

Mary's Song of Praise

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Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

1. Joy of Having a Baby

What is our first reaction when we are happy? What would we do if we were expecting, for example, a new grandchild? Likely, you and I would be filled with smiles. We might even sing a joyful song and give thanks to God for such a wonderful gift. We might tell our neighbors and friends of the exciting news. I was so excited to tell my parents that my children were born. The joy of a baby can be one of the biggest joys we experience in life.

2. Mary's Song of Praise

In the Gospel of Luke, we find two women who became pregnant and sang praises to God. These women are Elizabeth and Mary. In Luke 1:46 and the following, Mary praises the Lord, "***My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.***" Today's passage is called the *Magnificat*, which refers to the first few words of the song of Mary. This song follows the annunciation, where the angel Gabriel visits Mary and greets her with the words, "***Rejoice, favored one***" (v. 28).

When and where does Mary sing this song? She sings when Mary goes to visit her relative Elizabeth. As you may know, Elizabeth and Mary were relatives and both find out that they are pregnant. Elizabeth becomes pregnant roughly six months before Mary. The writer of Luke tells us that the two pregnant women have no rational reason to be pregnant. Elizabeth is too old and Mary is too young to have babies. Although we don't know the exact ages, Elizabeth would have been older than 70, and Mary would have been a teenager. In Mary's case, Mary is engaged, but not married yet.

Many of us have heard these stories many times over the years, but how do you think most people react when hearing these stories in the Gospels of

Luke and Matthew? In many ways, the stories are ridiculous. The idea of an elderly woman or a virgin teenager becoming pregnant doesn't make any sense. People reject these and other miracle stories in the Bible because they don't believe these things really happened.

However, if we are honest, childbirth itself is still a mystery to us. Even with our understanding of science, we still have a hard time explaining how sex, facial features, and personality characteristics form in babies. Parents don't choose the compilation of DNA and can't design their children's minds or souls. Many of us who have seen children know that each child is uniquely different. We can't explain exactly why they are like this, and it remains the mystery of the way and reason why God creates us differently.

3. How Can Mary Sing of Praise?

Mary did not know much about child birth. Yet Luke 1:31 & 38 tell us that Mary accepts what the angel says without any hesitation. The angel says, "**You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.**" Mary responds, "**Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.**" Does Mary know what she is saying? Does Mary know the types of problems she would have to face in the future? I am not sure she does. Mary had become pregnant before being married. She would be a pregnant teenager and would face potential death and social criticism. Deut. 22:23-24 says, "**If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, ²⁴you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death.**"

Mary could be stoned if people thought she wasn't faithful to her fiancé. Matthew's gospel tells us, "**When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly**" (Matthew 1:18 & 19). Mary had every reason to be worried, but the Bible tells us that she was free from all these worries.

Elizabeth on the other hand had been waiting for a child for years. The emotions and thoughts going through her mind would have been similar to Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In 1 Samuel chapter 2, Hannah praises the Lord, "**My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance**" (1 Samuel 2:1).

When we look at the state of Elizabeth and Mary, we see that their reactions are very much the same, but their situations are very different. When I was preparing this message, I asked myself the question, "Can I sing God's praises like Mary when I am in a similar situation?" It might take time for me to figure it out. But in the case of Mary, she does not hesitate at all. Today's

scripture says she “rejoices in God” (verse 47). How can she rejoice instead of being depressed? It is because Mary sees the bigger picture. She doesn’t just see her situation from a human perspective, but from God’s perspective. Mary was honored to be the mother of the messiah, a part of God’s wonderful salvation plan. Mary understands that her role is important. And instead of being sad about the potential problems she would face, she rejoices knowing that her son would have a major impact on the history of the world. She believes that truly all generations will call her blessed (Luke 1:48).

4. The Fulfillment of God’s Promise

As we look deeper into the text, we see that Mary understands that what is happening in her life is a sign of the fulfillment of God’s promises. In verses 54 & 55, Mary says, “**He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.**” What did God promise Abraham? Genesis 22:18 says, “**By your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.**” This is what the angel of the Lord said to Abraham after he offered his son Isaac.

God promised Abraham that his offspring who would in turn bless the whole earth. “Your offspring” means the coming messiah. Mary understands that her unusual pregnancy is a miracle sign of the hope in the messiah. She understood this was God’s intervention and that this was part of God’s plan to save humanity.

When we read this passage, one thing we need to keep in mind is that Mary never volunteers for being of the mother of Jesus. Mary didn’t know about God’s plan, but just accepted it when it was revealed to her. We are reminded this morning that accepting God’s invitation can be personally dangerous. There are times where we can even lose our lives for what God calls us into. Faith requires taking on personal risk. But it is in these steps of faith that we get to see God make a big difference through our lives in this world.

5. Taking Risk

Last Thursday, a firefighter in California died during the response to the Thomas Fire. Authorities identified the fallen firefighter as Cory David Iverson, a 32-year-old who has been with California Fire for 8 years. He was outside the fire engine at the time of the accident. Iverson and his five-firefighter strike team were engaged with a very active part of the fire near Fillmore, CA, when the accident occurred.

Iverson leaves behind his pregnant wife, Ashley, and a 2-year-old daughter Evie. California Governor Jerry Brown said in his statement. “His bravery and years of committed service to the people of California will never be

forgotten.” We are saddened by the death of firefighter Iverson. But in his death, we see a person who lived his life for his mission.

Why is the birth of Jesus into this world important? No one in the world wants to come into this world to die. And that is why the life of Jesus is difficult for people to understand. Mark 10:45 says, **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”** Jesus came to the world to die. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus made a huge impact on all human beings. God gave us eternal life through Jesus Christ. So we can have hope even after death.

6. Conclusion

By becoming a teen mother Mary’s life and future looked dangerous and full of shame. But Mary was brave enough to accept the challenge that God had given her to give birth to Jesus, the Messiah. Our mission may not be as big as Mary. But each of us is called by God every day to accept a mission as part of God’s kingdom. When we accept our role, our lives become part of God’s fulfillment of his plan on the earth. How do we accept God’s invitation when it requires dedication, serious commitment, sacrifice, risk taking, and even death? Are we willing to accept it and sing a joyful song praising God’s favor?

7. Application

These days it is a little bit difficult for me to meet those who are in need of God’s care. Yesterday I saw Jim McCusker, Joanie Cahoon and Betty Ellis. Jim and Betty are doing fine, but I was discouraged when I saw Joanie. She told me that she had been sick. I do not know how serious she is. And I am not sure how long she will survive. What makes me more depressed is that my prayer for her does not seem to make any difference. The theme of this Sunday is joy. As Mary sings a song of praise, we are supposed to sing a joyful song. Do we think we can sing a joyful song this morning? I am not sure whether I can.

But St. Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:4 that we can still sing a joyful song. He says, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”** Paul was in prison when he wrote his letter. Isn’t it strange that a man in prison is telling Christians in Philippi to rejoice? Since he is rejoicing in prison, he thinks the Philippians and we also can rejoice. Our circumstances may not allow us to rejoice. But if we are in the Lord, we can rejoice always. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? It means that we remember that we are under God’s control, his plan, His providence, and protection. As long as we do not forget His presence in our life, no one and nothing can take away joy from us. Jesus was born to remind us of God’s control, plan, providence, protection, and his presence. We give thanks to God for sending Jesus in such a miraculous way into the world. And we also give thanks to God for making us sing a joyful song in any circumstance because of Jesus. Amen.