

The Great God and His Son

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[0 : 00] My friends, let's pray. Gracious Father, we pray that you would teach us this morning from your word and drive us to the worship of your Son in all of our lives.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. Well, it was a long weekend and seven soldiers, two war veterans, all had seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They were joined by a couple of musicians and all were back home, trying to adjust and trying to make sense of it all. Some were in therapy. Some marriages were failing.

And the goal, well, to craft their stories into song. And some knew what they wanted to say and some didn't know what they could or even what they would say. Beers were shared.

Personal stories recounted. Stories of friends lost in combat. Stories of multiple injuries from roadside bomb blasts. Of struggles with wives, with alcohol and with injury.

[1 : 13] But as the weekend went on, a song was formed. And it was checked. It was set to music. It was given a name. And then it was sung. And everyone clapped.

They cheered. They patted each other on the back. Some smiled for the first time in the whole weekend. A tear was shed or two. And somehow, some way, they felt a little better.

Friends, story and song is a wonderful and powerful combination, isn't it? It can be incredible therapy. And it's that combination which is loved by the writers of Scripture.

I mean, just think about it for a moment. Think about the story that form introductions to the Psalms. You know the little bits that I mean. Right at the beginning of a Psalm, you'll have a little story about this is what David was experiencing at this point.

And then you go on and you tell the song. Think about the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, which reaches its crescendo in the song of the sea. Think about the story of the song of Deborah that we read earlier on this year, celebrating Israel's defeat of Sisera in the book of Judges.

[2 : 21] And what about that poetic prayer or perhaps song of Hannah as she theologically reflects on the gift God had given her of a son, Samuel, and that he'd given to all of Israel.

And think about that time when song bursts into your consciousness and draws tears from your eyes because of the echoes it brings of life and of your story in life.

You see, story, poetry, song, and music, a variety of forms, but an immensely powerful combination.

And today we're going to see yet another example from Scripture in the text that we've just had read to us. Great deeds will be seen and appropriately they will be turned into song. They'll be turned into prayer and they'll be turned into exaltation of the one of whom they are singing.

So let's see what we can learn. And I want you to turn with me to Luke chapter 1. I'll just give you a moment to find it in your Bibles. Luke chapter 1. I think it's 2025 or something like that from memory.

[3 : 23] 1,025. Now, you might remember from the past few weeks, we've been looking at these first couple of chapters of Luke as a lead up to Christmas.

Let me give you a big picture of these chapters. You see, Luke is very different from John. John simply states that Jesus became human. He states, as it were, the incarnation of Jesus when he simply says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

It is a powerful statement. But Luke treats the whole thing somewhat differently. You see, what Luke does is he tells stories, stories of people's lives.

And altogether, there are 10 of them. Stories of priests, of two women, of two births, of angels, of shepherds, of women, prophets, and of aging, devout men, and of priests who are visited in a temple.

And so far, we have only seen one of those stories. It was the story of Zechariah the Christ. And it was told in, you might remember, from verse 5 through to 23 of chapter 1. And it was the announcement of John the Baptist's coming birth.

[4 : 33] You might remember how the father, that is the priest, Zechariah, was not a paragon of belief, was he? Do you remember? The messenger came, promised him certain things, and he questioned the messenger of God, and he expressed some sort of doubt and unbelief, and God struck him dumb.

He had to wait the whole nine months before he could speak again. But God fulfilled his word. Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant, and we read about that in verses 24 and 25. Anyway, today we're going to come to another announcement that follows on this one. This time, it's the announcement of the birth of Jesus. And we're told that in verses 26 through to 38. And immediately, as we read the story, we notice there are similarities between this announcement and the one that had preceded it. First, they share a common progression. Both have an introduction to the parents. Both recount specific problems related to bearing children. Both Zechariah and Mary have an angelic encounter.

[5 : 44] Both are told by name not to be afraid. Both are promised a son. Both object in some way. And both are given a sign.

In both stories, the angel departs after delivering the message. And both stories, if you check them in detail, you'll find the language even is very similar. Here are the stories of two boys who will become men of renown.

Here are the links between the two boys. God, you see, is doing something with these two.

That something involves these two children. This something involves two children where the second child is of a totally different stature to the first.

This something is so incredibly special that it needs to be so orchestrated by God like a symphony being played out.

[6 : 48] One story involves a child whose parents are at the heart of Israel, at the very heart of the temple of God, separated only by one thin curtain.

Even the story involving the greater child doesn't take place in the center of Israel. It takes place somewhat in the back blocks, in Galilee of the Gentiles.

At the same time, it is heralded by incredible scriptural precedents. Friends, let me tell you that the things said about Jesus in these verses we look at from 26 to 38 are absolutely stupendous.

Any Jewish reader, we're so used to them that we cannot hear them any longer. Any Jewish reader who heard the things said about Jesus here would be overwhelmed and staggered by their enormity.

When they are put together, they are saying that this child, born of this virgin, will be a colossal figure. He will be the greatest ruler that Israel and the world has ever seen.

[7 : 57] Just look at what's said about him. Look at verse 31. His name will be Jesus. That is, his name will be the Lord is salvation, or if you like, the Lord saves. In verse 32, he will be great.

You see, others are said to be great before the Lord, but this one, no, he's great in himself. Verse 32, he'll be called the son of the most high. This is the language applied to David's descendants in the Old Testament.

It is regal imagery. Rich in overtones of kingship and glory. And backed up by the second half of the verse, where the Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David.

He will reign over Jacob's descendants. That is over all of Israel. In other words, whether they like it or not, Jesus will become king of the Jews.

And his kingdom will never have an end. His rule will be forever and ever. Nothing will overcome his rule or him.

[8 : 57] Presumably, not even death will stop it. Friends, can you hear this? As we listen in on this conversation with this young woman, we are listening in on the pinnacle of God's plans and purposes for his world.

And they are tied up, we find, with a child born of this virgin. Now look at verse 25. After a question by Mary, God answers by saying that just as God created life in Genesis, this is my interpretation of it.

So he will create a life beyond any that has been seen on earth. Through the work of his spirit, he will create life in the womb of this woman.

The result will be a holy one. He will be the son of God. This is the very first story in our passage for today.

It looks back on that previous incident in the temple. And it looks forward to the incident that will follow. Let's take a quick look at the one that follows. If the previous two stories were told of the intertwining of two sons, this story and the one before tells of the intertwining of two mothers.

[10:08] Two mothers. One from the center of Jerusalem. The wife of the most honored priest in Israel at this time. An older woman.

Formerly infertile. But now pregnant. And the other? Well, she's related to Elizabeth. Living in Galilee of the Gentiles. Betrothed to an otherwise unknown Joseph.

Joseph. A younger woman. A virgin. But now pregnant. And as Elizabeth comes to this younger woman and they meet. Elizabeth performs the role of a prophet.

As Mary had been overwhelmed by the spirit, so Elizabeth is now filled with the Holy Spirit. As Deborah the prophet extolled her fellow woman deliverer in the book of Judges, so Elizabeth extols Mary, the one who holds God's future deliverer in her womb.

And she describes the significance of what has happened. You see, she says Mary has been significantly blessed by the Lord. Mary's son will later on declare that there had been no greater person than John the Baptist before him.

[11:22] But Elizabeth, can you see what she's now doing? She now declares that Mary is more blessed than any woman before her. Now look at verse 42. In a loud voice she acclaimed, Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will be.

You see, Elizabeth knows what has happened. She may be an older woman. She may be the high priest's wife. But Mary is the one exalted. After all, as verse 43 indicates, She is the father of Elizabeth's Lord.

And already her child had acknowledged the greatness of what was going on. Look at verse 44. We're told that, As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy.

We don't know what's going on here, except somehow God is saying to Elizabeth and Mary, this is something else. Friends, in verses 46 to 56, Mary responds with what has been called the Magnificat.

In it, story is turned to song. Song interprets story. Song theologizes over and overwhelms story.

[12:34] Now I don't have time to ponder it in depth, but I want to draw out two ideas from it, and I want you to check them out with me. There are echoes you see here of at least two Old Testament songs.

The first is the song that was sung at the edge of the sea after crossing the sea in the book of Exodus. The second is the song that Hannah sings after giving birth to her child, Samuel. Just like Moses, Mary extols God and speaks of his deeds. Great. God has done great things for her. Verse 49.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. Verse 51. Just like Moses, Mary celebrates the salvation he has brought. Her spirit rejoices in God, her saviour.

Verse 47. And just like Moses, Mary speaks of God as a warrior, waging war against the enemies of the people of God. She declares, he has performed mighty deeds with his arm.

[13:32] He's scattered those who are proud in their innermost thoughts. Verse 51. Just as God dethroned Pharaoh, so now he has brought down rulers from their thrones.

Verse 52. Hannah has declared, had declared that God reverses roles and positions. Back in 1 Samuel 2. Mary picks this up. She, he, she says, he brings down rulers and lifts up the humble.

Verse 52. He is the mighty one who has done great things for her. Friends, can you see, we've seen the intertwining of the lives of two women. We've seen the intertwining of the lives of two human sons.

But you know, in these two sections, we see something even greater. We see the intertwining of Jesus, the son and God, the father, and even the intertwining of them with the work of the spirit. You see, God, the father, God, the son are alone. The great ones in this story. They are the focus of this story. They are whom this story is about.

[14:38] They are the supreme champions here. Theirs is the glory here. Friends, having said this, I want you to notice one thing else. One other thing.

See, I want you to go back and look at Mary for a moment, back in the story about her. You see, although God, the father and God, the son are the supreme focus here. They're not the only focus. You see, the spotlight does also fall on Mary, doesn't it?

The background is set for the spotlight is set by the spotlight of the unbelief of Zechariah back in the early part of the chapter, the part that we didn't look at today.

Do you remember what happened when he heard the word of God and questioned it? He became dumb. Not so with Mary.

Did you notice that? You see, Mary's story, which bounces off Zechariah's story, has echoes of great call narratives in the Old Testament. God comes to Mary.

[15 : 35] He tells her of his plans. He lays them out before her, and she embraces them without question or complaint. There are strong echoes of the story of Gideon that we read earlier on this year.

Like Gideon, she is greeted by an angel with a remarkable greeting. The Lord is with you. Like Gideon, she's overwhelmed by God's spirit. Like many who preceded her in God's salvation plans, Mary is commissioned and equipped by God's spirit for her God ordained task.

And she, the humble servant, embraces God's plan for his people. Now she may express her unworthiness, but that just emphasizes her suitability for the task, doesn't it?

She's not like Zechariah. In Luke chapter one, verse 20, Zechariah said to be unbelieving of God's word. As a result, he is struck dumb, but not Mary.

Look at chapter one, verse 45. Elizabeth acknowledges, Mary's dissimilarity to Zechariah, because where Zechariah was unbelieving, Mary believes.

[16 : 48] She believes that the Lord will fulfill his promises. And now, have a check this out. Have a look at her tongue. It's not dumb like Zechariah's.

God does not bind it like Zechariah's tongue. No, instead, it is filled with the praise of the glory of God. For from the believing heart, friends, comes glory and praise of the great God.

And of his great son. Can you see what I'm saying? Mary is not God. She is human, but she models what it is to be human and what it is to be called the servant of God.

She is not unbelieving. She is not resisting. She hears God's word. She believes God's word. She embraces God's word. And she declares God's great praise.

And friends, I want to urge you to contemplate these things this Christmas as you do the appropriate thing in response. Friends, I urge you not to be overwhelmed by the shopping, the cooking, the eating, the drinking, the celebrating and the joyous family times.

[18 : 01] Good that though, though they are. No, but this Christmas be overwhelmed by God's greatness. You see, he has planned these things from before he spoke that first word into the darkness and chaos of Genesis one.

He has executed his plans systematically and with great precision. He has planned for this day. He has worked to overwhelm evil.

He has worked to provide salvation for his world. Like a warrior and a shepherd, he's waged war and come to the aid of his people. And he has made and fulfilled his promises.

And all of them find their focus in this great promise of his son. One, this is our great God, a great king above all gods.

Be overwhelmed by him and his greatness this Christmas. And second, I urge you to be overwhelmed by the greatness of his son. Friends, be staggered at this babe.

[19 : 13] You see, he is the climax of the purposes of his great father. He is the greatest, the truest human this world has ever seen.

He is the greatest ruler. This world has seen or ever will see so that at the end of time, all will bow their knee before him for he alone is worthy of it.

In him, God will be the divine warrior waging war on his and our enemies. In him, God will be the merciful God of his promises who sides with the humble and the lowly.

In him and his death, this will reach its climax as he triumphs, as he rules from the cross in humility, obedience and triumph.

Friends, be staggered at this great God. And I urge you this Christmas to be staggered at his great son. Believe God's promise fulfilled in his son.

[20 : 25] Be a believer and then do the appropriate thing. Open your mouth in praise and exaltation of God and his son. And to do this, I thought we'd get started.

And you might reach into the newsletter if you've got it. Otherwise, pick up your Bible again at Luke one, page 1025. And turn to verse 46 with me.

So Luke one, verse 46. And I want you to exalt with me in our great God and savior and in his purposes, in his son.

I thought, let's stand to do it. And we don't, we don't have morning prayer here at 10 o'clock anymore, but we do it at eight o'clock once a month.

And we, we say the Magnificat, this particular thing. I think it's a great time to be saying it together, isn't it? In the lead up to Christmas. So please join with me in reading verses 46 to 55.

[21 : 30] My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on, all generations will call me blessed. For the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm. He has staggered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones and lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things, but he has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Just as he promised to our ancestors. Amen. Please sit down. Amen.