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Christmas Songs of Salvation

Mary's Song

Luke 1:46-55

It finally came this week . . . winter! The temperature dropped and the snow came. I must admit as a child that when this weather hit, it was an exciting time especially at recess in school. The soggy, muddy fields that we were not able to play in for most of November were frozen. Snow blanketed them now. Making snowmen, snow forts . . . all sorts of fabulous creations with wet snow. Patches of ice showed up and me and my friends would see how fast we could run and then slide across those icy patches. The snowplows would pile snow up from the parking lots by the play field to what seemed like mountains of snow to climb up. Then the sledding and skiing . . . we would bring our magic carpets to school or short skis . . . there was a little hill . . . maybe 5 feet to go down . . . but it seemed like a great bobsled trail or a mountain for skiing. The amazing fun we had as kids in the snow. The innocence and the wonder of it all. And in a way we were all excited about Christmas coming up. It was looking more and more like it.

Now I'm an adult . . . I didn't necessarily think that way this week. The ice I needed to take off my car. The slippery roads out there. The extra time I needed to take to clear my driveway. And then coming to the church – is there salt on the ice . . . we don't want people slipping. Is the snow removed from the lot . . . where are we going to place all that excess snow? It's a whole different mindset. Now coming to Christmas I have to think about making sure I have the right coloured lights, is the Christmas tree going to stand straight? . . . think about the right gifts for the people close to me. I need to think about how to care for more people during this year. The innocence and wonder of it all is kind of lacking unfortunately because responsibilities of life take precedent.

The question I find myself asking is: **How do I develop the right heart-focus at Christmas?** . . . The wonder and amazement once again. There are so many things distracting us from Christmas at this season.

Today we are starting a new series called Christmas songs of Salvation **and** for the next four weeks before Christmas we will be looking at the different songs in Luke and the characters connected to the Christmas story . . . some of them have songs that they sing. These people are faced with the news of the coming Saviour they did something that many ancient Jewish people did . . . they burst out in song. I think in our modern day we've lost this concept. We're more about listening to professionals sing and we have ways to instantly hear the professionally produced songs.

Growing up with my younger brother who tended to be an antagonist to me in my teen years . . . the two of us were driving down the road and I was singing along with the song on the radio . . . my brother stopped me and said, who is singing this song, I told him who it was.

He said . . . that singer sings so much better than you – let's listen to him. He said it as a jab . . . but for the most part I tend to listen to music at home than sing it . . . I think most of us do now. It's hard to sit for a concert of average singers when we have so many great songs accessed to us on our electronics.

In ancient times people sang wherever they went. We've lost something with the modern music we listen to.

Today we will be looking at Mary's song, sung by a young Mary . . . as a young child when I was growing up in the church I always thought of Mary as an older woman . . . Anyone above 14 when you were 6 was considered old. Most women in our day become moms now in the 20's or 30's. In ancient days women became mothers in their teens . . . 14, 16 years old. Just out of puberty. Most likely that was the age of Mary. And she sings this song as a young woman, a naïve, inexperience - hardly a woman just out of childhood.

(Luke 1:46-55)

Previously to the song, Luke tells us that Mary was visited by an angel and told of her unexpected virgin pregnancy. Mary then went from Galilee to Jerusalem to visit her older cousin Elizabeth. As Mary walks into Elizabeth's house, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for Joy and Elizabeth, knowing in her own spirit what this event means, she calls Mary the Mother of her Lord.

As those words were spoken from Elizabeth, Mary inspired with the Holy Spirit utters these famous words. **So, let's look at these words as we read Luke 1:46-55.** If you are able, would you stand for the reading of God's word. We don't know the tune of the song or the timing . . . it was probably sung originally in Aramaic too. I'm not going to sing it . . . I will read it this morning.

Mary's words . . . so profound – how could she say such deep truths? - She knew her Old Testament and this song has so many ties to the Old Testament. It's another thing that we've lost . . . scripture memorization. Memorization in general . . . as a kid, I had a bunch of my friends' phone numbers memorized, now they're programmed into my phone. I don't even know my kid's numbers by heart. Back then in ancient times people didn't have books, so they had to rely on their memory. At the Synagogue on the Sabbath, scripture would be read, it was the only place that had the scroll . . . a book, and so people would memorize most of the Old Testament word for word. As they walked everywhere to pass the time they would repeat the Word, as they harvested, they repeated the Word, as they worked, they repeated the Word. The Word was well known and this 14-year-old knew her Bible. This song is rich with Old Testament connections. It's a great song of celebration of what God has done for her and her people!

And Mary has this phenomenal insight that she shares with us about her Saviour. It is something to focus on as we come to Christmas.

How do we develop the right heart-focus at Christmas?

The first things Mary teaches us is that we need to

Know who we are before a holy God (46-48)

She says her soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.

Her soul magnifies . . . makes large. We think of a magnified glass – making something so small, larger to see. They didn't have magnified glasses back then. This same Greek word is used in describing the Pharisees who would show off how supposed holy they were . . . they would make their phylacteries wide and their tassels long . . . the phylacteries were little boxes that they would wear on their foreheads with a verse in them. The tassels were worn on their robes to remember the law. Jesus says they make them large, they have it memorized but they don't apply it.

The same word for these large tassels is the same word for magnify here. It means to make large. Her soul magnifies the Lord . . . her soul - the totality of her being makes the Lord large. The intellect, imagination, and the emotions and even the body . . . everything about her is making God as large as she is able.

God can't be made large . . . God is God. He is not made. You can enlarge your soul to see God. Mary in her celebration is saying that . . . as this pregnancy has come upon her, she is saying I have never seen the magnificence of God as I do today.

Can you say God is getting bigger in your life. As you understand the miraculous Christmas story of God the Son leaving heaven to come to be born on this earth, to identify with us. Does this enlarged your view of God. As you dive into the wonders of the Word is your view enlarged - is your soul stirred.

The next line is My Spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour. This in the original Greek shows us that this is past tense . . . my spirit rejoiced in God my Saviour. Most likely that happened when she was told that she was going to be the mother of Christ.

Think about this with this news . . . she wasn't filled with anxiety and worry; she was immediately filled with delight. It was a pleasure, a joy and celebration because this was of God!

As a young person approaching a new adventure this is so exciting . . . and often we see Mary like this . . . young and naïve – excited and not experienced . . . similar to a child sliding on ice - it is so much fun until you slip and hit your head or breaking an arm. Purchasing a new car is so exciting, until it breaks and you need to pay for the repairs. Being a newlywed is so exciting until the first big disagreement. Bringing home a newborn is so exciting until the third night of being up all night.

With Mary taking on this pregnancy was not so much a young naïve girl looking for an adventure. . . It was rooted in a God who caused her to rejoice because this was his plan and she gladly took it. God takes us on some uncomfortable adventures . . . but if God is taking you there, there is no better place to be. So do it with joy and delight.

V48 . . . she goes on and she is overwhelmed that God has noticed her at all. We see that she realizes she is a sinner at the end of v47 she needed a Saviour. Mary is not sinless. She was in wonder that God would notice this sinful lowly girl and given such an amazing honour. Possibly Mary had Isaiah 57:15 in her mind.

**For this is what the high and exalted One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
“I live in a high and holy place,
but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.**

Our God has no regard for the high people; he cares for the humble. People who need him, who know that they can't get through this life without him and need him for eternity.

As Mary approaches this journey of bearing the son of God . . . she sees herself . . . not glorifying herself, but marvels at her weakness, her need of a Saviour and to be visited by God. She gets a new glimpse of God . . . someone so great magnificent and wonderful.

So the first thing we can see on how do we develop the right heart-focus at Christmas?
Know who we are before a holy God (46-48)

The second things is we need to:

Know how to approach a holy God (49-50)

V 49 . . . she will be called blessed. All generations will call her blessed. Why? Did she discover a phenomenal scientific life changing miracle drug?

Was she a great politician ruling people with great economical insight and charitable ideas?

Was she a great singer, performer that everyone knew?
A great lawyer, engineer . . . none of those.

Why was she called blessed . . . she held the son of God against her breast and fed him. She sang to him . . . cleaned him up and burped him. When he got older she taught him about Abraham, Issac and Jacob and the great love of God. She modeled a life dedicated to God. Every single generation called her blessed . . . why? Elizabeth said it well in v43 – she is blessed because she is the mother of our Lord.

What a special gift that Mary had . . . being the mother of the Lord. She was blessed just in the role of being a Mother . . . oh we need more women known for being godly mothers. Taking that role as being so important and modelling Christ to your children. We need more fathers also taking their role as being so important.

Being a Parent is such a gift and responsibility before God – for both mothers and fathers. It seems in our modern world that people will shift their careers a few times over a lifetime. You can start off as a plumber, move to a paramedic, and end up as a politician. It is so

easy to find your identity in your work . . . In Canada we had some great companies that were world class . . . Eatons, Nortel, Rim – the BlackBerry Company, Massey Harris the Tractor Company – thousands of people spent their careers working there. They're all no longer here. You can work hard for a company and then one day have no job or company. There is more to invest with your life than a career. Believers need to be known more for being believers . . . those of us with children need to be known as being a godly mother or father.

Mary was blessed because she took her role as a parent as one of the most important roles. How will your children see you in the future? The passage goes on . . .

V 49-50

He is mighty . . . the God able to do all things. Mary had a view of God that was nothing less than profound. The mighty one with power, strength, and ability. He has created the Universe and the earth, the smallest atoms, and the largest suns. He does his wonders providing rain for the crops and food to eat. But more important he has provided salvation and eternal life for sinners like me.

He is mighty . . . and holy is his name. Holy God . . . his character, his person, his identity. He cannot be morally compromised; he does what is right or righteous. His name is so impossibly separate from sin, stain, and reproach.

This amazing glimpse of God that Mary shows to us . . . this great God who is so above us and beyond us . . . yet . . . v50

His mercy . . . his loving kindness . . . Again Mary knowing her Old Testament weaves these great OT ideas into her song.

Psalm 103:17

But from everlasting to everlasting
the *Lord's love* is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—

This great psalm of praise with the Lord's love . . . a similar word to his Mercy in the New Testament.

You also see it in this passage as Moses came down from the mountain and the Israelites were worshipping a golden calf. Moses got angry broke the tablets and had to deal with the sinners. He came to God with new tablets and the Lord said . . .

Exodus 34:16

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, *abounding in love and faithfulness*,

God's love and faithfulness . . . his Mercy.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation . . . for those who fear him.

To fear the Lord is to know who He is and what He has done and what he has promised to do and respond appropriately. It means to submit to his rule, respect and honour his majesty, praise him for his great works, and obey his commands. Mary knew what it meant to fear the Lord . . .

She had a glorious glimpse of his goodness and revelled in it.

Do we know how to approach our Great God . . . do you see him for who he truly is?

Mary goes on and shows us how we develop the right heart-focus at Christmas.

Know our compassionate God and the things he has done (51-55)

Mary continues to express who the God that she serves is like . . . again reflecting on what he has done in the past.

V 51-52 . . . with the waving of his arm he shows strength.

This echos . . .

Exodus 6:6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an **outstretched arm** and with mighty acts of judgment.

She takes us back to when God told the great prophet and leader Moses to lead the people out of slavery from the greatest world power of that day. He'll do with an outstretched arm.

Not a 28 point peace plan.

Not going to the world courts.

Not with the United Nations.

Not with the powerful weapons of the day . . . but with an outstretched arm. God's timing with an outstretched arm.

When the arm of God is raised and stretched out, it is a display of overwhelming strength. Moses came to Egypt telling the Egyptians that God will show his strength with his outstretched arm . . . he was laughed at because they thought it was a joke.

But the Nile River was turned to blood, the plague of frogs, gnats and flies, the livestock dying, the boils . . . hailstones and locust, darkness and after receiving blow after blow it took the death of the firstborn . . . all from the Mighty hand of God – his outstretched arm. As these slaves fled Egypt they came to the Red Sea . . . no way around it . . . and with an outstretched arm the Israelites were saved and the Egyptians drowned in the sea. Mighty Pharaoh brought low.

Mary reminds us that is how God works – miraculously with an outstretched arm.

V 52 -53

He exalts those in their humble estate . . .

When God wanted to bring his son into the world he didn't go to Rome, not even Jerusalem . . . not the Los Angeles or New Yorks of the world. He went to an insignificant almost laughable place in the world - Nazareth – a nobody place. And from that lowly place God has given Mary a name greater than that of Caesar . . . we tend to name our dogs or parrots Caesar. Mary, throughout the ages has been a very popular name.

Those who build themselves up will be brought low . . . those who seek to make the Lord great will be exalted in Him. To give immeasurably more than you could ask or imagine.

Mary knew God had that in store for her . . . to exalt those of humble estate. Mary didn't think of her accomplishments at all, she magnified God's accomplishments and wanted Him praised.

What a great outlook for her future!

V 54 -55

God in the past has chosen people unto himself . . . his own people - Israel. Out of slavery, not because there was anything special about them. He has helped his servant Israel.

This was part of his plan through Abraham and his offspring and now to Mary . . . all nations would be blessed.

Mary knew that by sending Jesus, God had not forgotten the covenant that he made with his people Israel. And God has not forgotten his promises to us who believe . . . that he will come back and set the world straight. That he will give eternal life. That he will help us in our time of need.

God's plan was to send a redeemer . . . one who would be a Saviour, miraculously through the Virgin's birth.

Mary's Song . . . the Magnificat.

And so.... How do we develop the right heart-focus at Christmas? Mary shows us what we need to do.

As a young teenager pregnant with this child probably went back to this song and sang it through the ages. Maybe the first time she sang it, all of the world seemed to be in order, but it wouldn't last. Yes, she was young . . . but these words are for all of us throughout the ages.

These promises were not instantaneous shown . . . going on that difficult journey to Bethlehem to give birth, fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod's sword. As Jesus got older and

did his ministry . . . some of his teaching she didn't understand and wondered if he really was the Messiah. Then the cross . . . her son being crucified on that horrible ugly painful cross, she didn't understand that either. She didn't comprehend God's plan until it fully unfolded and Christ rising victoriously from the dead and giving eternal life.

Have you come to that realization . . . that Jesus is the Saviour that you need. He is the only one who can deal with shame, who can deal with sin that you can't get rid of. He took it on the cross for all who believe. He takes sin away . . . he gives freedom . . . he gives eternal life. If you don't know him . . . surrender to him today . . . don't leave this place without putting your faith in Christ.

This song is not just for a young girl given exciting news . . . it's for the people who also live through challenges and struggles that this world brings to us.

As we come to Christmas . . .

Know who we are before a holy God (46-48). Is he magnified in our lives?

Know how to approach a holy God (49-50) – are we humble before a mighty and holy God?

Know our compassionate God and the things he has done (51-55). Have you grasped the great things of the past and great things he will continue to do?

Let's look to Him . . . let us sing Mary's song as we approach Christmas.