

Mary You Did Know! - Luke 1:45–55

Text:

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.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Prayer:

We ask, O Lord, pour your grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Introduction:

Welcome friends, if we haven't met my name is Trey and I am one of the pastors here at Antioch. It's an honor for me to preach and begin a new series "Songs of Advent" [Series Slide] that focuses on four sections of the beginning of Luke's gospel that have a prominent place in the history of the Church's worship. The first song in Luke 1:46–55 is traditionally called, "The Magnificat" is shorthand for Latin phrase we translate in English as "My soul magnifies the Lord". These songs have had a daily place in Christian worship, and still do in several expressions of Christianity today.

These songs of Advent bring us as their hearers into the reality of Advent and the reality of our own lives. We meet Mary, a young girl, terrified, at the angel Gabriel's announcement of God's favor upon her. We meet Zachariah, an old and advanced in years who in the midst of the barrenness of their infertility comes inexplicable life and

joy. We meet a group of Shepherds out in the wilderness, who receive the announcement of great joy. We meet Simeon, the faithful righteous waiting expectantly for the consolation of Israel. Within these songs we encounter the contours of Advent. We hear advent's mood and theme.

We hear the abundantly good news of God's coming to his people, but, as many of us know - that good news comes to these people as it comes to us. A people scared and unsure of the future (like Mary), having experienced bitter disappointment and failure (like Elizabeth and Zachariah), having great fear of where God may lead us (like the shepherds), having waited a lifetime for God's promises to come true (like Simeon and Anna).

Advent is light coming into the darkness, reminding us all both of our great need in throws of sin and death, and the great joy that is God's announcement of Jesus.

Mary's Magnificat opens up the drama of Advent for us this morning. The Magnificat is not an ancient version of the popular Christmas song "Mary did you know?" [**Mark Lowry slide**]. Now for those of you who like this song, I'm sorry/not sorry for what I'm about to say. Chris Lowry, who wrote "Mary did you know?" as many of you know, asks the biblical Mary if she knew the amazing miracles and atoning death of Jesus,

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy, Will one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy, Will save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy, Has come to make you new?
This child that you've delivered, Will soon deliver you*

We hear those words, and think, whoah - that's profound and very deep. But listen church - of course Mary didn't know these things! But if our assumption following this song is that Mary didn't understand at all what was happening to her, then our assumption based upon Mary's song is completely false. And as those of you who participated in our last training know, the meaning of Holy Scripture is not found in our reconstructions of the minds of the people of Scripture, but in what God in his self-revelation of Scripture says about his purposes in Christ communicated by his Spirit.

And of course this is what the end of Mary's song even says, when she composed this hymn in her heart,

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” (Luke 1:54–55).

A better example of what Mary’s magnificat is can be

found in the song “Belle” from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* [Beauty and the Beast Slide]. That’s the song at the beginning that starts... *Bonjour, bonjour, bonjour, bonjour, bonjour!* Have you ever noticed that the song Belle introduces all the components of the story of the film and even gives some pretty big hints about what will happen? Listen to what Belle, the bookworm, says at one point about halfway through the song as she’s talking about a book she’s reading,

Oh! Isn't this amazing? It's my favorite part because you'll see. Here's where she meets Prince Charming. But she won't discover that it's him till chapter three.

And remember when Belle meets the hideous beast she thinks he’s the opposite of charming, but she’ll later discover its him later in the story.

Mary’s Magnificat in many ways sets the stage for the themes of Luke’s gospel and also advent. That’s why I’ve titled the sermon this morning, [Title Slide]“**Mary You did Know!**”

I want to present to you three musical chords (if you will) that make up Mary’s magnificat and teach us about the meaning of advent. Here are the main points [Points Slide]

The Minor Chord: Advent sings to us our humility

The Major Chord: Advent sings to us God’s strong mercy

The Resolution Chord: Advent sings to us God’s upside down kingdom

1. The Minor Chord: Advent sings to us our humility

The minor chord is both beautiful and somber. You make a minor chord by distorting one of the tones. This distortion brings dissonance. It brings conflicting sounds together. Throughout Mary’s Magnificat the minor chord of humanity's affliction and humiliation sets the stage for the need for advent.

Mary's joyous response to Gabriel's word is set in the context of her humility and the affliction of Israel. Read with me in verses 46–48,

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;

When we read these verses we are drawn into the joy that Mary feels as she experiences the blessing of God. Mary states here that because of what God has done all generations will call her blessed. She has found favor with God (1:30). Her cousin Elizabeth says she is blessed among women (1:42) and Mary is blessed believing there would be a fulfillment of what the Lord spoke to her (1:45). Mary is most definitely blessed, but her blessing brings the joy and worship it does because it comes in the context of humiliation of Israel because the sins of humanity. Blessing is necessary for God to be reunited with his people because the curse of sin and death. As the forgotten stanza of Joy to the World says,

No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow; Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as, the curse is found. (Joy to the World, Isaac Watts)

But where is the curse here? Look with me in verse 48, **for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant**. The word in the original language the ESV translates "humble estate" can at first pass seem to indicate that Mary was just a lowly nobody who outside of God's favor had nothing worthy in her for her mission. And that's true, Mary didn't merit the blessing she received. As Martin Luther said,

"[Mary] does not desire herself to be esteemed; she magnifies God alone and gives all glory to Him. She leaves herself out and ascribes everything to God alone, from whom she received it."¹

As protestant Christians we are right to be wary of any extra-biblical teaching on Mary. But I think our general fear of Mary in catholic theology has blunted the scriptural importance of what Mary is in the storyline of Scripture and what it means for advent.

The phrase Mary uses to describe her self, "**humble estate**" could also be translated "affliction, distress, and humility" has deep covenantal connections. It doesn't mean Mary is simply folksy. As Deut 26:7 and Neh 9:9 say, God heard Israel's **affliction** (same

¹ Luther's Works 21: 308. Cited from, Levering, *Was the Reformation a Mistake*, 55.

word) when he brought them out of Egypt. And this Israel, which God redeemed out of Egypt, in the prophets is identified as a young virgin girl. We're familiar with the prophecy from **Isaiah 7:14**,

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Immanuel means in Isaiah "God with us" (Isaiah 8:8, 10).

But the virgin girl isn't merely one person in Isaiah's book. The virgin is a symbol of the affliction of Jerusalem and Israel. Jerusalem is referred to as the Daughter of Zion in **Isa 1:8; 10:30, 32; 16:1**. In Isaiah **37:22** Jerusalem is called "**The virgin daughter of Zion.**"² In Isaiah **52:1-3** we read,

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust and arise; be seated, O Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. For thus says the Lord: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money."³

The coming of Immanuel is about the redemption of his virgin daughter Israel, as we just sung a few moments ago,

**O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear**

Mary is drawing upon the scriptures of Israel when she considers her humble estate. She is the embodiment of the affliction of Israel. And in her hymn she embodies the prophecy of Zech 2:10,

Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the Lord.

The miracle of Mary's conception is not merely that a virgin gives birth, but that Mary is the embodiment of God's promises to Israel, she functions symbolically as she realizes when she says at the end of her hymn,

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." (1:55).

² Also, Lam 2:13.

³ Also, Isaiah 40:1-8.

In the first two chapters of Luke's gospel on Mary (1:38, 49), Israel/David (1:54, 69), and Simeon (2:29) are referred to as God's servants, which further strengthens her connection to Israel. Isn't interesting that two of the songs from the beginning of Luke's gospel are from the mouths of those who are associated with the people of Israel as a whole.

Advent is not merely the merry mood of family and carols and celebration. Advent should be a time of reflection on death, affliction, the enslavement of sin we see in the world. It is a time to recognize and confess the lingering effects of the fall we feel in our bodies and commit with our hands by sinning as Mary and Simeon realize. But it is the recognition that these old things are passing away, and by Christ's entry into the world everything sad is coming untrue.

Mary's song sings to us first of our humble estate enslaved by sin and death. In Advent, God comes to us in the misery of our affliction to dwell with and deliver us. The darkness and the dissonance of the minor chord of advent is met by the brilliance and clarity of the next chord, the major chord of God's strong mercy.

2. The Major Chord: Advent sings to us God's strong mercy

Major chords are brilliant and dominant. They make a strong statement in the melody of a song. **In the Magnificat the bright and dominant theme is the strength of God's mercy.** Now strong mercy sounds like an oxymoron, but look with me at verses 49-50 and 54 in Mary's song,

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; (49-51)

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy (54)

(49-51) God's coming to Israel, his mighty acts for Mary, and strength of his right arm creates a sandwich around his mercy. God's action towards Israel is done in remembrance of his mercy on his people.

We often define mercy in theological church-ese as "not receiving what we deserve." And on the flip side we talk about justice as getting what we deserve.⁴ Just do a google search and you'll see that there are about a gazillion recent Christian books that use this

⁴ I've traced this to [D. Stuart's Briscoe's writings in the 1970s and 80s.](#)

definition. However, these ways of understanding both justice and mercy pit them against each other, so that either God is merciful or he is just.

And in doing so we sisters and brothers can pit one aspect of God's nature against another aspect of his nature. So for example we can at times put a barrier between us and the Lord because we are afraid of his justice. Some of you this morning this is your default mode in relating to God. God is great, powerful, and just and while you know you need him for salvation you don't want to go near him. He's like the angry dad that as a kid you don't want to go near.

Or we think of God as the merciful guy in the sky who we could care less if we sin against. We practically relate to God as our grandparents on Christmas break. It doesn't matter what we do, we're not going to get in trouble. We're chugging two liters and staying up late watching all the movies we want- life's a party baby!

Both of these... both of these are false representations of who the God of advent is. Both mercy and justice are a part of God's over abundant goodness to us.⁵ Just look at these verses we've just read, God is mighty and merciful to those who fear him (v. 50-51). God's help towards Israel is because he has remembered his mercy in the past. God's strength to set everything to rights and his mercy towards his people.

Rather both God's mercy and justice are results of his nature as goodness itself. God's coming to us in Jesus is the great expression of his justice and setting what was distorted and marred in the Fall to rights, and the great expression of his mercy, but coming to us in our need. God's strong mercy brings us to a new normal, and surprising resolution of what is wrong in the world. This is our third and final chord of advent, the Resolution chord.

3. The Resolution Chord: Advent sings to us God's upside-down kingdom

The resolution of the melody happens at the tonic chord, which brings everything home. All is calm, all is bright. Mary's resolution chord of advent inverted, up is down and down is up.

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. (51-53)

⁵ [Summa Theologica, I.21.4.r](#)

Mary's words here mirror Hannah's song (Samuel's mother) at the beginning of 1 Samuel 2:

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. (4-5)

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. (7-8)

What Mary and Hannah sing is essentially how Luke characterizes the preaching of Jesus later in Luke's gospel,

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. (6:20–21)

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. (6:24–25)

So what do we say about all the verses we just read? The poor get the kingdom and the rich go away hungry. What does that have to do with us? I think we see a couple of things worth noting. First, Advent sings to us of God's upside down kingdom that is both past, present, and future. Both Mary and Hannah sing of God's upside down kingdom as a present reality. They say this is essentially who God is, he opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Jesus underscores both the present and future aspects of what he calls the kingdom of God. The poor have the kingdom now, but are still awaiting to be satisfied. And so,

Second, Advent sings to us an upside down kingdom that is still coming. The songs of Hannah and Mary point to a reality that has begun but is not complete. God really does act in an upside down way, and his ways of acting in the past are consistent with who he is now.

Third, Advent sings to us an upside down kingdom that tells us we are unremarkable. It's hard for us to relate to what Mary is saying here,

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. (51–53)

We're not hungry we're not poor on a global scale of what poverty means, and compared to those a stone's throw away from us our lives are relatively easy. But what this text shows us this morning is that God uses the unremarkable people for his kingdom. You know, I look out into this room this morning and see a lot of nobodies. Show of hands, is anyone in this room going to be remembered by all 100 years after you die? 50? 20? 10? Maybe by your family and your kids. We won't be.

One of the things that this advent series will teach us, I hope, is that advent for is the unremarkable people of this world. Advent is for unwed pregnant mothers, childless couples, and those for whom the race is almost over. These are the people that God meets in the advent of his Son and says you may be unremarkable, but you're mine.

Conclusion

The cross is a perfect example of this. How could a roman crucifixion of God's son be what God uses to bring in his kingdom? Because God's kingdom as Mary, Hannah, and Jesus know doesn't operate in the way everyone expects.