

Songs of Christ's Coming - Mary's Song

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this passage. We pray that you would give birth to the joy of this passage in our own hearts, so that we, with Mary, may be able to magnify your name and rejoice in you, our Savior.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You may be seated. So, it's December, and no month of the year is filled with more song or music than the month of December.

There's this keen sense that as we approach Christmas, it's time to sing. People start at different times. If you're like some of my friendly relatives, you start at the beginning of Canadian Thanksgiving.

And it's quite early. A bit too early for me. If you're like others, you like to wait till Advent or till the very last moment. But eventually, music is everywhere.

Christmas musicals fill the TV channels. Music Christmas carols fill our church services. Mariah Carey songs are resounding through the cafes and the coffee shops.

[1 : 19] Handel's Messiah is filling the theaters. Little Drummer Boy is filling the radio stations. By the way, I can't figure out Little Drummer Boy. I just don't get it.

I think musicians like it because it's a song about music. Old hymns start to resurface. Come, thou long-expected Jesus is one of my favorites.

Or, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Old Christmas albums start to resurface. My grandma, much to my chagrin, loves Elvis Presley's Christmas album.

And every single year it comes out. It's the worst. Music and song everywhere. Because when Christmas comes, it's time to sing.

But why? Why do we sing? We sing because something so great has happened that we don't know what else to do but sing. We could discuss it, yes.

[2 : 20] We could write about it, yes. We could think about it, yes. But eventually, you have to sing. Because something that great has happened. And people may not acknowledge its greatness.

They may not know its greatness. They may still need to hear of its greatness. But God has done something so great that over the last 2,000 years, songs have been resounding through all of history, declaring the wonderful works of the living God.

Because when God acts, His people must sing. And we see this all throughout the Bible. Songs occur in these huge, dramatic moments in biblical history when God is doing amazing things.

Think of Moses' song of praise in Exodus 15. God just delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea. And Moses says, I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed graciously.

The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. This is my God. I will praise Him, my Father's God, and I will exalt Him. Or think of Hannah's song.

[3 : 30] After God had given her a child, He had opened her womb and given her the prophet Samuel. And she says this, My heart exalts in the Lord. My strength is exalted in the Lord.

Because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord. There is none beside you. There is no rock like our God. Or think of David's song.

His song of remembrance and praise to God, when God finally delivered him out of the hands of Saul and his enemies. David says this, The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer.

My God, my rock in whom I take refuge. My shield and the horn of my salvation. My stronghold and my refuge. My Savior, you saved me from violence.

Worthy are you to be praised. Songs occur when God acts and does something. And His people cannot help but erupt with praise.

[4 : 28] And that's why in Luke chapter 1 and 2, it is filled with songs. Jesus' birth is filled with songs. Because something really great has happened.

In our passage, there are four songs in particular. And this is actually the highest concentration of songs in the whole entire Bible, outside of the Psalms themselves. Which tells us that something really big is actually happening here. There are three songs by human characters. Verses 46 to 50 is Mary's song, historically called the Magnificat. Verses 68 to 79 is Zechariah's song, historically called the Benedictus. And then Simeon's song in chapter 2, verses 29 to 32, historically called the Nunc Dimittis. Three songs by human characters, and then one song by the heavenly host, in chapter 2, verse 14. And I need to tell you, before we get into Mary's song, that these songs have two functions in Luke's narrative.

[5 : 37] The first is that they tell us the meaning of what is happening. They tell us the meaning of what is happening. In particular, they want to proclaim to us that what is happening in these two families, what is happening with Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Mary and Joseph, is not just a private household domestic affair.

What is happening in these private interactions is actually something that has universal significance for the whole entire world, and for all people. The tectonic plates of history are shifting in what is happening in these scenes.

And so the songs tell us the meaning of what is happening. But there's something more. There's a second thing. The songs also tell us that there are also celebratory pauses.

The narrative is really fast-paced. There's things happening all the time, but then these songs come, and it's as if the narrative pauses for a moment. What is happening that is so great that we have to pause to ponder.

We have to stop to give thanks. We must slow down to consider and rejoice. It's as if these songs show us that we are stopped in our tracks by God's grace, and we simply have to sit in the wonder of it all and bask in the glory of his grace.

[7 : 05] So these songs hold together for us the meaning and the celebration of Christmas. And over the next couple weeks, we're going to be going through three of the songs, and today we start with Mary's song, the Magnificat.

So open up your Bibles and get ready, because here we go. Mary's song, the Magnificat. I want to look at this through three angles. Mary's song is a proper response, as a personal thanksgiving, and as a public declaration.

Proper response, personal thanksgiving, public declaration. Mary's song is a proper response to what God has done. He is fulfilling his promises.

We see this in verses 39 to 45. There's this commonly repeated cycle. It goes like this. Promise, fulfillment, praise.

Promise, fulfillment, praise. God makes a promise in verses 31 and 32. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, and he will be the son of the Most High.

[8 : 18] That's the promise. God fulfills his promise in verses 39 and 45. Elizabeth proclaims that Mary is pregnant. And then Mary sings.

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my salvation. Promise, fulfillment, praise. Notice how we're left in suspense when we pick up in verse 39.

As Mary travels to Elizabeth, we're left in suspense as to whether she has conceived or not. What is to come of God's promises to her? It's not like these days.

We don't hear of any ultrasounds. We don't hear of any pregnancy tests. We don't hear of any doctor's appointments. The suspense is there. But then the suspense quickly turns to joy in the presence of Elizabeth.

We pick up in verse 40. Mary enters the house of Zechariah, and she greets Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby, John the Baptist, leaps in her womb.

[9 : 30] Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit so she can speak the words of God. And she exclaims with a loud voice, Blessed are you among women. Blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And you can just imagine Mary, right? The fruit of my womb. And then Elizabeth continues on. And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

And you can imagine Mary just about having a heart attack. The mother of the Lord? And then Elizabeth continues even further. For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. A fulfillment? Of what was spoken? Can this really be true?

And you can kind of imagine Mary sitting there and racking her brain as she remembers back to the angel's final words, for nothing will be impossible with God.

[10:36] Can this be true? The mother of the Son of the Most High God? The mother of the Eternal King? The mother of the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises?

The mother of the beginning of the new creation? Can it be true? Yes. Yes, it can be true.

And it is true. Because the Lord has done what He said He would do. And so Mary sings. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

God has made a promise. And God has fulfilled that promise. And so Mary sings. And her singing is the proper response.

But it quickly leads to personal thanksgiving. And this is point number two. Personal thanksgiving for what God has done. Notice how deeply personal these first few verses are.

[11:33] They have lots of me's and my's. Look at the first couple verses. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name.

Mary rejoices in the deeply personal way that God's mercy has touched her life. And notice how it doesn't make her conceited. I mean, imagine.

Imagine that on your CV. Mother of the Lord. I mean, it's impressive, right? It doesn't make her conceited. And it doesn't make her worry either.

What am I going to say to my friends and my family and my community? I'm pregnant and yet I'm a virgin. Rather, she magnifies the name of the Lord.

[12:37] This song is all about the living God. Mary wants to celebrate who God is for her and to her. Look at verse 48.

She focuses on God's action. For He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For He who is... And then verse 49. For He who is mighty has done great things for me.

The Almighty God has looked on her situation. The King of all kings and the Lord of all lords has touched her desperation. the Alpha and the Omega has chosen to bless her in particular.

And isn't this one of the truly amazing things about our God? Is that though He holds the stars in place and although He controls the tides of history and He makes nations rise and fall, He still cares about this woman from Nazareth.

And He cares about you and He cares about me. And He wants to make His mercy personally known. Mary's song is not some response of vague sentimentality and it's not glib and it's not trite.

[13:53] It's rooted in what God has done for her personally in her life. It's a thanksgiving for what God has done. But the song is oh so much more than that.

Thank the Lord. It's not just Mary's song. It's a public declaration for all people. In verse 50 the song transitions from the particular to the universal.

From the private to the public. From the personal to the communal. She celebrates that the mercy God has shown her is actually a mercy for the whole entire world.

We discover that what is happening in Mary's womb is the fulfillment of all God's promises to Abraham. and it is the revelation of God's mercy. Look at verse 50.

Verse 50 says His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. And then verse 54. He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy.

[15:01] So we have a mercy sandwich. a sandwich. And in the middle of this mercy sandwich she describes the great reversal that God's mercy will bring about.

Verses 51 to 53. He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He has sent away empty. In these verses Mary speaks in typical Old Testament prophetic language.

The prophets of that day viewed salvation as a great reversal. A reversal where those who exalt themselves would be humbled by the hand of the Lord. And those who humble themselves would be exalted.

God would give mercy to the humble. Those who recognize their neediness. And God would judge the proud. Those who bask in their self-sufficiency. This would be a great reversal.

[16:05] And it's quite amazing how much Mary's song actually talks about judgment. judgment. Mary's son is going to bring judgment. According to Mary's song Christmas is not all about fun and games.

It's not all warm and fuzzy. Christmas is a warning to the proud. It's a warning to the mighty. It's a warning to the rich. Because the proud are scattered.

The mighty are taken off their thrones. And the rich are sent away empty handed. Now, this doesn't mean that wealth and power is inherently bad.

But what it does mean it has an unbelievable ability to corrupt and deceive us. We're easily lured into the prison of pride and self-sufficiency.

And these verses act as a warning for us. They proclaim to us that at Christmas we have to face the fact that our ways are not the Lord's ways. And the world's ways are not the Lord's ways.

[17:07] And that God one day will bring about a great reversal through his son Jesus Christ. And those who trust in their status and their power and their riches will be humbled.

No matter who they are. Now, some of you may be thinking at this point, it sure doesn't seem like Jesus has done this yet. Or like, at least like he's done a very good job of it, right?

If Jesus is going to judge the proud and the mighty and the wealthy, then why does the world look the way it does? Where the proud get prouder, the powerful get more powerful, and the rich get richer.

And this is not a new complaint. John the Baptist himself, later in the gospel, is in prison wondering the exact same thing. And he actually sends messengers to Jesus to ask Jesus and say, are you the Messiah?

Like, are you going to do something about this situation in the world? Or, should we look for somebody else? He wanted to know if the bad guys would keep winning.

[18:17] He wanted to know if Jesus' kingdom was the kingdom that the Old Testament was expecting. And what we come to realize throughout the gospels is that Jesus will judge, but not yet.

His judgment is delayed for now. It will come at his second coming, but his first coming is primarily about mercy. Jesus came to bring the age of mercy.

And so, what we primarily sing about at Christmas is the extravagant mercy of the living God because Mary's pregnancy means mercy for all who humble themselves before the Lord.

And lots of mercy. And we see this throughout the gospel of Luke. The rivers of God's mercy flow into the world through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, in Luke chapter 4, opens the scroll of the prophet of Isaiah, and he says, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. Has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, liberty to those who are oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

[19:30] And Jesus sits down and he says, today this is fulfilled in your presence. Mercy. Jesus comes across a demon-possessed man.

And he says to the demon, be silent and get out of him. And the demon leaves and the man is unharmed and restored. Mercy. Jesus walks by a widow whose only son is being carried out of the city to his grave.

And Jesus has compassion on her. He says, young man, I say to you, arise. And that man gets up and starts speaking to his mother again. Mercy.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and he sees a woman who's been hunchbacked for 18 years and he says to her, woman, you are free from your disability. And immediately she stands up straight again.

Mercy. Jesus was crucified by the ones he came to save, hanging on a cross, beaten, mock, scorned. And yet, he says, while hanging there, father, forgive them.

[20:39] Forgive them for they know not what they do. Mercy. I wonder if Mary had any idea how much mercy would flow from the son that she was going to give birth to.

I wonder if Mary had any idea how many people would benefit from the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we need to hear this today, brothers and sisters.

Because we're heading into Christmas and some of us feel like we have nothing to offer. some of us feel depressed and hopeless. Some of us feel weighed down by anxieties and uncertainties.

Some of us feel overcome with shame and sin and defeated by fears and failures and alone and wounded. And we need to know that Mary's son is full of mercy for us. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. And Mary's son doesn't bring the sort of distant mercy that stands aloof. Mary's son brings the mercy that gets in the trenches with us.

[21 : 49] Mary's son doesn't bring the mercy that comes and pats us on the back. Mary's son brings the mercy that enters into our pain and suffering. That's what the incarnation is partially about.

And Mary's son doesn't bring the sort of mercy that is powerless to do anything. Mary's son brings the mercy that can bring about reversal in our lives. Mary's son is our mercy.

And so we can sing the song with Mary and say my soul exalts in the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.