

Song of Mary

Luke 1:46-55

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Good morning. It is good to be with you this morning on our final advent week. Christmas Eve is tomorrow, y'all. Y'all ready? Anybody, last minute shopping to do? We won't go there today. I'll be available for counseling later if you need to. This morning, we will be looking at Luke 1:46-55. As you are turning there, children ages 4 to 1st grade may participate with children's worship downstairs. If this is your first time, I invite parents to go with them and meet the teachers at the stairwell door out in the lobby.

We have been going through an advent series looking at the songs of Christmas, particularly different songs from Scripture. And as you've turned to the gospel of Luke, we've been there before. We started the first week of advent looking at the songs of angels, the account of the angels declaring and announcing the birth of Jesus in the city of David to the shepherds. The birth of Jesus, the Savior who is the Christ. The next week, we looked at the song of Moses from Exodus, recounting the Lord's deliverance from the hand of the Egyptians. We saw how that song is to be sung in glory as its recounted in the book of Revelation. Last week, we looked at the songs of a generation from the book of Isaiah, highlighting the Lord being his salvation.

All three of these weeks, the passages have had a similar theme: praising the One who brings salvation. And that's no different for today as we look at the song of Mary, a song of praise to the Lord who is the One who brings about this salvation. Let's together read Luke 1:46-55.

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." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Will you pray with me?

Father, we ask that you would add blessing to the reading of your word. That you would speak through your word by the power of your Holy Spirit, this wonderful mystery of you being with us, dwelling among us, God incarnate in the person of Jesus, living and reigning today, ministered to by your Spirit. And we give thanks and we give praise. Help the teacher to speak rightly, to speak truthfully. And help us, the listeners, to respond by faith in all of your glories and all of your riches. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Just the other day, I was getting my hair cut, much to the pleasure of my wife. And I heard a song on the radio in the barber shop. And I was immediately transported to the 8th grade. And no, I'm not going to tell you what song it was. But songs do that, don't they? Music shapes us. They take us back. They elevate us higher. We listen to songs that match the mood we're in. We listen to songs to change the mood we want to be in. Sometimes, a song captures the moment, like Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth." Other songs like, "Life Every Voice and Sing" become an anthem for a people. Music is powerful because it is a window to our soul, and it's a doorway to our hopes.

And Mary's song gives us a window into her hopes as she is now bound up in the story of redemption that God has been telling for generations already. And now, He's entering in. And she's part of the story, and she gets to bear the long-awaited Savior. Theologians have called her the "God-bearer." To think of that will

make your mind explode. Today's passage shows us what Mary did know and what she was celebrating at the birth of her child, Jesus, the Son of God. And we'll look at her song of praise and ask the Lord to tune our hearts to the melody of His salvation.

So, we're going to look at this song kind of in three parts. We're going to look at how, because of Mary's praise, we can also praise God for His salvation. We can praise God for His attributes. And we can praise God for His actions. So, first, looking at the beginning, verse 46-48, we see how Mary praises God for His salvation. It says, Mary, "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." There is this sense of her acknowledging where she is in the story. Starts at the very beginning of the song. It's the only time she references what she's doing in the process. And the rest of the song is highlighting all that the Lord has done.

If you remember the story, Mary had been visited by the angel Gabriel. There, she learned that she will conceive and give birth to a son. And He's to be named Jesus. Gabriel also mentioned that Jesus will be great. And He will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David. This is weighty news. The special moment of being visited by an angel in and of itself is breathtaking. The quandary of the conception by the Holy Spirit scratches your head. But the foreshadowing of the child's role makes you pause and ponder, what child is this?

So, Mary's song comes after meeting with her relative Elizabeth, who was also pregnant at the time just as Gabriel said she would be as he was giving Mary a sign to look for: when you go and visit your relative, this will be true. And that becomes a way of: here, this young girl being told the impossible, being told that with God nothing is impossible. And so now, when she's with her relative, she's experiencing firsthand the impossible being possible.

So, what does she do? She sings a song. She sings a song of praise. There in verse 46 and 47, we see that her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior. Her praise animates from her inner being to magnify the One that she is directing her praise to, the One who is her creator, the One who is her sustainer. And now, the One who is to be her redeemer. To magnify is to make large, right? Think of a magnifying glass. Think of a microscope. It's magnifying and amplifying something to see much clearer and much bigger, at a larger scale. But it also means that we are making much of something or someone. We're speaking highly of a person so that they would be held in greater esteem. And Mary doesn't do this begrudgingly. She's not giving lip service. She's not performing. She's not pretending. She's rejoicing with gladness and a sense of being overjoyed. This gladness of her heart is what's matching the words on her lip, as all of her words are directed to the One who is worthy of her praise.

This beginning of her song reflects many other songs in Scripture, from the Psalms, Psalm 62, "For God alone, my soul waits in silence. From Him comes my salvation." Psalm 63, "My soul thirsts for you." Again, a few verses later in that same Psalm, "My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me." Psalm 66, "Come and hear all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." Psalm 119, "My soul longs for your salvation. I hope in your word." Lamentations 3, "My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is." And then a few verses later, "The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore, I will hope in him." Mary's song parallels Hannah's prayer from 1 Samuel 2.

All of these things throughout all of Scripture, these are just a few examples again and again. It is being lifted up to a higher plain, recognizing the source of salvation. The One who is worthy to be praised is her God, her Savior. She herself is in need of salvation. She recognizes the covenant promises given to Abraham and given again and again and again throughout all the generations. She remembers the deeds of the Lord and His redemption from Israel's enemies. She knows the brokenness of the world, the destitution of her condition before Him. She needs a savior, and so do I. And so do you.

Now, we must put Mary in a proper context. Many Christians throughout time have made too much of Mary. And other Christians of our own particular tradition, for example, have made too light of her. But to recognize that though she's not listed in Hebrews 11, she very well could be. A woman of faith believing the promises of God and responding with faith having no clue what's about to happen to her life, having glimpses,

having that foreshadowing of what's to come. But she's got to live that out. She's got to endure the pregnancy, she's got to endure the snickering and the glances of whose child really is this? The scandal of what it meant to be pregnant, and you are proclaiming that it is not your husband's. People in that time period knew how biology worked. And it was not something to be happy go lucky.

She knew what was at stake in the pain of pregnancy, the pain of delivery. What's going to happen? That is the suspense from Genesis. It's the suspense from every birth announcement until the baby is healthy. Every pregnancy, no matter how amazing our technology is, no matter how wonderful our medicine is, giving birth is dangerous. And if you're resting on the promises of God, you're putting it in the hope of this delivery. That is heavy. What is God going to do? He says He's going to bring this child. He says His name is to be Jesus. But we have been waiting for so long. Is now the time? Really? Is now the time, really?

So, we must focus not on Mary herself, but we should focus at what she is pointing to. We must not see her as worthy of herself or being blessed because she is worthy. But rather, let us worship God because He's blessing her, worshipping God that He's showing kindness to her and choosing her to bear Jesus. The uniqueness of that event is certainly to be praised and marveled at of God's promises and God's fulfillment. And likewise, as Mary, we must know the story of God's great redemption. We must know the fulfillment of that redemption is culminated in Jesus, the pinnacle of the story, the hinge of the rest of the story, that this salvation from her God is to be fulfilled in her son. Her son, of her flesh and blood is to be her Savior.

So, we must know our need for such a great salvation as Mary knows. We must cry out to Him as our Savior, trusting by grace through faith. And so, the question at Christmastime, friends, is have you done this? Whether you are a Christian for generations or for decades, it is to reflect back on the grace of God in your life and to never lose sight and at the splendor of your salvation. If you have not yet done this, the invitation is always before you, and it certainly is now when we gather together on Sundays, and it certainly is now in the time and the season as the last vestige of Christianity in the world still sings Christmas songs. Would you see Jesus as your Savior this season?

We praise Him for His attributes. So, the next two points really do kind of flow out of as we praise Him for His salvation. But we praise God for His attributes, which that in and of itself is a worthwhile endeavor, to study theology, to study the Scriptures, to study what gets ascribed as the qualities and the characteristics of the Lord. We seek to understand particular characteristics to further understand the whole of who God is. We zoom in here, and we see the beauty of that and we see how it relates to this characteristic over here, and we marvel. We step back, we marvel at who God is.

Mary, in this text specifically mentions three. And then we can deduce a couple more from the passage. First, in verse 49 and 50, she recognizes Him as mighty. When described of people, it is sometimes used to describe a champion, a warrior through whom strength and skill bring about victory. As a title of God, it expresses Him as the One who is capable, where all things are possible by the power of His hand. All the rulers and commanders of armies pale in comparison to His might. She calls Him holy. Holy is His name. The Scriptures, such as Psalm 111:9, and Isaiah 57:15, just to name two, speak of the Lord's name being holy. Holy is His name. This name declares God's innate nature. He is holy because He is perfect in holiness. I get it. It's a circle, right? But the embodiment of who He is in His nature is who He is in His righteousness and how He then conducts Himself. The Lord is absolute and majestic. He's completely independent and distinct from His creation. There is none like Him. There never has been and there never will be. The Lord is holy.

Now, people cannot resemble that aspect of God's holiness. However, there is an aspect of God's holiness that His image bearers can exemplify in that sense of moral righteousness and perfect love. Sometimes, theologians talk about that as being part of His communicable attributes, what He communicates to His creation that we can then mirror and reflect as part of who He is and who He's making us to be.

Verse 50, she talks about His mercy. Mercy is another attribute of God that people can demonstrate to one another, one of those communicable attributes. But mercy find its ultimate expression in God's extension of compassion, kindness, and concern. It's sought after by a person who does not deserve it and cannot obtain it on his own. It is granted by the person who is not obligated to give it but provides it from his own love in abundance. Let me say that again. Mercy is sought after by the person who does not deserve it and cannot

obtain it in his own power. But mercy is granted by the person who is not obligated to grant it and provides it from his own love and abundance. The Scripture witnesses the Lord's mercy time and time again. Just to take you back to one, Deuteronomy 7:9, "Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."

From these three, being mighty, being holy, being merciful, we can certainly deduce other attributes. We can see that God is perfectly trustworthy. He's faithful to His promises and in order to execute these things in His creation, He also has to be most wise and most just. Our own reformed tradition asks this question in our larger catechism: what is God? Think about it in your head. How would you respond to that? What is God? The answer that's given in the catechism: God is a spirit in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection, all sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

Now, when I was a younger Christian, the form of that question used to bug me. I used to think, well, isn't God a person? Why are they asking this question what is God? Surely, the question should be, who is God? Right? And it's important for us to know who we are worshipping. And that is true enough. And it's important to make that distinction. But the longer I'm a Christian, the more I consider how profound it is to ask that question "What is God?" first. Now, of course, the Bible declares the God of the Bible is a person who reveals Himself and is knowable. But exploring the mystery and the majesty of what He is makes who He is all the more beautiful and glorious. And even more so, when we see the unveiling of God's purposes fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we marvel and praise. We go from that abstract "What is God?" and we glory in who in this God do we worship?

So, we praise God for being mighty, holy, and merciful. We praise Him with our voices and reading His word, singing songs to Him. We praise Him when we talk much of Him with one another. And we say to our family how we are experiencing His kindness and goodness in our lives. When we show in our lives to our neighbors in how we trust that His might is greater than mine so that my neighbors and my coworkers – who happen to be here, so put that in your own way – how your coworkers see your peace and see your confidence regardless of your circumstances. We praise God when we acknowledge who He is and our prayers to Him.

I encourage you to incorporate this song in a season of your life in prayer, taking Mary's words and praying and singing those words to God making them your own, meditating on Scripture that highlights the qualities of His character. When we praise Him and we seek Him in our circumstances, when we run to Him in our temptations and our sins, when we find our rest in Him alone because we know His attributes are infinite and never failing. Because we praise Him for His attributes, it's very natural that we would hold together that we also praise Him for His actions.

Mary does three things in this song. First, she anchors her praise of God and what He does in her life in a very personal way. Look at verse 48. "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." For He has looked upon her, her lowly state. It's not necessarily the disposition of her heart and humility. But she's recognizing her lowly estate in that culture. And yet, God is mindful of her. She isn't called blessed in her own self, but rather, her happiness and fortune are tied to God inviting her to be a vessel of His grace and mercy. And as we've already stated, we don't worship Mary and her attributes. We do not ascribe things to Mary that Scripture does not say of her. But we can look upon Mary like so many others in Scripture who responded to God by faith. Be encouraged by her faith. But believe the One Mary has placed her trust in.

The second thing she does in verses 50-53, Mary is recognizing – though, as she's experiencing a unique kindness of God to be the mother of the God-man – Mary is rightly understanding the implications for God's actions for others. Verse 50,

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.

You notice the reversals? We'll come to that in a second. The third thing Mary does is placing these actions in the context of God's redemptive history, verses 54 and 55, "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." She knows the covenant story. She's familiar with it. It captures her imaginations. It captures how she goes about her daily life, the rhythms of the calendar, the rhythms of the daily chores, all things being focused upon the Lord's redemption, recognizing God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on to David, and even in exile. And now, the long-awaited Messiah is coming in the birth of her son.

So, there is this interesting aspect of her song that many scholars debate. And as scholars do, we usually like to talk about grammar, right? But the form of this section of the passage is interesting because, is she talking about the past? Is she talking about the future prophetically? Is she talking about something that is always true because God is always faithful and always the same and always steadfast? That the future will be the same as He's done in the past? So, there is this eschatological aspect of this song, this forward-looking hope of when God is going to make all things right. This speaks to those reversals that she's mentioning.

Now, abstracted from God's salvation, we could say: this is a political manifesto, this is a sociological abstract for how we should conduct society. It certainly challenges those sensibilities, but it is in the context of His redemption that it is to be a wonderful confidence to those who are in the low positions, and it is a caution to those who are in high positions. For us to hear God's word and to know that we're all actually in the position that we can't be mighty, that we can't be proud, that we can't be haughty, we can't presume to think that what we have brought about in our lives and spheres is of our own doing. And so, this great salvation is in the context of God reversing things, reversing the curse, reversing injustices, reversing that which is contrary to His character. As the song says at Christmas, "As far as the curse is found," He is working. He is acting. So, do not confuse humility with pride. Do not be so proud that you think you are undeserving. Do not be filled with false humility and be so proud that you think you are deserving.

All of these things are the Lord's doing. He is the One who is sovereign. He is the One who rules justly. He alone brings about His glory. And He alone brings about His salvation. We cannot be so mighty in our eyes that we bring ourselves into His favor. There is nothing that can be done. There is nothing that can place you in a status that is so lowly that He cannot find you. You cannot be so far away from Him that He would not call upon your name. There is nothing outside the bounds of His reach. There is nothing outside the depth of His abundance. Every time the word is preached and every time the gospel is offered is a time in your story to say, from now on – to use Mary's words – "From now on, I will live in light of this redemption." From now on in my life, I will be blessed in the Lord. From now on, I will live in accordance with a God who is active in my life.

So, what say you, Christian? What do you give praise to? What shapes your hopes? What causes you to celebrate? Are your hopes and dreams fulfilled in the Lord's salvation? How would you rewrite this song? What would you declare of God's work in your life? What glory would you ascribe to His great actions in your life? How are His attributes on display for you to see in your midst? How do you experience Him? How do you point and bear witness to this great salvation in your life?

Christmas is a time of remembrance. Christmas is a time of reflection. Christmas is a time of repentance. Christmas is a time of celebration. Salvation has come. Just like the song that I heard on the radio that took me back to the 8th grade – which I still won't tell you what it was – eggnog, sausage balls, all these things remind me of Christmas. Greenery, family, friends, holiday cards, lights on the tree, all these things are wonderful traditions. They all point to the reality, though, at a deeper level that death, isolation, and darkness does not win.

Let the light of Christ shine into your darkness and let the hope of Christ redirect your despair this season. For unto us, a Son is given to be given as a Savior. Christmas is the birth of this Savior who comes into the world sent from God to live a perfect life, to die a tragic death, to be the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Christmas is the God-man taking on flesh and frailty. Christmas is seeing the might hand of God breaking into your life. My soul, my soul magnifies and rejoices in the Lord. We can praise Him because

He is our God, the One who brings about this salvation. We can praise Him for His attributes. We can praise Him because He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We can praise Him in His might, His holiness, His mercy. We see that this extends to those who fear Him from generation to generation, even to ours, even to the next. We praise Him for actions because we do not merely worship a God of ideas, a philosophical proof. Rather, we worship a God who is present, who is active, who is engaged. We praise Him because the God who is is the God who acts. We can praise Him for the final chapter of redemption because it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And it is finally culminated when He returns.

So, this Christmas, may we join together in ourselves, in our families, as a corporate body of Christ here at CPC, may we join with Mary and sing, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Amen? Let's pray.