

Jason Upchurch - Luke 1.46-56 - My Soul Magnifies the Lord - Christmas 2024

As we come to the Word of God this evening, I want to remind us that we have every reason to rejoice this time of year. And that's what I want to fill your heart with this evening as we celebrate the Lord Jesus coming into the world to save sinners.

That's the whole reason he came. **1 John 4:9:** God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

If you have life - eternal life - through faith in Jesus alone as the crucified and risen Lord, then you have every reason to celebrate.

And so what I want to do is encourage your heart this evening as we look to the Word of God and I hope your heart will be filled with joy through this passage.

This passage is called the Magnificat. Magnificat in Latin means to magnify. To glorify or honor. Mary says in **Vs. 46** my soul magnifies the Lord - magnificat. She is honoring and praising God for the Savior who is in her womb.

And this little section of praise is just amazing on so many levels. First of all, the situation that Mary is in is impossibly difficult. She is a good Jewish girl who is pregnant and not married. That would have been not only incredibly shameful in her time, but according to the Law she could be put to death for alleged fornication.

Joseph, her husband to be, was incredibly gracious in wanting to divorce her quietly. And you say, "Well, didn't the angel tell them both what was happening? Wasn't he fine?" Well, maybe that comforted Mary and Joseph, but think about the rest of the family and community.

"No guys, really: the Holy Spirit got me pregnant, not Joseph. And not some other guy. And he even told that to Joseph in a dream through an angel." "Oh really. He told you guys in a dream. How convenient." The social pressure here would have been immense and may have been the reason she left Nazareth quickly and lived with Elizabeth for 3 months.

Another amazing thing is that much of this section is borrowed from Hannah's prayer in **1 Samuel 1**. Mary knew her Bible well and apparently had memorized Hannah's prayer of thanks for God giving her a child and uses that prayer-song to praise God herself for this child, Jesus.

If you remember, Hannah was barren. She had no kids although she wanted them. And she begged the Lord for a child. Eventually the Lord gave her conception in a miraculous way. And so Hannah dedicated the child to the service of the Lord.

In the same way, Mary's conception is miraculous - brought about by the Lord - and her child, Jesus, is dedicated to the Lord's work all the days of his life. The sheer volume of Scripture Mary has memorized is impressive.

Finally what I think makes this so amazing is that Mary is likely very young. The customs of Israel in that day were that girls got married often in their teenage years. So she was likely not very old at all and accepted her role in God's design with dignity and honor.

And what's her attitude in the middle of all of that? It's joy. It's praise. It's a song to God that takes the richest theology and applies it directly to her heart. And I believe it will bless us this evening as well.

The whole theme of this section is praise. Praise to God for what he is doing through Jesus. I want to talk about that for a minute and then I want to work through this fantastic little song and look at specific reasons Mary gives us for praising God.

So look at **Read 46-47**

So Mary says she magnifies the Lord. Or some of you have glorified. This is her praising God. She wants to exalt God. That's her heart: that God would be seen as great for what he's doing in bringing Jesus into the world.

You know how when someone's favorite team wins a game they come out the next day with all their team gear on? That's the idea. God has done an amazing thing, and she's putting God on display for everyone to see.

Despite her crazy situation that is, frankly, just beyond belief to everyone but Mary and Joseph and God, Mary is exulting in God. This overflow of praise comes when these two pregnant ladies come together and there's a joy between them and even between the babies themselves. **Read 39-45**

Isn't that amazing? John, this little baby just 6 months along in conception and still in the womb is leaping for joy in the presence of his Savior Jesus who is also still in the womb. Jesus is probably only just a couple of months gestation at this point but the reality of Messiah coming into the world is so powerful that the baby leaps for joy.

And Elizabeth cries out in praise and blessing to Mary. Mary is blessed, the child is blessed and even Elizabeth is blessed just to be in their presence. And it's to all this spontaneous joy and blessing brought about by the Holy Spirit that Mary's heart overflows with praise and she gives the Magnificat.

Listen, if ever you're in a place where it's hard to fathom what the next step is or the path forward. Your life is so dark and black and there's just no hope, you're going through the valley of the shadow of death - the only possibility of having true joy is looking to what God has done in Jesus. That he has come to set everything back to right, to good. Maybe not now, but eventually he'll right all wrongs, to fully redeem those who follow him. That's the only hope that is so great and amazing, it can carry us through any situation.

If someone doesn't follow Jesus then they have no true hope. Actually the Bible says you're under the wrath and judgment of God for your sin. Even if everything is going well in the world for you, there's actually no reason to praise or rejoice because at the end of it all God's judgement in hell is all that awaits. Turning from your sins and begging the risen Lord Jesus for forgiveness is your only hope for God to be merciful to you.

And that's why he sent Jesus into the world. To save. And that salvation is worth praising him for.

Look at Mary's song of praise here. What does she praise God for? I think we see 5 things.

1) He blesses the humble. Read 46-48a

The first thing Mary realizes is that she is no one great but God still loves her. God does not owe her a fantastic life of wealth and privilege and ease. She didn't get the picture perfect wedding she wanted. She didn't get the easy 9 month pregnancy she wanted.

Mary is traveling all over ancient Israel while she's pregnant. She goes from Nazareth to wherever Elizabeth is. Then she goes back home. Then when she's 9 months along she has to travel 100 miles south to get to Bethlehem for the census. And when the time to give birth comes she doesn't have a proper place to give birth or even lay her baby.

But she just goes along joyfully. Why? Because she is a servant of God. She is God's willing servant. Her life is completely in God's hands. "God you want me to carry the Messiah? I'm at your service. God you want me to bless my cousin miles away? I'm at your service." She views her whole life through the lens of God's joyful and obedient servant.

And God looks on that with favor. **Read 48a**

The Bible is filled with promises that God blesses the humble. Those who don't think highly of themselves. Those who don't think they're better than others or think they deserve some other mission or station in life. The humble are those who do what God has called them to do in the place he's called them to do it with gladness. God blesses the humble.

2) We praise God because he does great things for us. **Read 48b-49**

Mary was used by God in an absolutely amazing way - she is blessed of God. And I know that the Catholic Church has all kinds of nonsense about Mary.

But what we do know for sure is that God blessed her abundantly. Of all the women who have ever been, she is the only one who bore and raised and taught the Son of God. She was his mom.

There's always a unique relationship between mother and son, and that's what Mary had that with Jesus. And even at this point where she doesn't know all that will unfold in her life, she praises God because he has set her on a trajectory of immense blessing.

This is true for us as well. Do you want joy in your life? Do you want praise for God to bubble up naturally? Count the ways God has blessed you. Literally count them and write them down.

Many years ago I had an assignment in seminary. And the assignment was to write down 100 things that God had blessed me with. No sweat. I got this. I was 22 things in and I had nothing left to give thanks for. Just nothing. How sad is that?

I think most of us have the same difficulty: we struggle to recognize how blessed we are by God and actually gives thanks for what he's done.

A lot of times we have spiritual amnesia. We're like the Israelites in the wilderness who experience all the amazing power and might of God, we're saved by God, fed by God, led out of slavery by God and while we're munching manna from heaven and drinking miraculous water, we complain that God isn't doing anything for us. And if you remember Moses says over and over that the Israelites grumbled. They complained. There was no joy.

No, if we want joy in our lives we need to remember the blessings of God. We need to remember that the almighty has done great things. Yes, he's saved you. Yes, through faith in Jesus your sins are forgiven and you will see him face to face. But the blessings don't stop there. God multiplies them all our lives.

3) We praise God when we remember his amazing mercy. **Read 50**

Mercy and grace are cousins. Grace is getting something that we don't deserve - it's getting a gift. Mercy is just the opposite: it's not getting what we do deserve.

It's the convicted murderer who is pardoned. It's driving 15 over and getting off with a warning. It's sleeping through your alarm clock and your boss doesn't fire you.

For us, we praise God for his mercy toward us. Mary says that God shows mercy to those who fear God. Why would we ever fear God? Because God is holy and righteous. God demands perfection. He demands that our lives our lived in perfect obedience to him. Any and every sin we commit is deserving of his eternal wrath in hell forever.

But in his mercy what he does for those who believe and follow Jesus is forgive our sins. He gives us a full and free pardon.

When I think of God's mercy I often think of the thief of the cross. He wasn't really a thief, he was an insurrectionist, someone who tried to overthrow the government. He probably murdered and sabotaged and committed all kinds of treason. And he was so vile that he was mocking and insulting Jesus as they were hanging on the cross together.

And then something changed. As he's hanging there in the last few hours of his life God changes his heart from a blasphemer and persecutor to a worshipper and followed of Jesus. As he's knocking on the doors of death, he is transformed and Jesus promises that he will be with him in Paradise that very day. God pardoned him.

How can he do that? What did the thief do? What sign of repentance, what good work to justify his salvation? None. He simply believed that the man hanging on the cross next to him was the Son of God and worthy of praise and obedience. And although he was taking his last breaths God pardoned him. Gave him mercy. How can that be?

It's the same thing he does for us when we believe in Jesus. We get a full and complete pardon in Christ who bore the wrath we deserve in his body on the tree. He got what I deserve. I get what he deserves. That's mercy. Full and free mercy, praise God.

4) We praise God for his strength. Read 51-53

The Bible often uses the arm as a metaphor for strength. And we do this as well - biceps throughout millennia have represented strength. And even though God doesn't have a body, the idea is that he is all powerful to do whatever he wants to do.

Here, he scatters those who are proud. He destroys the arrogant. He knows what is in their hearts and just tosses them aside like they're nothing.

The hard thing about those who are wicked who are in power is that it often seems like there's nothing that can be done to them. It's as though they'll never be held accountable, never be taken down, never overthrown.

But God not only sees their deeds, he knows their heart. And he knows the exact moment they will be deposed and brought down and catapulted into an eternity of judgment.

The Bible is full of examples of wicked people who oppressed the weak for a long, long time and then were brought to ruin in a moment.

Pharaoh, the Philistines, Syrians, Babylon, Assyria, various kings in Israel and Judah like Ahab and Jezebel and Jeroboam. They all ruled with an iron fist and seemed untouchable until the Almighty brought them to absolute ruin in a moment of utter disgrace and humiliation.

We often have a very limited view of the scope of history and want deliverance from wicked rulers right this very minute. But that's not always what God has decreed. But when he decides to act, his arm is strong to do so. He will bring them down and humble them. **Read 53**

This is saying the same thing in a different way. The fat and happy rich are usually the powerful oppressors and the hungry are usually the ones they oppress. But God rules over it all and will always do what is right in the eternal scheme of things.

He can do it - and we praise him for it - because he is strong.

By the way, I find it interesting that this young woman is rejoicing in this. It's not often in our society that young women are praising God for his ability to crush wicked rulers and uphold the weak in society. Mary wasn't just focused on her situation but on the quality of lives of those around her who were oppressed by Rome and the puppet kings it had placed in power in Israel.

And she was glad her child would come and put all things under his own feet.

We praise God because he blesses the humble, he does great things, for his amazing mercy and for his strength.

5) We praise God because he keeps his promises. Read 54-56

Jesus coming into the world is ultimately about God fulfilling the promises he made to his people millennia before. He helped Israel.

The gospel is to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles. God has brought his promises to save and bless and redeem and forgive to pass because he remembered his mercy. **Read 54**

It's not as though God forgot. When it says he remembered the idea is that he's making good on the promise. That promise is what he gave to the fathers. **Read 55**

Jesus is the fulfillment of all that God promised to the patriarchs of old.

When he promised to Abraham to give an offspring to bless the nations - that was Jesus.

When he promised Israel that the redeemer would come from Judah - that was Jesus.

When he promised David that he would have a son whose Kingdom would endure forever - that was Jesus.

When he promised Isaiah that one would come who was the Prince of peace, who is wonderful, counselor, mighty God, and the government would be on his shoulders, and justice and righteousness would come forth forever - that was Jesus.

We praise God that he is faithful to his promises. Sometimes they come quick, sometimes they come slow. But they come.

Lighting

And as we come now to the lighting, we remember that they do come. One by one, faith by faith, people come to trust in the promises of God through the Lord Jesus. And just like we light these candles and our building is slowly filled with light, so too as people throughout the world believe the world is slowly filled with light.

Is there darkness? Sure. But the light will overcome the darkness. And for that we rejoice and praise Jesus just like our sister Mary.