

Luke 1:46-55

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Well, good morning.

Welcome to the second Sunday in Advent. We're Baptists. We don't tend to pay attention to that very much. But hey, it's a great thing to celebrate. The remembrance of how God worked to send his son.

In fact, that's what Advent is, right? Advent is meant to be an anticipatory celebration. For those who walked through it the first time, they didn't always know what was going to come. But for we who are able to look back on it, we are able to look at it and know that this anticipation has a fulfillment. That what we're looking forward to on Christmas Day has already happened. And what a good thing it is that we come together to celebrate Advent this morning. What I want to ask you as we begin is, what stirs your heart to joyful praise this morning?

[1 : 16] Some of you love the Christmas season. And when the garlands come out and the lights go on and you've already been baking and you've already been decorating.

And there's just a joy to this season in the cultural expressions of how we celebrate it that just warms your heart. Some of you have found great refuge in the Hallmark Channel's 25 movies leading up to Christmas.

And found great joy in that. Some of you are looking forward to snow. Maybe some of you for the first time if you're from another country or another part of the U.S. where snow doesn't happen. Even as we've sung this morning some of the great classic Christmas carols. Maybe that brings back memories of Christmas's past with family and celebration. There are lots of things in this season that can easily spark our hearts to joy and to praise. It's also true that it may be that this season is hard for you.

[2 : 25] It may be hard for you to have a joyful heart of praise. Some of you students may be thinking, I can't even think about that until I get over my exam period and get through my work.

Some of you, this season is a memory of a lost one more than a joyful celebration. Maybe the Hallmark movies aren't very helpful for you because they picture happy endings. And you are struggling with broken relationships, strains, and family. Maybe some of you are facing great trials this year.

Financially, health-wise. Or maybe it's that you're struggling with a sense of superficiality in the Christmas celebration that goes on around you.

You look at it and you think, Really? Is this what it looks like? Frosty the Snowman? Really? Can't it get better than this? And so you struggle with the superficiality and the sentimentality of our cultural expression.

[3 : 33] And so it's hard. Maybe it's hard for you this morning to have a joyful heart in this Advent season.

Well, my friends, whether you are loving this time of year and it's easy, or whether this is a hard time of year for you and you are struggling, this morning I want to point us to the fact that our hearts were made for joyful praise.

This is actually what we were created for. We don't always know how to get there and we struggle to keep it up. But this is what we were made for is joyful praise.

And that's why this season we are actually doing an Advent series on songs. Songs from the Gospel of Luke, songs of praise in response to what people have seen God done.

We'll do Mary's song and Zechariah's song. We'll do the angel's song. We'll do the song of Simeon in the temple. And we're going to look at these over the next four Sundays to spark our hearts, we hope, to a deep and abiding reason for us to have joy this season.

[4 : 51] That our hearts might be turned to praise, regardless of our circumstances. We're going to look this morning at the first song, the song of Mary in Luke chapter 1, verse 45 is where it begins.

It is somewhere in your pew Bible. The bulletin gives you a number, because I never forget to remember to write it down. Anyone? 8.56. 8.56.

There we go. 8.56 in your pew Bibles, if you want to look there. We're going to look at that together, and then we will consider how this song points us to the things that may produce in us abiding joy and praise.

So let's look together at Luke. I'm actually going to begin, I want to give it some context. So we're going to go all the way back to verse 26, because I want to get the run-up of the whole thing.

So verse 26 of chapter 1 is where we're going to start. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

[6 : 16] And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at this saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, How will this be, since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

[7 : 25] For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah. And she greeted the house of Zechariah, and greeted, entered the house of Zechariah, and greeted Elizabeth.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 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 believes that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble, a state of his servant.

[8 : 44] 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.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 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.

He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. Friends, will you pray with me? Lord, we thank you this morning for this text.

[9 : 43] We thank you for your word that reveals to us the kind of God that you are. Lord, in your character and in your nature, and also in your work in this world.

Lord, thank you for this song of praise. Lord, we pray that as we look at it together this morning, Lord, that you will help us, help us to be those who are filled with joyful praise because of you.

Lord, I ask for your help this morning. Lord, that as I proclaim your word, Lord, that you would fill me with your spirit and enable me. Lord, I pray for all of us that we would receive from you your word.

Lord, that you would use it this morning to encourage our hearts. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Friends, Mary's song of praise points us to a great truth, a great truth about who God is and

what he has done.

And as we consider it, I pray that it will move us, give us a deeper and an abiding grounds for joyful praise in our lives. We see in this passage that God has come in fulfillment of his promises in unexpected ways to save his people.

[11:11] And that's what we're gonna do. We're gonna walk through those three things. God has come to fulfill his promises. God has done it in unexpected ways. And he has done it so that he might save his people.

So that's what we're gonna do this morning. So let's look at the first one. God has come in fulfillment of his promises. Now when we stop and we think about the context in which Mary was, she lived in Israel in the first century or maybe a few years before.

Let's not get all hung up on that. And she lived in a time when Israel was under Roman rule. Oh, there was a king, Herod, who ruled over the nation of Israel, but he was appointed by the Romans and answerable to them.

And he was not the anointed king from God Most High to rule over his people. And so the people of God, the descendants of Abraham, living as a nation, were longing and crying out.

They were crying out for a savior. They were crying out to be delivered from this political and social oppression. They were looking for freedom from the Roman rule.

[12:27] They were looking for a restoration of the glory of God's kingdom as they remembered back to King David and to Solomon and the glory of the palace and the temple and the kingdom that extended far further than it did at the time of Mary's song.

People were longing for that kind of deliverance, that kind of ruler. For those of you who know the words of the hymn we sung earlier, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, it's a beautiful expression of the kinds of longings.

Come and free captive Israel. And it's what they wanted. It's what they longed for. And when the angel comes to Mary and announces, you're going to have a child, he then goes on and he describes this child in terms that for any Jew of that time would have had a resonance and a meaning and an incredible thing.

First of all, his name will be Jesus, which means he saves. And he will be a great man. He will be called the Son of the Most High. And here's where the resonances start to pick up into these hopes. He will sit on the throne of his father David and his kingdom will last forever. That's basically what we see in verses 31 and following as the angel comes and announces what God wants to do and is planning to do through Mary.

[14:08] That this child who will come will be the fulfillment of all of those hopes. He's going to come to be a deliverer. He's going to restore the kingdom.

He's going to restore God's rule over God's people. And you see it even in Mary's song. Turn with me. Turn with me.

Look at verses 40 or where is it? So verses 51 and 52.

Right? As Mary's looking forward, she says, he has shown strength with his arm. This is an Old Testament image that God has given them over and over again.

The strength of God's arm is the strength of a deliverer and specifically the strength of a deliverer to deliver his people in military battle, in military conquest, to overthrow the enemies who would come and try to attack God's people.

[15:13] And he has brought down the mighty from, not just the mighty in society or the mighty in their own minds, but he has brought them down from their thrones. There is a very clear sociopolitical understanding and Mary, having grown-ups from all accounts as a fairly devout Jew, knew these words and these phrases from the Psalms and from the prophets.

And her song recognizes all of those things. And so Mary believed that the baby, she was starting to make these connections.

What the angel told me is that this baby is going to be this deliverer, the hope that we've been longing for for so long. You look at the end of Mary's song.

He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever. Do you remember the promise to Abraham?

Out of you, I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and I will make your nation great among all the nations of the world and I will make you a blessing to the world through it.

[16 : 25] And if you were a first century Jew, you would think, this isn't that. Whatever we are, we are not that great nation being a blessing to the nations around us. And so, with this announcement of this baby, with this announcement of this child who would come to do all of these things, Mary sees it and says, God is finally fulfilling his promises.

God is finally doing what we have longed for him to do and what he said he would do. And I'm not even sure if Mary understood the fullness of it in this moment.

I think it's striking when she says, how can this be? She's not thinking, how could this be that he will be the son of the most high and sit on the throne of David forever? She's thinking, how can this be because I've never been with a man and you're telling me I'm going to have a baby.

I think that's what Mary's surprised about. And so, I think it takes her a while to get there. But by the time she sings this song, I think she's recognized a little bit more fully.

God is faithful to his promises and he will do the thing that he said he will do. Friends, I wonder if that brings joy to your heart this morning.

[17 : 51] Have you ever considered how much you are a part of the same strain and the same promises and the same history of redemption that the Bible talks about from beginning to end?

That God has been faithful to his promises to provide a deliverer and a savior for his people and recognize that we have the privilege of looking back on the central event, the central work, the pinnacle of what God has done to accomplish that work of redemption to save a people for himself and for his glory.

We don't have to wonder like the Old Testament saints and to peer into the future and to hope that we might understand as Peter says what these things are about. We can look back and we can know them and we can know them with confidence.

friends, I also hope that you see that this is a recognition that the God of the Bible is a God who sees you.

He sees you in your circumstances just as he saw Israel, just as he saw Mary, he sees you in your circumstances and his plan is one of salvation.

[19 : 13] I wonder if you've given up hope of that. I wonder if you've given up hope that God can actually fulfill his promises to you.

I wonder if you've settled for a kind of Christianity that is going through the motions but has no hope and no joy.

maybe your hearts have been battered through trials and suffering. Maybe your life is so full of good things that it's been easy to take him for granted.

But friends, remember, God sees you and he knows you and he will be faithful to all the promises. Think of these promises.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

[20 : 18] As the Father has loved me, so also I have loved you. Whoever believes in me shall not live in darkness nor die but he shall live and he shall live forever.

Friends, these are some of just a few of the precious promises that God has given us. In the words of Jesus to us, these are the things that God has done for us.

And so, like Mary, I pray that you will not lose hope that God can be faithful to you but I pray that you will, like Mary, have joyful praise in the thought of a God who is faithful.

And in his keeping of his promises, he produces for us and gives us a ground for joyful praise. So that's the first thing is that God has done this in keeping with his promises.

The second thing is that this God has done it in unexpected ways. Think for a minute about the narrative that comes right before this song.

[21 : 35] Think of the absurdity of it. The fruit of a barren womb leaps with joy for the fruit of a virgin womb to confirm that God is bringing salvation to the world.

That's how we're supposed to read that. That's what we're supposed to see in the connection between Mary and Elizabeth in those verses 39 to 45.

What is this all about? A God who is doing the impossible is confirming that by doing another impossible thing in order to give us confirmation that what he is actually doing is possible.

He made a barren woman Elizabeth able to have a child so that that child might bear witness to another child who's going to come from a virgin womb one who had never known one who was conceived miraculously by the work of God and the Holy Spirit.

And the fruit of this is a Savior who will come and save the world. And it's helpful to stop and think because Mary is aware of this that God isn't doing this great work in any expected way.

[22 : 58] It's not through the rich and powerful. It's not through the who's who of first century Jerusalem. It's not even within the proper religious structures powers or authorities.

Mary is from an obscure town. What good can ever come from Nazareth? And we see this beginning of as we continue to see in Luke and one of the great themes of Luke is this theme of the great reversal that God brings down the high and exalted and raises up the lowly and the neglected and the overlooked.

This is a pattern of God's kingdom. This is a way in which God is in his character and in his works that he has special care for those that we don't have care for in our normal humanness.

God does this great reversal in the way that he does it. Look with me for a few minutes at Mary's language in this song. Look at verse 48 with me for a minute.

He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. She recognizes who am I? Who am I that God would choose me to do this?

[24 : 20] I have nothing to commend myself. Verse 50 and 51 we see that his mercy is for those who fear him.

That is for those who recognize how great God is and how little we are and who submit to him as opposed to the proud whom he scatters.

Verse 52 he's brought down the mighty from their thrones but he has exalted those of humble estate. Those who are nobodies become somebodies because of God.

Verse 53 he has filled the hungry with good things but the rich he has sent away empty. In a common first century understanding being rich and having plenty was a sign of God's blessing and being hungry and being needy was a sign of God's cursing.

It was a misunderstanding of who God really is and when God comes to do this work of salvation when God comes to do this most central work in all of history he does it in this unexpected way to confound all of our expectations to confound all of our the ways that we would have thought that he would have done it.

[25 : 46] Sometimes I'm afraid to quote this because I'm afraid you're going to think this is a good the musical Jesus Christ superstar which is beautiful in its music blasphemous in its portrayal of Jesus but absolutely fascinating in its portrayal of the disciples and their confusion so did I qualify that well enough okay here we go so Judas has this great song Jesus why did you come at this time to this plan every time I look at you I don't understand why you chose such a backward time and such a great land if you'd come today in the 1970s when it was written you would have swept the whole nation Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication don't you get me wrong anyway I can sing it to you I grew up on it it's part of my childhood but it's fascinating to think about this is a modern person thinking about the birth of Jesus and looking at it and saying why in the world would God ever do it this way why would he ever pick a backward place a small town in the middle of the big

Roman empire why would he ever pick someone like Mary why would he ever do any of these things one part of it is because that's the kind of God that he is when we read from Micah earlier O Beth you who are lowly you who are a nothing town out of you will come a great thing God doesn't come with pomp and circumstance in the ways that we expect but he comes in quietly he comes in humbly the God of the universe takes on human flesh and almost inconceivably if you'll excuse the pun he becomes an embryo within a woman's body and this is how

God is going to save the world he does this of course because he knows our frame and he knows that we need a God we need a salvation that will come to us and identify with us there are some of us who might in our arrogance and pride think well yeah I'm good enough God should save me because I'm really great but most of us know that we're not most of us when we really honestly think about it we know at the core of our being that we are not that and we need a savior who will come and identify with us not in our greatness but in our weakness this is the good news of the gospel that God has come for the humble for the downtrodden for the forgotten for the outsiders for the ragamuffins who say who cry out who me not in despair but in grateful joy you would actually care about me you would come to save me you would come and allow me to be a part of your kingdom you've come to make me a part of your family this is what

Mary is overwhelmed with joy about that God would choose someone like her she knows she's not special she knows she's not unique she knows that she doesn't have any claim to God or any particular moral standing before God that God would choose her rather than someone else but God

has come for her and God has come for us to deliver us from our wretchedness there is a sting in the tail for those of us who do trust in ourselves for those of us who are uncomfortable when we have to depend on others for those of us when it is scary to admit our weakness our inability or our failure for those who expect to have a good life because we have worked hard and done right for those who have become too accustomed to this

Christmas story and have forgotten the wonder of grace Jesus has come for you too but he will come in a way that will humble you will call you to forsake those places those positions for Jesus came not for the healthy but for the sick not for the self righteous but for sinners and this is this is what Mary sees even in even in a kernel of it and so Jesus has come in fulfillment of God's promises in this unexpected way which leads us of course to the third part he has come to save us this is what Mary knew from the very beginning when she knew that her son was to be called Jesus which means he saves and it is at the very title it is the header to her song look with me again verse 47 my soul magnifies the

[31 : 44] Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior she knew somehow Mary knew that this baby would be the means by which she would be delivered he would not come in privilege or power but he would come in humble estate and out of obscurity he would not come riding on a white horse with an army in his back to free his people from oppression but he would surround himself with 12 smelly fishermen he would not be a mover or shaker in the corridors of power he would never hold an office either political or religious but by the power of an indestructible by love and obedience to his father he would wield an influence beyond all other his salvation did not come in freedom from

Roman oppression but he knew and looked at the depth of the human soul and saw that the greatest oppression and the greatest captivity of the human heart is that of sin and of death Jesus came and he saw that that was actually the great enemy that needed to be overthrown and so he did he defeated the power of sin and death not by combat but by sacrifice rather than overcoming he offered himself up he offered himself up on the cross to die in our place to take the penalty for our sins to bear the wrath of God against our unrighteousness he was hung between two thieves scorned by the crowds and as he went to the very place of his glory was the greatest place of his humiliation salvation and this is the kind of

God that we serve a God who comes to save us in this way he humbled himself unto death even death on a cross for us so that having raised from the dead having been raised from the dead and having defeated the power of sin and death and having been raised to eternal life he is now able to give to all who call on him forgiveness of sin a new birth a new life freedom from the power of sin in our lives freedom from despair freedom from wondering whether there's a God who will help us for because he has come and saved us in the way that he has we know the answer to all these things and friends when we know this it's joy it's joy to know these things all the glitter and all the tinsel and all the hallmark movies can't begin to plumb the depths of the joy that is possible from knowing that God has done this for us in Christ and that as we trust and believe in him as we receive him as our savior as our lord as our deliverer this is the great joy that is unshakable this is the great promise that leads us to praise even in the darkest moments this is the joy that cannot be snuffed out by superficiality and sentimentality my soul magnifies the lord and my spirit rejoices in god my savior let's pray together lord we thank you for this song and for how it reminds us of your faithfulness to your promise of your upside down nature of the way that you save us that you would do so in a way that humbles us before you and brings down our pride and our self lord and makes us nothing before you yet lord in that very place is where we see lord our savior for that's what he did for us lord i pray for those this morning lord who may be wondering lord if this if this is all real if this is all true god i pray for them this morning i pray that they would see the glory of jesus and i pray that you would bring them to a place of faith that they would choose christ today lord i pray for those of us this morning who have already made that decision and who have chosen christ lord i pray that we would meditate on your faithfulness and on the remarkable way that you worked your salvation for our good lord in that in meditating on these things lord you fill our hearts with joyful praise we pray these things in jesus name amen