

A Joyful Weakness

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[0 : 00] If you're visiting with us tonight, a special welcome. My name is Aaron Roberts. I am the minister for this service, and I don't wear this jacket often.

This is my Christmas jacket. Once a year, it comes out. Might be a bit short on the arms, but it's lovely and warm. Well, good evening.

I'm going to preach a pretty short sermon here because I want to get us back into the carols. We are taking a break. We're doing a sermon series on Mark currently, the Gospel of Mark, the story of Jesus.

And we're taking a break this week to look at the birth of Jesus and the Gospel of Luke. And at this point in our readings, we haven't got to Jesus being born yet. We'll get there by the end of the service.

At this point, we've had two announcements and a song sung by Mary, the mother of Jesus. And I think it's pretty obvious that there are some parallels, right? You can see some parallels there between the two stories.

[1 : 07] And just a reminder, Elizabeth was pregnant with John. Jesus was Mary. Okay? Just as a reminder. I'm not presuming, you know, completely familiar with the story, but just as a reminder.

Okay? Okay. So the parallels. The parallels are more than just two people were unexpectedly pregnant. Okay? Here's some of the parallels. This is not an exhaustive list.

So there are both pregnancies announced by angels, Gabriel. Gabriel, both times they said they were troubled when they heard it. Both times the angel says, don't be afraid.

Both of them are having a son. And both times the angel says what the names are going to be. So the parallels aren't there because the writer of Luke is unimaginative and he's kind of copying and pasting across the two kind of stories because he doesn't quite know what happened.

He is trying to emphasize the sameness of these stories for a number of reasons. One of them being he wants the contrast between the two to be really obvious.

[2 : 12] So let me say that again. So the stories track quite similarly, right? The stories track quite similarly. And then, bam, they go off in two different directions. Come back again, but this bam part, this two different directions part, that's really important.

I want to talk about that. So let's have a closer look. So an angel comes to Zechariah and says, your wife is going to have a baby. The baby is going to be awesome. This baby is going to point people back to God.

It's going to call people to repentance. This baby is going to prepare people for the Savior. You should call him John. There's a lot to take in, obviously, for Zechariah. He says, how shall I know this?

In verse 18. You know, we're old. It's interesting. He says, my wife is advanced. He just says he's old. So the Mary comes. I don't know if that's anything. But anyway, the angel comes to Mary and says, you're going to have a baby.

This baby is going to be the son of the most high, the Savior. You're having the Savior. Call him Jesus. And she says, how will this be since I'm a virgin?

[3 : 16] That's verse 34. Now, it sounds like their responses are quite similar, right? It sounds like they're both kind of going, oh, I don't know about this. I don't know how this is going to pan out. They're actually very different.

And this is the significant contrast here. See, Zechariah is asking for a sign. How shall I know this? Prove it to me.

Do something else. Do something else just so to confirm this kind of thing you've just said to me.

The result of that unbelief, this was a judgment on him. He was made mute until the baby was born.

When I talked about this at the staff meeting, one of the ladies says, well, how do you know this was a judgment? Maybe it was a gift to Elizabeth, his wife. But I think the scripture fairly clearly says it's a judgment on him.

All right. So he's going, how can this be? Give me a sign here, right? She says, how will I know this? I'm a virgin. It's very reasonable, okay? She's saying, I believe you, but what's the mechanics of this?

[4 : 23] How will this happen? I don't understand how this is going to happen. I'm a virgin. I'm not married. I believe it. I just don't know how it's going to happen. And the angel says in verse 37, nothing is impossible with God.

And sort of the net result of her belief is this amazing, joyful, beautiful song, my soul magnifies the Lord, right? So Zechariah, unbelief, mute, Mary's trust, this joyful, joyful song.

So these contrasts here, I think, hold up as kind of negative and positive examples for us. So the question is, how do we be people like Mary?

When God calls us to walk the walk of faith, how do we respond joyfully like Mary? And the clue to the answer of that question is found in another contrast that the passage sets up.

And so there's a contrast in their responses, joy versus unbelief, but there's also a contrast in the people just in general. Like, Zechariah was this adult male priest from an impressive heritage, chosen to be the guy to enter the temple that year.

[5 : 37] So he's, you know, he's a big man on campus, right? Mary, teenage girl, single teenage girl living in a small town, no mention of her family. So on the status scale, she's way down here, right?

He's way up here. Now, is this a random detail? Is it just kind of like a random coincidence just happens that this person is quite a big name, big guy, big guy, tough guy, you know, well known. Responsibility, admire it. And she's just this random teenage girl. Is that, is that just a random detail? No, it's not.

It's not random that Jesus, the long-awaited eternal king, would be born to an unknown teenage girl in a backwater Middle Eastern town in a stable with his bed, a feeding trough.

Those details are there to tell us something about the kind of king Jesus will be. He will be eternal, the king above all kings, absolutely, of course, all-powerful, judge of all men and women.

[6 : 47] But he will be a humble king. And his kingdom will be marked by service. It will be a kingdom that turns our notions of money and power and status completely upside down.

You remember, that whole turning upside down is a pretty good summary of a good chunk of Mary's song. So back to my original question.

How do we be people who respond like Mary, responding with joy when asked to walk the difficult road of faith? Well, bearing in mind the kind of a status contrast here, I think the passage is trying to tell us that if we are weak in joy, if we are weak in joy, it could be because we are strong in ourselves.

If we are weak in joy, it could be that you are strong in yourself, trusting in your status or your gadgets or your power, your looks, your intellect, your postal code, your bank account.

And none of these things are bad things, of course. These are great things, you know. These are good things. But when we trust them, we put ourselves in such a dangerous place for two reasons, really.

[8 : 05] Lots of reasons, but two I'll throw out. You are welding your joy and esteem to something that is temporary, something that is fragile. And two, when you hear Mary's song, you hear that God is in the business of bringing down the proud and lifting up the humble.

And this bringing down is not a vindictive thing. It is a righteous judgment. And it can be a kindness, a great kindness to us. God sometimes brings people down in the hope that they will see that their posturing is keeping them from trusting in him.

We see this in Zechariah, don't we? He was punished by muteness for his unbelief. And then, of course, later on in the chapter, we'll hear this amazing song from him as well. Wonderful example of somebody's heart that was turned to God.

So in a nutshell, my Christmas carol message to you is this. Let go of any claims you have to power, to status, you know, based on your looks or intellect or your family.

And know the joy that comes from humble obedience. Behold the king. And in the words of Mary, say to him, I'm your servant.

[9 : 28] Let it be to me according to your word. Amen. Folks, let me pray for us.

Father, in the midst of great tragedy in the world, Lord, I pray that we can turn to you our ultimate hope for renewal.

Amen. And I pray the colic of the day now. O God, who makes us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only son, Jesus Christ, grant that as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer, we may be with sure confidence.

Behold him when he shall come again to be our judge, who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen. And as our Savior Christ has taught us, let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Amen.