

Mary's Song

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Date: 07 December 2025

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[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 12, beginning at the first verse. The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country, your people, and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse.

And all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. This is the word of the Lord. Luke chapter 1, verse 39.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zachariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear. But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

[1 : 20] As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her.

Mary said, My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. 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 scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.

[2 : 27] He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever. Just as he promised our ancestors.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. This is the word of the Lord. I wonder if you know what a parent's favourite Christmas carol is.

Silent Night? It's one of those really corny Christmas cracker jokes. But it's just a way of introducing the idea of Christmas carols. And I wonder what your favourite Christmas carol is.

Why don't you turn to your neighbour, front, behind, beside, and you've got 33 seconds to discuss. Go. Go. All right.

That'll do. I don't know if you have a favourite Christmas carol or not. But we certainly hear them this time of year, don't we?

[3 : 49] Quite a bit. So we hear them in the shopping centres still, which is quite a nice thing. We hear them on TV. We sing them at church. They're all around us. And so this December, I thought we'd look at the very first Christmas carols, that is the songs in the Bible around the birth of Jesus.

And so this week, we're looking at Mary's song. Next week, we'll look at Zechariah's song. Then for our carol service on the 21st, we'll look at an early church song. Then for Christmas Day, the angels song.

And then for the last Sunday of December, Simeon's song. And as we do, we'll see why Christmas is really worth singing about, like Mary does today.

And her song begins with a joyful magnification of God. Point one, verse 46 and 47. It begins, and Mary said, my soul glorifies the Lord.

And for some reason, the verse on the screen is missing a line. It says, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. Sorry, no. Let me read it again.

[4 : 57] Mary said, my soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. It's missing a line later on. Here, Mary begins by singing a song, although verse 46 says, Mary said, doesn't it?

And so perhaps Mary spoke it, but the poetic and joyful nature of it suggests that she actually sung it. Either way, it says her soul glorifies the Lord.

But the word glorify is literally magnify. That's why this song is sometimes known as the Magnificat. Have you heard of that name? It's the Latin version of magnify, because that's how she begins her song.

Now, when you magnify something, you make it bigger, right? If you want to look at an ant and make it bigger, you use a magnifying glass. And when you look through the magnifying glass, the ant becomes bigger, doesn't it?

Or if you've got a picture on a postcard and you want to make it bigger, you go to Officeworks and you blow it up to A3. You magnify it, enlarge it, make it bigger. That's what the word means. And Mary wants to make God bigger, to exalt him in her life, to lift him up with her words.

[6 : 08] But there is a difference, of course, between God and the ant and postcard picture. God already is big and great, isn't he? And so Mary's magnification of God is really just trying to show how big and great God already is, to magnify him in her life, to show how great he is in reality.

And her magnification is a joyful one. Verse 47 says it's coupled with rejoicing in God, her saviour. This is Mary's joyful magnification.

And one way she does this is by singing about God, which is one way we can too. Even if we're not naturally big singers, we can still magnify God in song.

After all, if the most hard and footy fans can sing their team's song, then certainly we can sing about our great God, can't we? Of course, what helps us and moves us to do that is remembering what God has done for us.

And that's what Mary does now, what God has done for her. She magnifies God because of God's merciful reversal for her. Point two, verse 48.

[7 : 22] And this is where it's missing our line. Verse 48. For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. And it should also say on the screen, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

Now notice verse 48 begins with the word for or because. And so we know it's giving the reason for her magnification of God. For God has looked on the humble or lowly state of his servant Mary and will lift her up so that she is called blessed by every generation.

You see, a young woman in the ancient world would have been seen as lowly or humble, a nobody. But God has made her a somebody, lifted her up to the privileged position of being the mother of our Lord and Savior, such that even generations today call her blessed.

Of course, some people go too far and worship Mary as a co-redeemer along with Christ. Although it's encouraging to hear the new Pope kind of put an end to that.

This is an article from last month where Pope Leo says, Yes, Mary has a unique role but rejects the co-redemptrix, which is the Latin way of saying co-redeemer title for Mary.

[8 : 45] And the article goes on to say that Christ alone saves humanity. That's pretty good, right? And so hence the Pope is putting the crown on the statue of Jesus and not Mary.

He still holds that you can pray to Mary and ask her to pray for you or intercede for you, which is not what we see in the Bible. But either way, it's true that Mary has a unique role to play, which is a reversal of her low estate in the eyes of her society to a privileged position as the mother of Jesus. In fact, it's this reversal that prompted Mary to sing this song in the first place. Earlier in our reading, when she visits her relative Elizabeth, Elizabeth is filled by the Holy Spirit and exclaims, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

Why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb, which was John the Baptist, leapt for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her. And Mary said or sung. You see how Mary's song is in response to this privileged position, this blessing among women as being the mother of Jesus.

[10 : 04] In fact, the other thing to notice though is verse 45. This blessing also comes because, verse 45, she has believed the word of the Lord, that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her.

You see, just before our passage, an angel appeared to Mary and said, Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favour with God, grace, mercy.

You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he

will reign over Jacob's descendants forever.

His kingdom will never end. And then Mary naturally asked, Well, hang on a second, how is this going to happen, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered, Well, the Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, so the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.

Even Elizabeth, your relative, is going to have a child in her own age, and the one who is said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.

[11:15] Now, at this point, Mary could have said, Oh, hogwash. As if that's going to happen. Yes, I've heard of people who maybe couldn't have kids, and then suddenly they could have had kids, so I get Elizabeth's case, but a virgin having a kid?

Don't be daft. She could have refused to believe that word, but she didn't. Verse 38, she goes on to say, I am the Lord's servant, Mary answered. May your word to me be fulfilled.

Which is a polite way of saying, I believe, bring it on. The point is, it's because she believed God's word to her, that she's also blessed.

I mean, if she didn't believe, I take it that God could have found another young woman to show favor to instead, but because Mary did believe, she is blessed with this merciful reversal, and now joyfully magnifies God because of it.

And the next reason is essentially the same. As she goes on to say in verse 49, For the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name.

[12:20] Notice verse 49 also starts with the word for or because. It's giving us another reason why she magnifies God. And this reason is because he has done great things for her.

What things are they? Well, the things we've just seen. First, how God showed Mary favor or grace and mercy, choosing her out of all people for the honor of being Jesus' mother.

And then second, by faith, he would reverse her lowly state to a privileged position, such that every generation will call her blessed. This mercy and this reversal are the two great things God has done, which is the same as before in verse 48, right?

And so this second reason to joyfully magnify God in verse 49 is essentially the same as the first in verse 48, but with one difference. Mary in verse 49 also magnifies God for his character.

Notice how she calls God the mighty one and says, Holy is his name. You see, no one else could pull off this virgin birth. And so it means God is set apart as holy.

[13:31] That's what the word holy means, set apart as the only God who is mighty enough to pull this off. As some people have told me in the past that, yeah, I believe in God, but I don't believe in miracles, so I don't believe in Jesus.

But that's actually illogical, isn't it? I mean, if you believe in God, a mighty one who created the world, then the virgin birth is a piece of cake, right? And so Mary magnifies God for his character, the mighty one, who then shows her mercy and reversal.

But then her song moves from herself to others. Point three, verse 50. His mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.

He, God's mercy, is not just for Mary, but extends to all those who fear him from every generation. That's us. For all those who revere him, if you like, which includes believing his word to them, to us, like Mary did.

About what word? Well, clearly it's not a word that we're going to give birth to the Son of God, right? It's the word that the angel declares to the shepherds in the next chapter. These famous words.

[14:49] Angel doesn't appear to Mary this time, but to the shepherds and said to them, do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you.

He is the Messiah or Christ, the Lord. Jesus is our King and saviour who saves us from our sins. This is the good news for us who believe his word.

And if we believe his word to us, like we heard Caleb here this morning say that he believed, then we will be blessed with a merciful reversal too. See verse 51 to 53.

Did you notice the reversals there?

Verse 51 and 2. Those who are proud in their hearts, God will scatter. And in particular, it seems he's thinking about arrogant rulers whom he'll bring down, while the humble or lowly he will lift up.

[16:02] It's a reversal. And because the humble are contrasted with the rulers, I take it it's being lifted up to rule. Either way, there's a reversal.

And in verse 53, the hungry will be filled, the rich will be empty. It's another reversal, right? But did you notice it all sounds like it's already happened?

It's all past tense, isn't it? He has brought down proud rulers. He has lifted past tense the humble. He has filled past tense the hungry, sent past tense away the rich.

And yet we don't see it in our world, do we? I mean, we can all still think of arrogant rulers, can't we? I mean, just turn on the news and I'm sure you'll see some. And the rich still seem to get richer, don't they?

Well, humble Christians continue to be persecuted around our world and counted as lowly in the eyes of our society. And yet Mary speaks as though our merciful reversal has already happened.

[17:10] She does the same for Israel in the last couple of verses of her song. She goes on to say, She again speaks as though God has already done this.

He's already accomplished those promises we heard in our first reading. You know the promises to Abraham? Land, offspring, blessing, that LOB acronym. And while there, yes, there were lots of offspring or Israelites in Mary's day, their land was ruled by the Romans.

It's not their own. And while some enjoyed the blessing of knowing God, they still lived life in this world that was fallen and under a curse. And so it was not always good.

We know that too, too, don't we? And so it's like God has kept some promises, but not yet all his promises. And yet Mary sings as though he has.

As though he's kept all the promises completely, as though we're already enjoying our complete merciful reversal. Why does she sing like this? Because it's her way of speaking about its certainty.

[18:25] There is so certain God will do all this in the future, she sings as though he has already done it in the past. I was talking to one of the kids from this congregation who told me we have a dog.

And when I kind of said, Oh, well, nice, nice. What's the name? The mother heard me and kind of stepped in and clarified and said, Oh, we don't have one yet. Are we getting one later in the year? To which I replied, Are you really sure? Have you got one yet? Alice and Booth? I don't know. The point is, Emily was so certain they were getting a dog in the future that she spoke as though it already happened in the past.

As though she already had one. Well, that's what Mary is doing here. But why is she so certain it will happen in the first place? Because she's about to give birth to the promised King and Saviour, the one on whom all God's promises and our merciful reversal rests.

And so if this was about to happen, the birth of Jesus, then she was certain God's promises to Israel and God's merciful reversible for us will happen.

[19:39] It's a bit like on a Friday night when our teenage kids are hungry and my wife Michelle promises to reverse their hunger and fill them with good things, which for my kids means take away from shopping town.

And so when Michelle drives up the driveway from work, before she's even gone up the shopping down to get the grilled or snits or whatever it is, they celebrate as though they've already got the food.

Why? Well, because her imminent arrival means their promised reversal is certain. That's why. It works, right?

Like, Jesus, he's not before he's born and grows up, his imminent arrival means God's promised reversal is certain. That's the connection.

That's why Mary is so certain and sings as though it's already happened. But we can have even more certainty than Mary. But we live this side of Christmas, don't we?

[20:36] Jesus' first arrival with his birth, death and resurrection has already happened. And so our reversal has actually already begun. For at the cross, Jesus took the punishment for our sins.

So instead of facing punishment we deserve, we can mercifully receive forgiveness instead. That's a reversal, isn't it? From punishment to forgiveness. Instead of being enemies with God, as the Bible calls us, we can be given life with God now.

Life where we have the privilege of calling the God of the universe Father, just as we heard in Caleb's testimony. And enjoy the privileged position of being his child with Jesus.

And it is a privileged position. For as much as God loves his son, that's how much God loves you. As precious as Jesus is to the Father, that's how precious are you.

As much as the son inherits, that's how much will you. Because we are connected to Christ. We are co-heirs, brothers and sisters with Christ.

[21 : 54] You see, the world sees us as lowly nobodies, but in Christ God has made us extraordinary somebodies. Our merciful reversal has already begun.

And since it's already begun, since Jesus has already got the ball rolling, then we can be even more certain it will be completed. That Jesus will arrive a second time on judgment day, the last day to finish the job.

To scatter the proud and bring down the arrogant rulers, but lift up the humble believers to rule with Christ, which the Bible says we will. And to remove the hunger and emptiness in life, because we live in a beautiful but broken world.

And bring the blessing of permanent feasting and fullness of life instead. But only if we believe in Jesus.

We are those who fear and revere God such that we believe his word to us about Jesus. And so do you. Do you believe that the one born at Christmas is God the Son, who came to earth, become human, and then die in your place?

[23 : 06] To pay for your sins. So you could begin to enjoy a merciful reversal now and completely later. And for us who do believe, then do we understand our privileged position in Christ?

Now. And the certainty of our full life to come later. If we really let it sink in, then it should cause us, move us to do what Mary did.

And joyfully magnify God. Point four. How? Well, firstly, in our lives, by seeking more of him and less of us.

Just picking up on that word magnify, remember, it means to make bigger. And so we want to seek to make God bigger in our lives and us smaller. For example, seeking more of his character and less of our sinful nature.

Seeking more of his priorities and less of our desires. Seeking more to rely on his strength than on ours.

[24 : 18] More on his word than our wisdom. We can magnify God in our lives by seeking to make him bigger and us smaller. Seeking more of him and less of me.

Seeking more of him and less of us. That's how we can magnify God in our lives. But more like Mary, we can secondly magnify God with our words. Including singing. Back in 2021, a Bendigo woman bursts into song after answering one million dollar Tats Lotto winning phone call.

I'm not sure what song she sang. But, you know, to go from a few dollars to a million dollars, that's a pretty good reversal, isn't it? And it caused her to sing because of it.

Now, as much as we'd all like a million bucks, and I'm sure we all could handle getting one, getting a million dollars. Our merciful reversal is actually greater. Because a million dollars doesn't actually go that far these days.

And those who win it often find that the peace and contentment doesn't last either. But what God gives us lasts an eternity.

[25 : 28] All at the cost of his only son's blood. And if we really get how great this merciful reversal is and what it costs God to give it to us, to begin it for us, it ought to move us to magnify God with our words too, wouldn't it?

We're not going to do it, including by singing. As I said before, we may not be big singers naturally, but if hard and footy fans can do it, then so too can we. We've got even better reasons to sing.

But also by speaking of him with our words. I was getting to know the butcher at Jackson Court, a guy called Steve, just down the road. He's a nice guy.

He even said to me that if anyone from your church comes in and says they're from your church, I'll give them a 10% discount. But before you get excited, his prices are quite high. But anyway, he wanted to ask me about the difference between Jehovah's Witnesses and Christians and things like that.

And so I had a chance to magnify God's name. Talk about God's goodness in giving Jesus. And how every religion or cult around the world, it's all about what we have to do to earn our way to heaven.

[26 : 39] But in the Christian faith, it's all about what Jesus has already done to give us a place in heaven. Well, last week, we were both lamenting, Steve and I, about the cold weather, despite it almost being summer.

And he asked if I could use my connections with the guy upstairs to do something about it, to which I replied, Well, I'm sure that big guy sees more than we do and has good reasons for it.

These were my attempts to try and magnify God with my words, you see. The point is we can magnify God in our lives, firstly, by seeking more of him and less of me.

But then also, secondly, with our words, whether it's singing or speaking about him. And thirdly, in our hearts, by being joyful because of him. Remember, Mary rejoiced in God her saviour, even in her lowly or humble state, because she believed in what was coming, the birth of Jesus.

For us, it's the return of Jesus. That's what's coming. And not to mention the reversal and the privileged position we already have in Jesus. And so this ought to make us joyful, even when we face little life.

[27 : 50] I was listening to a podcast where they were speaking about how there are more Christian Anglicans in Africa than the rest of the world combined. And the two guys speaking on the podcast were commenting how they went to a conference in Africa and how, despite having very little, these African Christians were so joyful.

Joy was a mark of their lives because of Jesus. Now, yes, the African culture is a bit more outgoing than the Western culture. Even at the Archbishop, for those who don't know, we got a new Archbishop last Sunday.

He was installed in the St Paul's Cathedral. And after the installation took place, the African women started cheering with, what's that called? That ululation? It's kind of...

That's it. I was actually going to ask Florence for a demonstration, but I didn't want to... Yeah.

Anyway, and, you know, they kind of burst into here with joyful and all the Western clergy...

The golf clap, right? But we could learn something from our African brothers and sisters or from Mary herself by living joyful lives because of God, even in the face of little.

[29 : 00] It's not always easy, so we need to keep remembering the merciful reversal God has begun for us with Christ's first arrival at Christmas. And we'll complete with Christ's second arrival on the last day.

If we remember this, it will help us, like Mary, to joyfully magnify our God too.