

Songs of Christ's Coming - Mary's Song

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[0 : 00] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name. Amen. You can be seated. Well, good evening once again. My name is Aaron. If you're visiting with us, I'm the minister for this evening's service.

And I speak with experience when I say it's always a surprise when the pregnancy test comes back positive. But you can imagine, I'm married by the way, but you can imagine it's even more of a surprise when you're a virgin.

And it's even more of a surprise when it's an angel that delivers your pregnant news. But that is our context. An angel visits Mary and says, you're going to have a baby. You should call him Jesus. Jesus, he's God's son, and his kingdom will last forever. And what does Mary do? Well, she says these wonderfully faith-filled words. We see them in verse 38. Let it be to me according to your word.

This is the kind of faith we should pray for, isn't it? And then what does she do? Well, what any pregnant teenager would do, probably, go visit an older female relative.

[1 : 19] And you can imagine the scene. She visits Elizabeth, obviously. And you can imagine the scene playing out quite poorly in some situations. The teen goes to auntie's house.

I'm pregnant. What? Who did this to you? Trevor, get my gun. Now, perhaps that's just the New Zealand response.

But that has played out many times in the world, I think. But it didn't play out poorly for Mary. She receives an amazingly faithful reception from Elizabeth.

Mary, this is awesome. You're blessed, Elizabeth says. And then we have Mary's response to what Elizabeth said, which is commonly called the Magnificent or Mary's song.

That was the last thing we heard read out. So, if you can read your Bible, I'll just tell you what happens. All right. Basically, here's the situation.

[2 : 22] She's carrying in her womb God's son. But the song itself is remarkable in that she turns the attention away from herself almost immediately.

The song is not, I'm so great. I'm so great. I'm having God's baby. You could forgive her for singing kind of like a, wow, check out how awesome I am kind of song.

But it's only the very sort of first two verses that are about her. Verse 46 and 47. And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

The rest of it is all about God. She turns the attention away from herself and sings a song about the great stuff that God has done. And before moving on to talking about that, let's just spend a minute just in these first two lines though.

My soul magnifies. My spirit rejoices. We can see this is not a shallow joy that she has. It's from her gut. It's a deep, deep, deep joy.

[3 : 26] And why does she rejoice? Well, it's an important question, I think. Because don't we want deep, deep joy? A joy that can overwhelm our circumstance.

It's a remarkable thing. Because she had every reason to be very freaked out. She was, after all, a pregnant, unmarried teenager in a small, very religious community.

And yet that never comes up. Never. Joy. Joy. So, why does she rejoice? That's a big question, right? Why does she so happy?

Well, she's joyful because she believes in a God who acts. A God who does stuff. And it's very clear in her song, if you could see the verbs in it.

There's lots of verbs. Let me read them out to you. God looks. He blesses. He does great things. He shows his strength. He scatters. He brings down. He exalts. He fills the hungry.

[4 : 32] He sends away. He helps. He speaks. If you're visiting with us tonight and you're not a Christian, I am so glad you're here. And I'd love it if at the end of this service, you would come to the conclusion that the universe is not closed.

First, that there is a creator who is not silent, who is not passive, a creator who intervenes, a creator who steps in in amazing ways, in radical ways.

Now, I've shared this story before, but I want to repeat it. There was some graffiti written on the wall in a subway interchange in Chicago many, many years ago. And someone got on a ladder and wrote right up at the top of the wall, wrote up, God is dead, signed Nietzsche.

And somebody crossed it out and wrote, Nietzsche is dead, signed God. And somebody crossed that out and wrote, God is dead, see Time Magazine, 1966 front cover.

And somebody crossed that out and wrote, Time Magazine is dead, signed God. And somebody crossed that out and wrote, God isn't dead. I spoke to him this morning, signed Billy Graham. And somebody crossed that out and said, Who's Billy Graham, signed God?

[5 : 51] Anyway, it just sort of went on and on and on. People kind of writing another line under this. And until somebody wrote this, God isn't dead.

He just doesn't want to get involved. And after that, no one wrote anything. It was as if this person had summed up this great fear that we have.

That what if there is a God? But what if he's indifferent? What if he doesn't care? What if he doesn't care about me? Well, that's not what Mary believes. And it's certainly not the God that the Bible talks about.

Folks, the Bible is not closed. The universe is not. The Bible is closed. Don't add anything to it. The universe is not closed. God intervenes. And to use an American phrase I've learned since being over in North America, it's he's got some skin in the game.

Literally, he sends his son as a baby to be God with us, which is what the word Emmanuel means. And this child, Jesus, grows and is our Savior and our Judge.

[7 : 03] And these are the roles of Jesus which come out in Mary's song, interestingly. So, what is it? What is the intervention that Mary talks about?

This God who comes into the world. So Mary rejoices because God acts. And those acts are salvation and judgment. And it's why Mary rejoices.

Which is interesting, right? You wouldn't think the second one so much. And we can see that. When you look in the actions of God here, you actually see that, right? You see the salvation part.

But you actually see the judgment part. You actually see the scattering part as well. Let me remind you what they are. Now, Mary says, he looks upon the humble. He shows mercy to those who fear him.

Fear, in this context, means awe. He fills the hungry. But secondly, he scatters the proud. He brings down the mighty. And he sends away the rich, empty.

[8 : 10] What does that mean? Does it mean that God loves poor people and hates rich people?

No. We see in verse 51 that it's the... When he talks about wealth, he's talking about the people that are proud in the thoughts of their own heart.

He scatters those who think they don't need God. He scatters those who reject him because they see themselves as completely self-contained. But he gathers and fills those who humble themselves before him.

And it's one of the great Christian ironies that it's in this humbling of ourselves before God. Saying, God, you are God. I am not. Forgive me. It's in that. It's in making our life less about us and more about God.

It's in doing that we find joy. Deep, heart, gut, joy. And it's a crazy idea because most other messages we would hear, especially at this time of the year, about finding happiness.

Or about finding it in self-fulfillment. But God's message through Mary is joy comes from being on board with God's agenda. And can we say that about our lives?

[9 : 22] Now, I said it was a short sermon. I'm finishing up here. Let me finish with this idea.

Tonight, two weeks out from Christmas, if you are weak in joy, perhaps it is because you are strong in yourself, trusting solely in your own thoughts, sitting on our thrones of status and gadgets and power and looks and intellects and youth and postal codes and bank accounts, etc.

being just about your own plan. Folks, that is a dangerous place to be. And it's dangerous. I'll give you three reasons why it's dangerous. One, there is a loss of transcendence in your life.

You are grasping at eternity. And you realize it's folly.

That's why people who seem to have it all together can actually feel so empty. Second reason it's a dangerous place to be is you're welding your joy to the temporary and to the fragile.

The third reason it's a dangerous place to be is because when you hear Mary's song, you hear that God is in the business of bringing down the proud. So in a nutshell, my Christmas carol message comes down to this.

[10 : 51] Let go of claims you have to power and status. And entrust your life into the hands of the Father who loves you so much that he sent his only son to be with us.

Do that. So you can say with Mary, my soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked on the humble estate of this servant.

So we can say with Mary, I am your servant. Let it be to me according to your word. Amen. Folks, if you have any questions you'd like to ask me about this sermon, I'd love to speak to you at the end.