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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0:00] Gospel according to Luke, and we're going to read from the Magnificat, Mary's Song, which is found in Luke 1 and beginning at verse 46. Mary has, you know, been told that she is with child. The birth of Jesus has been foretold, of course, throughout Old Testament history, and it's important that, I don't know if in your Bibles, for those of you who have paper Bibles, for those of you who have Bibles on your phone or whatever other device you might have, if you go back to the beginning of Matthew and you find a page that says New Testament, okay, it probably shouldn't be there, should it? Right, because that is, Jesus is born in the Old Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are Old Testament books, but they are in the New Testament because they are the beginning of the new covenant which

Jesus brings about through his blood. Remember when he eats the Lord's Supper with his disciples, this is the new covenant in my blood. And so Jesus here is, all the way through the Old Testament, there has been these promises concerning Christ and people are waiting and waiting and waiting, and there's not a new covenant, but rather the fulfillment of the Old One, which brings about this new covenant in the blood of Christ. And so it feels like we're in the New Testament, but we're still in the Old. And that's the way Mary and Joseph and all of those would have understood it. So let's pick up a reading in verse 46. Now hear God's word.

And Mary said, 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. 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. Well, let us pray and then we'll come to God's word. Father God, you have given us your word to hear and you have given us your word to live by. And we are people who,

Father God, sometimes we come to your word without necessarily something specific to confess other than our unbelief in your word. And that, Father God, if we confess our sins, we know that we are forgiven of our sins, but we don't go on sinning after that. We recognize, Father God, that in your word is light and life and you give us both through your word. We ask, Father God, that this is, that we would understand that this is foundational and therefore it doesn't move. And therefore what we feel about it does move. Father God, our feelings go up and down and it would be a terrible thing to base anything or to build anything based upon our feeling. So we thank you, Father God, you give us conviction through your Holy Spirit in your word to the foundation that keeps us steady and strong in turbulent times. We thank you, Father God, that your word this morning speaks to our soul in the same way it is promised here that every generation would know the blessings and the mercy of those who fear you. And Father God, we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, it is true that time and truth go hand in hand, that given enough time, the truth will always come out. And throughout Israel's history, they have had turbulent times brought about by their own disobedience to disobedience to God's word. And they were to be a light to the Gentiles. They were the first missionary community to the world in many ways, apart from Adam and Eve. And they were given this special mission to be light to the Gentiles. And how were they to do that? Well, they were to do it first and foremost by being faithful to God, living righteously, obeying his word, fulfilling everything that God expected of them. In other words, the way that they were lights to the world was not through the Great Commission and going out and proclaiming Christ because Christ hadn't come. It was actually by being faithful to God and walking in faithfulness. And of course, time and

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truth go hand in hand because they were not faithful. And over time, they grumbled against God and they complained. They were always a people, and this comes out actually in the psalm singh that we'll look at later this evening.
[5:46] There were always a people who wanted to be treated as an exception, as if God's word was not foundational for them, but it was something that could be moved or at least bent to accommodate their sinful ways.

And of course, that doesn't happen. And so you can imagine when everyone's hope is based on this awaited Messiah and everyone is wondering through whom this Messiah will come. And as we saw last week in the book of Revelation, who is this woman who is with child? Is it Eve, the mother of all living? Is it Israel? Is it Mary? Well, as we saw, it's all three because the promise was given to Eve.
It was then re-established throughout Israel's history and then, of course, actualized in the mother Mary. Now, what we have here in this song is something new, but also something old. And it's for that reason we understand Mary has a very good understanding of her history. She is very well biblically educated, if I can put it that way. And that is why her song mirrors point for point Hannah's prayer back in 1 Samuel chapter 2. And so you'll begin to see that when Hannah's praying this prayer to God and Mary is singing this song of praise here, why do they look so similar?
And it is because they both understand that God is the only one who can reverse and change the conditions that his people live within. God is the only one who can do that. People cannot bring about the change they want unless God blesses them with that change. Now, I know that it's very tempting to believe that the future is very much in our hands, but the conditions of our life and the future are very much not in our hands. And so when Hannah speaks of exalting the Lord, Mary's soul magnifies the Lord. It's exactly the same. Okay, the words are slightly different, but both women are doing exactly the same thing. They both understand to whom praise is due. The question is, is do you?
As you sit here this morning, are you truly convinced that the one who holds the conditions of your life and keeps it to his order and foundation? And though he loves you and though he gives you grace and shows you mercy, you're not an exception to the rule.
[8:46] You're not an exception to the order and the foundation that God has laid down from the very beginning. The order of his righteousness and his holiness and his standards. And sometimes we truly believe that grace is God treating us like an exception to all the rules. No, that's not grace at all. In fact, if you read Titus, Titus is really quite clear that the grace of God teaches us to say yes to God's word and his law and keep it and not to treat it as though we are now an exception. But of course, Israel have got a long history of that and Mary understands what it is to really appreciate and proclaim to God in this song of praise that God is the one who controls the conditions of my life, the outcome of a nation.

Now you'll notice as you read through that Mary's song is full of past tense phrases concerning what the Lord has done. And the reason she does this is because it is a way of reflecting the certainty she feels about what God will do in the future. In other words, I've said this when we did our series on the Psalms on the Wednesday night Bible studies, that it was really quite clear that unless you can, history is important because God is the same yesterday, today and forever. And if God was not the same yesterday, today and forever, we couldn't learn from history because none of it would apply to us now in our relationship with God. It is the very fact that God doesn't change and God gives us a history to show us how our relationship works with him today. It's not something new as though we can ignore the past, as though, well, God related to his people back then in that way, he relates to us differently. In part, that's true, but it's not foundationally true. The foundations that
God lays down are forever the ones that he has laid down and they shall not be removed. But Mary understands that God is the one who will bring about his promises and therefore, when God fulfills his promises, the condition of your life changes and the future for you changes. And so God makes promises and God keeps promises. And so it's important that as you come to God's word and read it and pray it through and sing it even, that what you understand is that you belong to a promise-keeping God.
You belong to a promise-keeping God. And the reason why that's important for you to know is because of all the promises that are yet to be fulfilled. They are all fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

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Every promise of God is yes and amen, but they're not yet fulfilled in time. We live in this awkward period where we're still having to wait for some things to be fulfilled, even though they are certain in the person of Christ. They are not yet realized in time. And so we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. But as we come to Mary, Mary is given this special revelation. She knows that she is with child and now she sings this song to recognize what it is, what position she now has in the plan and purposes and even promises of God. She is with child. She is the woman. The child, the savior that would be born of the seed of the woman, she is that woman. And so she's coming to realize whether she realizes the promise was made all the way back in Genesis 3.15. One would think so. She definitely recognizes similarities with Hannah's prayer or she builds her song on Hannah's prayer. And so she lives, she's lived waiting, no doubt, for these promises to be fulfilled. And now she finds herself in the very place where she is the very person who God is using to bring about this child. And so you have people in the past waiting for the savior. You have Mary now no longer waiting, although you could say she is with child, she's waiting in that sense. And then you've got us who are not waiting at all.
[13:22] And we look back on something that is real, something that cannot be undone, something that cannot be overturned, as though this has changed the world forever. Now God was always in control, but we need to understand the impact and the importance that Jesus Christ brings. So she carries this child.

And the child is the son of the Most High, who will occupy the throne of David. And this is what I want you to see. And this is why we sang that song just before we come into this. That unless we truly appreciate this morning, we appreciate this morning, that our Messiah, the Messiah reigns. That we are people who belong to a king, whose kingdom is well established, in a world where people may not recognize. But there is a king of this world. And all people will bow the knee to that king.
You can either do it today in the day of grace, or you can do it then in the day of judgment. But you're going to bow. Either way, knees will bow, and tongues will confess as they behold the reality of what God has revealed here in this song. And so when we actually get into the song, you begin to see just how much Mary knows. So she says, like Hannah, my soul magnifies the Lord. Or Hannah says, my heart exalts in the Lord. My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derives my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. Mary's song is almost identical to this. She understands that salvation, as all Israel would have understood, is about being rescued from enemies. It is not about the forgiveness of personal sins.
It includes that. It includes that, but you really need to understand that what has happened, if I can put it this way, to a Western Christianity, is that we have narrowed salvation so far, it is so narrow that it's just about me and my relationship with God and whether or not my sins are forgiven.
[15:42] And yet salvation, all the way through the Old Testament, was way more than that narrow definition that often occupies the minds of so many Christians today.

Salvation is about the proud being scattered. It's about enemies being, or you being rescued from your enemies. It's about the humble being exalted. It's about the hungry being filled with good things.
It is about the rich being sent away empty. Salvation is so much more than your personal forgiveness. However important that is, and it is important, and however real that is, and it is real, salvation is not as narrow as you might have come to believe that it is, or how narrow that you might have made it.
Salvation is the answer to the world and everything that is mentioned here. Salvation brings about the Messiah reigning, and this is what we really have to understand.
So salvation. Salvation is of the Lord, and salvation addresses everything. Salvation is of the Lord, and that's the Lord, and that's the Lord.
[17:27] Just go to church, hear the gospel, repent and believe, get saved, and then the only thing that's left for you now is you're waiting to be either picked up or die so that you can go to be with God in heaven.

And it had no future for the earth whatsoever. There was no talk about the new heavens and the new earth. There was no talk about God renewing all things. There was no talk about building Christian communities and cultures.
You have to read the Bible for yourself. Why is all this stuff being left out? Why is it that the church, over years and years and years, have narrowed salvation down to simply focus on themselves?

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Well, I think it's for no other reason than the very mindset of society is individualistic. And therefore the church has been infected by this individualistic mindset and now interprets everything, including God's word, through that mindset and reduces the message of salvation down to the forgiveness of sins and going to heaven when you die.
I think that is sad. It makes me feel really sad that that is sort of like the be-all and the end-all of what God has done for you.
[18:48] He's given you Jesus so that when you die you can go to heaven. That is amazing. But it's such a sad reduction when you consider everything else that Christ has accomplished.

And also it puts the focus mainly on you rather than on Christ. It's all about what God does for you to get you to heaven rather than what Christ is doing because it is his world in which he reigns.
And so Mary's song is very strange to the ears of perhaps many of you, of wondering why this isn't speaking about the things you're expecting it to speak of.
Mary says in verse 52 that he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble, and exalted the humble estate.
He has filled the hungry with good things. He goes on and says, And the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in the remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.
[19:55] In other words, what you have here in the birth of Christ is the king has come. The throne is well established.

He is reigning now. And this is why Jesus does not tell you to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Jesus never tells you to go to all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He says, if you listen carefully, Therefore, go.
Therefore, go. And what does he say before the therefore? All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go. Therefore, go.
To the nations. Speaking the gospel. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the motivation for proclaiming the gospel of God and the assurance of proclaiming the gospel of God in this world comes from the fact that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ.
[21:13] Therefore, go. It's not just now that you're saved, go and get someone else saved. It's not individualistic. It's though you're leaving Christ out of the picture.

And that all the focus is on people. No, the focus is on Christ. Therefore, go. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go.
And how many of us have the confidence to say to someone we know, it is because of the authority of Christ over all heaven and all earth that I am telling you today that you must repent and believe in the gospel.
I mean, that doesn't need a bridge to be built beforehand, does it? You don't necessarily need to know the person. I mean, how many people did Jesus know when he went into the villages and proclaimed the message of the gospel?
How many people actually knew him and he knew them when he said, repent and believe for the kingdom of God is at hand?
[22:19] How many bridges were built? But rather, we understand it is the king has come. And all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to this person.

And therefore, what we're responding to is the authority of God, not an invitation. Repenting and believing is not accepting an invitation.
It is responding to the God who is over this world. And this is what Mary fully understands through her song.
But how often does the gospel come across as though you're being invited to something? The gospel and the command to repent and believe is a command that comes from the Most High who sits on the throne.
And this is what Mary's song establishes and understands quite clearly. It doesn't establish it. Rather, it is established in her song as she writes, as the content is written out.
[23:26] Notice then how Mary's song, right from the very beginning, opens with this act of praise to God because of everything she recognizes. My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

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Now, Mary was a godly woman. She wasn't sinless. She wasn't in the position where she herself was without need to be saved.
There is no bodily assumption of Mary into heaven. Mary, like the rest of us, needs Christ to die on the cross.
That's really important to understand because that is really a defining mark of biblical Christianity, isn't it? That you understand these clear positions.
So Mary is no doubt a godly woman. She is no doubt a faithful woman. There is no doubt that her life has had a tremendous shock. I mean, to actually come to terms with an angel visiting you and telling you that you're with child and this is the son of the Most High God.
[24:33] I mean, I don't think any of us are in the position to be able to get our heads around that of what Mary was going through. But in her song, she tells us.

She doesn't tell us what she feels, but she tells us what she knows, what she realizes that this means not only for her and that every generation will call her blessed, but every generation will receive the mercy of God, those who fear the Lord, that is.
She understands that this promise is very much generational. Verse 49, she acknowledges the great things that God has done for her. In the promise, she recognizes that a healthy fear of the Lord, verse 50, leads to God showing mercy to his people.
Now, what does it mean to live in the light of fearing God? Well, it cannot mean uncertainty. It must mean comfort.
It must mean mercy. Because the connection here between fear and mercy is one that those who fear the Lord will receive mercy. And it's not just connected to one generation, but it is connected to all generations.
[25:53] Why? Because we get back to this position of time and truth go hand in hand, that given enough time, the truth always comes out. God controls the conditions and the outcome of your future.

And those who fear the Lord recognize that God is the one who controls the conditions of my life, the conditions of my tomorrow and my next month and my next year, that all of that is within God's hands.
And it is foolish to believe that any of it is in your hands. And this is what Mary understands and appreciates with the coming of Christ.
God is the only one who is able to change the conditions of his people. The only one who can do that. They are driven and tossed throughout the whole of the Old Testament by their enemies and their disobedience towards God.
And the only one who can bring about that stable change and lasting change is, of course, God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And as I said this on Sunday evening a couple of weeks ago, please remember that you cannot bring into your life through hard work, through money, or through any other means that which God has not blessed you with in the first place.
[27:13] You can't do it. It is foolishness to think so. And so this healthy fear of the Lord doesn't lead to uncertainty. It leads to mercy.

It doesn't lead to discomfort. It rather leads to comfort because now you're not straining and striving in areas where God's blessing is not turning up. And we all know what that is like to strain and to strive in an area and then God's blessing not turn up there.
It turns up somewhere completely different. I mean, how many of you know that reality? That God's blessing doesn't always turn up in the place of your striving.
It's too often a reality for so many. And it's because time and truth go hand in hand that you cannot bring about through hard work or through any other means, money or health or whatever it is, those things which God has not blessed you with.
And the fear of the Lord, to have that fear of the Lord, means that you understand that and you live by it. And therefore you don't go off into areas and do things that are not profitable.
[28:24] God is the only one who can change the conditions that you live within. And this is not just true for one generation, but this is true for every generation.

And this is what it says here, that for he, for now on, all generations will call me blessed because we look back and we look on what God has done and we call Mary 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. There it is.

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That God is treating us to the same foundational standard as he treated his people back then. That we're not the exception. As though the rules don't apply to us.
As though the order and structure that God has laid out for humanity doesn't apply to us. It very much does. And this is what I want us to truly appreciate this morning.
[29:22] And this is why Peter says, on the day of Pentecost, that this gospel, this message, this blessing is not just for you, but for you and your children. But for you and your children.

And yet we get back to this very narrow view in Western Christianity that has infected so many churches that we think everything's individual.
That we don't truly believe that these promises are for us and our children. We just believe they're for whoever individually approaches God and we make our own way there in the dark, fumbling around.
It's such a sad reality that the church doesn't really reflect in their belief what the word is stating quite clearly.
Every generation will receive the mercy of the Lord for those who fear him. Every generation. From generation to generation. And this is why Peter could say that these promises are not just for you, but they are for you and your children.
[30:24] Well, here's the exhortation as we close. Understand then that as you listen to Mary's song, it focuses very little on the individual. She says, her soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Of course it does. It's her song. But we can rejoice along with her. And she does acknowledge that every generation will look back on her and call her blessed. But is she really focusing on herself or is she rather focusing on the fact that God is using her to bring about his promises on earth?
Notice how little this focuses on the individual and how much it focuses on a God who reigns and who's in control and who gives mercy to those who fear him.
This is why Peter can say what he says on the day of Pentecost. This is why we can repeat the same thing today because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
God reigns. Our God reigns. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ.
Therefore, go. We are in the best position that we could possibly be in before God, given to us by the grace of God, that we can go out into the world not building bridges or tentatively making our way as though we need their permission, but respectfully and loving our neighbor, telling them the gospel because we have the authority, delegated authority, to do so.
[32:07] This is the extent of Mary's song. This is what it means to enjoy the privileges of being the people of God.

And so, understand this. The fear of the Lord does not lead to uncertainty. It leads to blessing. It does not lead to discomfort.
It leads to comfort. It does not lead to a lack of assurance, but rather full assurance. The fear of the Lord leads to you receiving God's mercy.
Why? Because God is the only one who can bring about change in your life. Amen. Well, let's stand and sing before we close our service.
Beans of grace for those who are ready to receive. And we thank you, Father God, that it is also a means of judgment for those who dishonor you in that way of sinfulness.
[33:23] Father God, we ask your blessing upon us as your church and your mercy we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. I'm going to read to you the blessing as you go.

Number six. And then we will close this morning's service. Now, may the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and to be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

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