

# Luke 1:46-56 AM

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Let's bow our heads and pray. Heavenly Father, as you sent your Holy Spirit to overshadow Mary and form Christ in her womb physically, we pray now that your same Spirit would overshadow us, that Christ would be formed in our hearts, we pray. Amen.
- Amen. Well, if you turn back to Luke chapter 1, that little reading that was read for us, this is the first and best Christmas carol sung by Mary, the Virgin Mother of the Lord Jesus, right after her supernatural pregnancy has been confirmed by Auntie Elizabeth.
- And her song is full of wonder and joy. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.
- And this has become part of Christian worship since the 5th century onwards, as we as Christians see in these words of Mary our same experience of Jesus, even if we don't conceive Jesus physically in our wombs.
- And it's even a part of the Anglican evening prayer service. So that can tell you just how important it is. Now, the lovely thing about this is Mary does not fully understand what is happening, but she is being changed in the depth of her being, her soul and her spirit.
- [ 1 : 4 0 ]     That's where she begins. And like all Christians, she knows that the grace of God is not something you choose, but the grace of God is something that chooses you.
- And her sense of mercy and her sense of grace coming from the outside are not just changing her physically as she bears the child, they're changing her in the depths of who she really is.
- My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. The angel Gabriel had just appeared to her, not in Jerusalem and in the temple where he had six months earlier to Zechariah the priest, announcing the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth, but in a hometown in Nazareth of Galilee, one of the most irrelevant and poorest villages in Israel.
- And Gabriel tells her that she has found favour with God. Literally, she has found grace with God because nothing she's done could deserve this.
- It's a work of God's free grace from beginning to end. And after announcing that she will conceive and bear a son, Gabriel then explains, if that's not gobsmacking enough, that the child will be both human and divine.
- [ 3 : 1 1 ]     He says he'll be great, which is a word only used in the Bible of God. He will be the son of the Most High, a term only used of God. And he will found an eternal kingdom that will rule forever.
- He will rule forever, something only God can do. And after briefly pointing out to Gabriel that that's impossible, that she has never had sex with anyone, Gabriel says to her, well, yes, we know.
- And God will overshadow you so that the child that will be born will be holy. That this child that is to be born in you is going to be the beginning of a new humanity, a new birth humanity, bearing the image of the holy God in a new way.

Mary, in your womb, God is refashioning the whole human race to reflect the holiness of God. And as soon as he finishes speaking, she instantly takes a long journey down to Judea, where Auntie Elizabeth lives, who is miraculously six months pregnant with John the Baptist.

And when she comes to the door and enters into the house, the unborn baby, John the Baptist, leaps inside Elizabeth's womb in joy and recognition at the coming of Jesus.

[ 4 : 40 ] And Elizabeth says, it's a very noisy household, Elizabeth yells out, why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? And I don't know if you've ever thought about this before, but it means that somewhere between Gabriel speaking to Mary in Nazareth and her arriving in Judea, the Holy Spirit has overshadowed her and she has conceived the Holy Child.

And when Mary hears Elizabeth's greeting, until now everything's been all action and movement, but everything comes to a halt. As she's been taking this journey of, you know, 80 to 100 kilometres, she's been thinking deeply about what these things might mean.

And now she bursts into song and praise and joy. My soul magnifies the Lord. Now, if she was a contemporary artist, what would she sing about?

What she'd sing about herself and what the experience means to her. But that's not what her song is about. Her song is about God. It's the authentic Christian message.

Because the authentic Christian message is about God himself. And her song is full of God. He has looked. He is mighty. He has shown. He has scattered. He exalts.

[ 6 : 06 ] He pulls down. He has filled. God is the subject of almost every verb because this is what Christmas is all about. It is about God himself and what he has done and what he is doing and what he will do.

So Mary makes two basic points in the song about what God is doing in the birth of Jesus. And point number one is this. It is a revolution.

It's not a political revolution or a religious revolution. Nor is it a call to revolution so that we should try and overthrow the current order and establish God's kingdom now.

Because God is the subject of all the verbs, it's a celebration of God's radical revolutionary grace. In fact, God's action is against those who take power into their own hands.

So what God is doing in the very physical circumstances of Mary's life is nothing short of the beginning of a cosmic revolution that shows us that the final word in our world is not human power or corruption or greed or pride, but the miracle of God's grace, the revolution of God's grace to the humble brings salvation to those who don't deserve it.

[ 7 : 36 ] And Mary celebrates this revolutionary grace of God both personally and globally. She begins with the personal. Elizabeth has just declared, you are the mother of my Lord.

Because she realises that God is bringing the saviour of the world through the physicality of her own body. What do you do when you recognise that the grace of God and his salvation involves the reality of your own physical body as it does for all true Christians?

What you want to do is you want to expand your heart toward God. You want him to be magnified. You want to make God greater, to give him the greatest part of your heart since he is your saviour.

And it's very helpful, isn't it, that Mary calls God my saviour. God my saviour. Because it's right for us to honour Mary, particularly, I think, for the way that she received the news with great humility and belief.

But we cannot and we should not worship or venerate Mary. And she rightly calls God her saviour because she knows that she can't save anyone.

[ 8 : 53 ] She needs a saviour. And she's not sinless and she's not immaculate. She's aware of her own sin and a need of a saviour. This last week, Notre Dame, the cathedral was opened in Paris.

And I don't know if you've been there or not. It is utterly beautiful. And it's a national treasure. But it's not dedicated to God, nor is it dedicated to Jesus.

But it's dedicated to Mary, the Queen of Heaven. And most of the art in the cathedral has Mary in the top spot. While Jesus seems to remain on the cross, she offers herself as the answer to our prayers and to answer our prayers.

It's not what the Bible teaches. But Mary wants us to see the deep personal revolution of God's grace.

That without the invasion of this grace into the world, we create a world all mixed up and upside down, almost completely upside down from reality.

[ 9 : 57 ] We seem to begin to imagine that God is the end of me, of my freedom. And that his word is unrealistic and even repressive.

And his sexual ethic, particularly, speaking about the use of our bodies, is outmoded and negative and unhealthy. And the way to personal fulfilment is for me to express myself sexually any way I feel, so long as I don't hurt anybody else.

But in Mary, we have the beginning of the true sexual revolution. She says, my body is not merely or primarily given to me for personal pleasure, but for God's eternal purposes.

And what is truly revolutionary for all believers is that our bodies do not belong to us. They belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. They are meant for the Lord Jesus.

And the same Holy Spirit that came upon Mary and conceived Christ in her womb has come to dwell in us so that our bodies are the arena for the glory of God.

[ 11 : 11 ] But the revolution is not merely personal. She quickly goes on to say it's universal. Verse 51. He's scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts.

He's brought down the mighty from their thrones. He's exalted the humble. He's filled the hungry with good things and the rich he sent away empty. Because Christianity is not a private religion.

Mary is describing what happens in history and what will happen through the birth of Jesus. And this is the revolutionary power of God's grace. It's not the way we think today, is it?

I mean, I know opera is five years ago, but she's a great representative of the way we put the world together. In her book, she teaches that we should all find, and I quote, our authentic selves.

Her motto is, you are the captain of your own ship. And her method for finding answers are life are to look within because we are the measure of all things.

[ 12 : 17 ] And she says at the end of the book, she just knows that she was born for greatness. And then the mercy of God comes along and scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

puts down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those who are humble. I mean, it's so like God, isn't it, to bypass Caesar and choose Mary.

He's always looking for the humble to exalt them. He's always pulling down the high and the mighty and the proud and the arrogant. We've seen him do it this week. And you may be experiencing God's humbling in your own life over these last months.

And if you are, thank God, because God is doing it to lift you up. And the key to this revolution is not a vague and general nebulous revolution for special, special people, but it's specifically tied to the birth of this child.

It means that by God's grace to Mary in the birth of Jesus, he is bringing this revolution and salvation to all humanity.

[ 13 : 28 ] It's by the incarnation, by the fact that he looked on her loneliness, that he's begun this great and cosmic revolution. And that's the first point she makes.

What God is doing in the birth of this child is a complete revolution. And the second point she makes is that it's a revelation. Now, we tend to think about Christmas in human terms.

You know, this is the time of year people should be nice to each other. And it's nice when people are nice to each other, which is sometimes a result of Christianity and Christ coming.

But what gives this revolution reality and energy is that it is a revelation of the being of God. That the ultimate meaning of Christmas is to reveal to us who God is.

That's why in verses 49 to 50, Mary sings and tells us three things about God. And the first in verse 49 is that God is mighty.

[ 14 : 34 ] He who is mighty has done great things for me. You see, God's might is not just seen in casting down the proud, but what God is doing in humble Mary as she walks in faith and humility before her Lord.

You know, in verse 34, when Gabriel was speaking to Mary, after he tells her about the miraculous conception of the Son of God, Mary asks the obvious question in verse 34, how will this be since I am a virgin?

And Gabriel's answer is very beautiful, verse 35. He says, the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power, the might of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. The child will be called holy because of the generation by the Holy Spirit.

And we tend to be focused on genetic calculations. Gabriel is focused on the power of God. The power of the Most High will overshadow you, Mary.

[ 15 : 48 ] The same power that God's Spirit exhibited at the creation when he hovered over the waters. And this word, overshadow, is also used for the cloud of God that came down with the people of God in the wilderness over the tabernacle.

It's the physical presence and glory of God in a particular place on the tabernacle. And now, the presence of glory of God will be visible in a particular person.

But it's only the strength and might of God that can make that happen. So, Christmas is a revelation of the might of God. It's not that history is bending towards social progress.

But in the incarnation of baby Jesus, the might of God is there to save us. Secondly, she says, God is holy, verse 49. I think today we want to believe that everyone has the right to decide what is right and wrong for themselves.

But Christmas shows that God is utterly opposed to all sin and evil. It reveals him as a consuming fire. And when Jesus comes, he comes to deal with our guilt and our sin.

[ 17 : 04 ] The reason he comes is precisely because we thought we had the power to decide what was right and wrong for ourselves. It's amazing love that the God of the universe is conceived in the womb of a virgin to live and to die to take away my sin and guilt and to make me innocent and holy.

So, Christmas is a revelation of the might of God and the holiness of God. And thirdly, it's a revelation of the mercy of God. And this is so important that Mary says it twice.

In verse 50, his mercy is on those who fear him. In verse 54, he's helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.

If you humble yourselves in the fear of God, God's mercy will come to rest upon you. We can never presume upon his mercy. It's not that God will just turn a blind eye to how we live.

But if you do not fear him, he will pull you down, he will scatter you with his arm. There's only two choices, Mary says. And what his mercy does is it takes all our calculations of worthiness and it revolutionises them.

[ 18 : 26 ] Jesus comes as saviour for those who recognise our need of a saviour, that we're in a desperate need situation, a need for forgiveness, a need for grace.

If you feel like you do not need him, you're in danger of being swept away. And though God has the right to blot us out in our sin and our corruption, he is merciful to those who don't deserve it and he offers salvation and freedom and restoration for his mercy is never end.

And that's why Mary says that this birth of this baby reveals God as mighty and holy and full of mercy. So, here is the first and best Christmas carol I dare to suggest from the lips of Mary.

and the reason we can sing it is because Jesus has come for us. The most high God in the person of Jesus has made himself most low, bringing about the greatest revolution of his eternal grace, revealing his might, revealing his holiness and revealing his mercy.

And we enter into the radicalness of this salvation by humbling ourselves before the revelation of God, by hungering for his strength and his mercy and his holiness and allowing him to revolutionize what we do with our hands and what we do with our hearts and what we do with our habits.

[ 20 : 02 ] And we do that as we sing, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. Amen.