

## Give Glory to God

As we read about Mary today she was just a young teenager. I'm sure she thought she had her life planned out. She was about to get married to Joseph, one of the nicest guy in Nazareth. She would care for their house and children and he would work as a carpenter. It would have been a picture perfect life. But then it all changed. The angel gave her the news that she would become pregnant and would give birth to the Savior. In only a moment all her plans were up in the air. Questions must have raced through her mind. What if Joseph didn't understand or didn't believe her. He could have her stoned to death or at the very least end their engagement. What about her family and friends? Would they understand? Would she and Joseph have to move away from Nazareth? The angel never told her the answer to any of these questions. All Mary knew was that she was going to be the mother of God's Son. And yet despite the uncertainty of her life she gives glory to God. Despite everything happening in her life she still praises God for his mercy and rejoices in his salvation.

Mary went to see her also pregnant cousin Elizabeth after the angel's announcement. Maybe she just needed to get away from Nazareth or maybe she wanted someone to talk to about everything that had happened. Either way she leaves Nazareth and travels the seventy or so miles south to the hill country of Judea. When Mary arrives, a remarkable exchange happens between these two women. We read that it is not only Elizabeth who is excited about Mary's visit but also her unborn son, John. Elizabeth exclaims that Mary is blessed and so is her child. But it is probably Elizabeth's unborn son John who gets the most attention. Luke tells us that at the sound of Mary's greeting John leaps for joy in his mother's tummy.

Mary responds to this extraordinary greeting by her family with song. And if the words of the song are familiar to you it's because we still use them today in our services. We call it the Song of Mary or the Magnificat. Magnificat is a word meaning to glorify. It comes from the same Latin Word that we get magnificent and magnify from. We have been singing the Magnificat on Wednesday evenings after the sermon, in response to hearing the wonderful things God has done for us and we sang a version of it before our sermon this morning.

But why a song? How can she be so happy that she wants to sing? Had she forgotten that she was a pregnant, unwed mother who still had to tell her fiancée? No it was because despite all the troubles in her life she knew God was still merciful in lifting up the humble.

Mary was familiar with God's laws. As an obedient Israelite she knew what God demanded. She had the books of Moses read to her on the Sabbath - books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy that governed all aspects of her life. She knew what God expected her to do. She knew what she could eat and couldn't eat, how she was to worship, even what holidays she was to celebrate. And these were all on top of the Ten Commandments that were given to govern the morals of the people.

And she knew how Israel and all people had failed to keep these laws. Her nation had been conquered and deported and conquered again all because of the gross failings of the people to keep the laws of God. Most of her countrymen never returned from their exiles in other lands. Even those great heroes in the Old Testament, those people her nation looked up to, had failed to obey God. Noah, Abraham, David, they had all fallen into terrible gross sins. Noah had been a drunkard. Abraham lied to protect himself instead of protecting his wife. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Everyone had failed to keep God's laws. No one had done what was needed.

And Mary herself knew she was no exception. She understood her sin. That she in no way deserved God's love. And yet she praises God for lifting up the humble. As well as she knew her own faults she knew that God lifted up his people. As Proverbs three says, "God gives grace to the humble." She knew she deserved nothing. But Mary also knew that God showed mercy to those who didn't deserve it.

Mary praises God because his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. The Mighty One has done great things. Noah had failed. He deserved nothing. Yet God lifted him up to rescue every animal and preserve mankind from the coming flood. Abraham had failed. He deserved nothing. Yet God lifted him up to leave his homeland and become the father of a great nation. David had failed. He deserved nothing. Yet God lifted him up to be the king and bring great prosperity to his people. Mary had failed she deserved nothing. Yet God lifted her up to be the mother of the Savior. You too fail to keep God's commands. You deserve nothing. Yet God has lifted you up. God has chosen you to be a kingdom of priests. He has lifted you up to love one another. He has lifted you up to enjoy the blessing of knowing that he has pieced together everything in this world to work for your individual benefit.

Raise your hand if you've seen the movie Ice Age. If you've seen the movie you remember the character Sid. He was a sloth with a speech impediment. Sid really didn't have a lot going for him. He was small, not too bright, and always managed to get himself into trouble. He never really worries or is sad though. In fact in the whole movie he is probably the most happy and optimistic. Why? Because he had his two friends, Manny the mammoth and Diego the saber tooth tiger, to lift him up. It didn't matter to him that he was a sloth when he had the company of others to lift him up. We have better than a cynical mammoth and a brooding saber tooth tiger. We have a God who promises to lift us up from our lowly state.

The writer of Lamentations says in chapter three, "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning." And you do see the Lord's mercy and compassion every morning. And I wonder if because they are there new every morning if we don't pay as much attention to them as we should. Does the familiarity of God's mercy make it easy to overlook. But whether we notice his mercy or not it is there. You are granted health and strength to go through your day. The Lord is merciful as he gives you wealth to support yourself and those entrusted to our care. His mercy is shown to you in your families as you love and care for one another. He has been exceedingly merciful to you in giving us a great country to live in giving you protection and freedom and prosperity. Even in giving you a job the Lord has poured out his mercy on you, giving you a way to use your energy and skills to support yourself and to glorify him. Yes even in crisis when it is easy to wonder if God still cares, he shows you mercy.

He has even chosen you to enjoy the blessings of salvation. The last part of Mary's song is really the highlight. Mary glorifies God for remembering the promise made to Abraham and to his descendents forever.

Mary sang because God was keeping his promise. The promise he made long ago when there was only two people on the planet. God spoke to Satan saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he (that is the woman's offspring) will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

Adam and Eve had sinned and faced separation from God. But God promised to save them. He promised to send someone who would break sins power. Mary realized that this promise was now being kept by the child that was growing inside her. God would bring salvation to his people. Mary's child, the one who would be named Jesus would save the people from their sins. It was the joy of this thought that caused Mary to burst forth in song. This is why she glorified the Lord and rejoiced in God her Savior.

How often do you consider God's mercy? How often do you praise him for his salvation? Salvation is the one thing we need most in life. More than any other thing our salvation is most important. That is why Christmas is so great. It gives us an opportunity to be reminded of God's plan of salvation. We can sing songs like Joy to the World and Comfort Comfort Ye My People even when, like Mary, times are hard. Because God came to earth, as a little boy born into a manger in Bethlehem God brought joy and comfort to the world. That little boy would grow up and one day walk the road to the cross to pay for our sins. And in that fact we have a lot to be happy about.

They say that the only things we can be certain of in this life are death and taxes. And these are things are very certain. But the reality is there have been a few people from time to time who get away without paying any taxes. And the Bible records for us two people, Enoch and Elijah, who never tasted death either. There is really only one thing in life that we can be completely sure of and that is that God sent his one and only son into the world that whoever believes in him will have life. This is a fact more certain than death or taxes. It is a fact so certain that we can have confidence in it every day of our life.

Mary looked forward in confidence but we have the blessing of being able to look back in time with that same confidence. We can look back and see just how God redeemed his people through Jesus. Salvation has been accomplished. Because of the great things God has done we have a reason to glorify God.

The Lord has remembered to be merciful to his people forever by winning their salvation. Amen.