

But there's actually the biggest salvation story of the Bible where God is the Saviour. He's the God who has promised to deal with the great problem of humanity's rebellion against God and His righteous anger at our rebellion.

God promised to deal with the problem of our rebellion and His righteous anger at us by sending Jesus. The most famous verse in the Bible, John 3.16, says, That God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son, that He gave Him to die for us, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

[10:40] And that's exactly what we sing about when we say the words, Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King, Peace on earth, Mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

We sing about how God reconciles sinners to Himself through Jesus. God is the mighty Saviour because He gave His Son to die on a cross in our place and to take the punishment we deserve. Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King.

The salvation story is even bigger than just the forgiveness of sins. Look at the language of verses 51 to 53. He has shown strength with His arm.

He's scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He's brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

[11:51] Now, at one level, Mary's words don't match reality. Not for her and at least in the first century, hungry still went unfed and rich still oppressed the poor and the pagan Romans still ruled Jerusalem and not much has changed today either.

The poor are still poor. There is still injustice. God's people are still oppressed in many parts of the world. So, how do these words make any sense at all?

Well, Mary's words speak about the future kingdom of God as a present reality. The future kingdom of God where God's King or Messiah, when He rules, that future promises this where God's people are vindicated.

God the judge rights every wrong. God punishes His enemies. Now, that's a day in the future but Mary speaks about it as though it is already done.

In other words, God's promises are so sure and so certain because God always keeps His promises, the future that God promises is as good as done.

[13:03] With the coming birth of Jesus, the rule of God's kingdom, the ruler of God's kingdom has begun to reign. So, consider the future kingdom already here.

The great promises to Abraham are now fulfilled in Jesus. They are words of great trust in God and His Son, King Jesus.

I mean, we've only just scratched the surface to this song. I mean, you could do a year's worth of sermons on this song but already we have started to see some significant realities for us to consider.

Firstly, the words of this song are all about God. Second, this God is the reigning and rescuing Lord over all. And third, God's Son, the Lord Jesus is the fulfilment of this song as the crucified and risen Lord and God.

Mary's song is a joyful expression of trust and praise in this God. Mary's not like the shoppers and people attending carols by candlelight with Ray Martin or whoever it is who blindly sing about God's incarnate Son all the while going about their lives keeping Him at arm's length.

[14:21] Mary's not like that. She knows the God of the Bible. She trusts Him and she worships Him. So let me ask you, do you know what you are singing?

When you sing of God's Son being the Prince of Peace, the ruler of the world, do you believe it? Is the God of the Bible your God?

Or are you like the crowds of people who only sing about God's exalted Son but deep down in your heart it doesn't make a difference to your life at all. You don't acknowledge Him for who He is.

You say the words but it's meaningless. Is that you? I would urge you and encourage you to put your trust in this God. He is trustworthy. He always keeps His promises.

I would encourage you to seek Him by praying to Him and by trusting His Son Jesus Christ. Now this church we want to help all people regardless of background to know and worship Jesus as their King.

[15 : 24] One immediate way you can put Mary's song into practice after the service there's a table out there with a whole bunch of books you can take home and read one of which is called The Essential Jesus. It's very short.

It's shorter than the Bible. You could read it in probably less time it takes you to watch an episode of MasterChef or The Simpsons. It's a very quick read. This is Luke's Gospel so you'll be able to flick through it read the words and deeds of Jesus yourself and come to know Him.

So there's some books for there for you to look at on the way out. We'd love for you to look at those or perhaps sign up for Introducing God to learn more about the God of the Bible. That's just one or two practical ways you can immediately put into practice what we've heard about from Mary's song. So do you know and worship and trust this God? O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him. O come let us adore Him.

Christ the Lord. Amen.