

Mary's Christmas Song  
Luke 1.46-55  
Phil Congdon

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And Mary said:

“My soul exalts the Lord,  
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.  
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant;  
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.  
For the Mighty One has done great things for me;  
And holy is His name.  
And His mercy is upon generation after generation  
Toward those who fear Him.  
He has done mighty deeds with His arm;  
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.  
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,  
And has exalted those who were humble.  
He has filled the hungry with good things;  
And sent away the rich empty-handed.  
He has given help to Israel His servant,  
In remembrance of His mercy,  
As He spoke to our fathers,  
To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

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Good songs often have a story behind them. Something happened that caused the song-writer to overflow with feelings that morphed into the lyrics of a song. Eric Clapton wrote “Tears in Heaven” following the death of his 4-year-old son, Conor. Stevie Wonder wrote “Isn’t She Lovely” after his daughter Aisha was born in 1975. Great hymns have stories behind them, too. Horatio Spafford wrote “It Is Well With My Soul” after his four daughters died at sea. John Newton wrote the words to “Amazing Grace” to express his personal testimony of being saved after a life of violence and evil in the slave trade.

The words we have just read are often referred to as the Magnificat of Mary. But they are more than words. *There is a story here.*

Our story could begin when Mary was a little girl growing up, when her faith was nurtured in the home by godly parents. But Scripture is silent on this part of her life, so we pick up the story when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in her home town of Nazareth (Luke 1:26).

At the time, Mary was perhaps 15 or 16 years old, yet she was already betrothed – *engaged* – to Joseph. Gabriel addressed Mary as ‘favored one’ and says she has ‘found favor with God’ (1:28, 30). The word translated ‘favor’ is from the Greek word for ‘grace’ (χάρις): Mary was an object of God’s grace. He said that although she was a virgin, she would give birth to a child who would be the Son of God and reign over the house of Jacob forever (1:32f). Mary was perplexed; “How can this be?” Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her; the conception would be a miracle of God. Then, as confirmation this was true, and that ‘nothing is impossible with God,’ Gabriel told her that her relative Elizabeth, who Mary would have known was not only barren, but well past child-bearing age, was also pregnant. In one of the briefest yet most impressive statements of faith in Scripture, Mary replies, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said” (Lk. 1:38, NIV).

Either to confirm that what she had been told was true, or perhaps to share her news with Elizabeth, Mary journeyed the almost 100 miles to the Judean hill country – not far from Jerusalem, where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. When she entered the house and greeted Elizabeth, something amazing happened. At the moment Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, her baby (that was John the Baptist) leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit – a sudden, miraculous filling that caused her to cry out with a loud voice and say, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”

Now there is a little ‘side story’ you need to know. Before Elizabeth got pregnant, Gabriel appeared to her husband Zechariah (1:15) with the news they would have a son, and said that the child would be filled with the Spirit even before he was born. In other words, the Holy Spirit

would control and empower him in his mother's womb and all through his life. When Mary walked in, carrying the Son of God in her womb, Elizabeth's baby – John – gave her a good kick!

My daughter is seven or eight months pregnant. A few days ago I was talking with her when she suddenly lurched – “Ouch!” I asked what was wrong: She rubbed her side and said that the baby had jumped.

When Elizabeth's baby jumped, the Spirit filled her; she recognized what had just happened, and cried out, “Mary, you are blessed, and so is the baby in your womb. My child leaped for joy, bearing witness to the Lord in your womb. And you are blessed for believing what God said to you.”

As Mary listens to Elizabeth, she is overcome with the awesomeness of what is happening. God is invading human history. The promises of all history, the tantalizing hopes that echoed through centuries as the prophets looked to the future, are all about to happen. And here they are, two insignificant, unremarkable, obscure women – one old and barren, and other young and a virgin, both bearing a miraculous child. And those children are going to change all human history.

Mary is moved in her spirit. Her vision of God has never been clearer. She begins to speak, and utters a ‘song of praise.’

### **Mary's Heart Magnifies the Holy God (46-47)**

The first part of her song is very personal. It is an outpouring of praise to the Holy God: *My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.* The popular name for this song, the Magnificat, comes from the Latin for *magnifies*. The Greek word, μεγαλύνω (*megaluno*) means to enlarge, to increase, to make great.

Mary is giving voice to what her heart is feeling. We may experience the same thing today. You might be reading the Bible, or taking a walk and observing the beauty of nature, or singing praise songs in church. In your heart, you have a deep awareness of the presence of God, and an appreciation for what He is doing in your life. You might have even thought words similar to Mary's: *The Lord has done great things for me!*

It can happen at the most unexpected times. When we are in the depths of grief, and no *human* solace can meet our need, that is when the Lord reminds us of His presence. When our plans come crashing down, and we feel like giving up, the timeless assurance of God's faithfulness can ignite a spark of hope. For Mary, facing a unique and uncertain future, she lifts the eyes of her soul from unanswerable questions and focuses on the security she has in God, and sings praises.

### **Mary Humbly Recognizes God's Blessings to Her (48-49)**

The first word of v48 is key here: *For*. That tells us that Mary is about to explain *why* her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior. Two things stand out in vv48-49: Mary's humility, and God's holiness. To put that another way, Mary decreases her own significance, and increases God's significance.

Perhaps this is the place for a gentle rebuke that probably all of us in America should consider. As much as any nation on the planet, and probably more than most, Americans have an ‘entitlement complex.’ We think we're *entitled* to so much. If you have an opportunity to visit a third-world country, you quickly become aware of the things we take for granted – even demand – that most people in the world never experience. Mary exhibits the opposite of an ‘entitlement complex.’

*For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave.* Mary is not saying, “Hey, look at me! I am so good that God picked me for this awesome task!” Instead, Mary recognizes that she is deserving of nothing, and she is on the level of a slave, and God has by His love and grace done great things for her.

This must have been a message Mary impressed on to her children. James, one of her sons, author of the epistle that bears his name, wrote that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and that *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* Mary is amazed God is blessing her: God condescends to her lowliness and does a great thing for her: he makes her the mother of the Son of God who is coming into the world! It is such a singular and unimaginable blessing that all generations from that time on have acknowledged Mary's blessedness.

But let's be careful here. Many of you have grown up in or attended a Roman Catholic church, and you know of the veneration of Mary. She is viewed as being morally superior to all of us, as though she lived a sinless life. Millions of Catholics pray to Mary, as though she is able to 'sway' God to answer prayers. The fact is, no one would be more repulsed by the countless statues of Mary and prayers being made to her than Mary herself.

Mary *was* unique. No one else gave birth to the Son of God. But Jesus Himself makes clear Mary is not to be worshipped. When a woman in a crowd once called to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you!" He replied, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk. 11.27-28) Another time someone told Jesus that His 'mother and brothers' were waiting for Him, and He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8.19-21).

Mary takes no credit here: *For the Mighty One has done great things for me, And holy is His name.*

### **The Holy God Helps the Lowly, Not the Proud (50-55)**

In the rest of Mary's song, we might say she preaches a sermon. She has expressed that she rejoices in her blessing of giving birth to God's Son, and exalts God for the great things that He has done for a humble bondservant like her. But there are truths here for all generations. What God has done for her, He has done throughout history, and He will do throughout history.

What Mary declares is like a responsive reading, with two themes that are like two sides of the same coin. The first theme is that God helps the lowly; the second is that God opposes the proud.

v. 50 – *His mercy is...toward those who fear Him.*

v. 52 – *He has exalted those who were humble.*

v. 53 – *He has filled the hungry with good things.*

v. 51 – *He has scattered those who were proud*

v. 52 – *He has brought down rulers from their thrones*

v. 53 – *He has sent away the rich empty-handed.*

This isn't just a theme in Mary's song: It's a theme throughout the whole Bible. God is not partial to the rich, the powerful, or the proud. How could God be partial to the things which in our world are, more often than not, substitutes for God rather than pointers to God? Vast numbers of people have perished, blinded by the pursuit of pride, power, and wealth.

God steps in to help the poor, the needy, the down-trodden, who calls out to Him. It's just the opposite to what we see in the world. God is not impressed by those who are rich: *Did not God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him? (Jas. 2.5)* God does not partner with the powerful of this world: *'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'* *Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses ...for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12.9).*

It never ceases to amaze me how conniving and deceptive Satan is. I watched this last week a program on so-called 'health and wealth' TV preachers. These charlatans rake in millions of dollars by telling people that if they 'sow a seed' of money in their ministry, God will reward them with a windfall. One preacher proudly announced that a woman had sent in a sizable donation, and within a week she had two new cars and a new husband! I pity the poor folks who are duped into giving up their meager savings...but I fear what awaits those preachers at the final judgment. They have turned God's word upside-down, and made themselves powerful and rich and prestigious in this world.

Jesus' story of Lazarus and the rich man is a somber warning. The rich man ended up in torment; Lazarus ended up in the Lord's presence. The message of Mary's song is not just beautiful; there's a word of warning here. It's as though after Mary overflows with her praise, she calls out to all who will listen, 'Look at what God is really like! He is not the least impressed by any of your pride, power, or opulence. He has mercy on those who fear him, who humble themselves and turn from the ego-boosting accumulation of wealth to the lowliness of self-denial for the sake of others. This is the way God is. This is how his holiness exhibits itself. The Creator and holy God magnifies his greatness by blessing the lowly who admire his greatness, not the proud who admire their own greatness!