

Mary's Song

C. S. Lewis, the distinguished English literature scholar, has a novel way of illustrating how the Christmas narrative works,

“Imagine that a famous composer had written a great symphony, so marvelous that it was played all over the world. Yet whenever it was played, orchestras and their conductors, musicologists, critics, and audiences all felt exactly the same thing: the music left its hearers with the sense of being incomplete, unfinished, as though there was ‘something else to come’.

Then a researcher discovers a hitherto uncatalogued manuscript in the composer's handwriting. It is an astonishing piece of music in its own right. In some respects it is mysterious, difficult fully to understand, and yet magnificent. There are elements in it that are wholly unexpected. Then the truth begins to dawn: this is the missing final movement. When played as the climax of the symphony it does two things. First, it makes sense of the whole, and removes its incompleteness. Then, second, it not only makes sense of the earlier movements but seems to take over the whole, as if the first three movements, for all their greatness, were but a stepping-stone or a series of clues to the final movement.”¹

In a very real way that's what Christmas is like: until it is discovered for what it is, all that has come before leaves people with the sense of incompleteness – as if life and history are clues pointing to a final movement, yet to be played. Our lives are incomplete without Christ. Finding Jesus unites the past with the present with meaning and fulfillment

I have personally preached 4 to 5 Christmas sermons a year for the past thirty-five years. I've examined it's many facets and pieces. I've found that it's primarily about individuals finding Jesus, through fulfilled prophecies, angelic announcements and appearances, and God's revealing work via theological explanations.

Today I'd like us to observe the song of Mary, a young woman who was just told that she would give birth to the promised Messiah. This is how Mary came to know Jesus as her Savior...

¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Child in the Manger*, (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), pp. 18-19.

Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. ⁴⁹For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. ⁵⁰And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. ⁵¹He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed. ⁵⁴He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵as He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

Mary

Mary’s song was a culmination of a series of events. First, she had a visit from an angel, who spoke of all God was going to do in her life. Afterwards Mary went to visit her cousin, who was much older than her to talk things over.

Luke records the events:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.

And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored on! The Lord is with you.” But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was.

The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”

Mary said, to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the Holy child shall be called the Son of God.”

It is both amazing and rare thing to be visited by an angel. But equally amazing for Mary was the angel's message that she would become the mother of the promised Messiah.

And when Mary heard this news, she asked the obvious question:

“How can an unmarried, virgin become pregnant?”

The angel explained that it would happen by the power of God by the Holy Spirit. He then informed her of her older cousin, Elizabeth supernatural pregnancy,

And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:36-37)

Mary, an ordinary young woman, willingly offered herself to be used by God for His honorable purposes.

“And Mary said,

‘Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her” (Luke 1:38)

Elizabeth

After her angelic encounter Mary went to visit Elizabeth, her cousin.

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”

Both of these women were miracle mom's – pregnant supernaturally. Elizabeth who had been barren, was now nearly six-months pregnant. I can imagine that they would have a lot to talk about.

Zacharias

An angel had visited her husband Zacharias to bring him the announcement that he and his wife would become the parents of the 'forerunner' of the Messiah, prophesied by Isaiah. Zacharias' response wasn't so good,

"Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." (Luke 1:18).

The angel's response was a rebuke and discipline,

The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time" (Luke 1:19)

Joseph

Matthew records another angelic visitation to Joseph, Mary's husband to be.

...Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which translated means, "God with us." (Matt. 1:18-23).

After a time of struggle Joseph obeyed the vision and took Mary as His wife. Joseph was referred to by Luke as a righteous man. By definition a righteous man (dikaios) is a person who has a faithful covenant relationship with God because of his grace. It means trusting in God's provision for forgiveness and a new life and living in fellowship with him.²

² Sinclair Ferguson, p. 15.

Angelic visitations and announcements, heavenly rebuke and discipline, major prophecies being fulfilled; all added to the excitement of Mary visiting Elizabeth.

Alistair Begg's thoughts,

The announcement is made by an angel sent from heaven. That is supernatural. But then Mary responds in a very natural way: *I need to go and talk to someone about this*. And so Mary “got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,” where she goes to the home of Zechariah and her relative, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-40). ...Elizabeth is decades older, and she is pregnant too. And so now we have a kind of girl's night in. today they would have watched a movie and had popcorn and felt each other's tummies and talked about it and said, “What are you going to do about getting a crib? And all that kind of stuff.”³

Mary's visit with Elizabeth:

Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and prophecies of Mary's child, the Lord.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy spirit.

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?

For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.” (Luke 1:41-25)

Imagine the strange excitement of a teenager, pregnant out of wedlock, meeting with her pregnant and elderly relative. Here, we add the ingredient of the miraculous as well the many ancient prophecies concerning their coming children.

This is the setting from which Mary's Song flowed.

Mary's song: a tribute to God

“My soul exalts the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

³ Alistair Begg, *Christmas Playlist*, The Goodbook Company, 2016), pp. 16-17.

This has been entitled, 'The Magnificat', based on the Latin word for 'my soul exults or 'magnifies.' Much of her hymn comes directly from the Hebrew scripture, blending Psalms and prophecies about Messiah.

- Ps. 24: 5 "He shall receive blessing from the Lord,
and righteousness from the God of his salvation."
Ps. 25:5 "Lead me in Your truth and teach me;
for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day.
Ps. 35:9 "And my soul shall rejoice in the Lord;
it shall exult in His salvation."
Is. 12:2 "Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid;
for the Lord God is my strength and song,
and He has become my salvation."
Mic. 7:7 "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord;
I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."
Hab. 3:18 "Yet I will exult in the Lord,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

Mary is well-read in Scriptures and grateful to God for being her Savior. She rejoiced in the coming of Messiah even though she would be his mother. She considered herself a servant, understanding and celebrating that the fulfillment of God's covenant promises was growing within her womb. During times of potential difficulty her joy would be in God.

▪ **A Gracious God**

⁴⁸For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

God respects the humble with favor and affection.
What an honor it is to be the mother of the Messiah.

▪ **A Mighty God**

⁴⁹For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.
⁵⁰And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. ⁵¹He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.

God is almighty in that He accomplishes his good work by His great power. His greatness is connected with His holiness and mercy.

- **A Just God**

⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.

He sovereignly rules with justice, caring for His own.

- **A faithful God**

⁵⁴He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, ⁵⁵as He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

The entire Old Testament is the story of the God who made a covenant with Abraham, promising the people of God a Messiah who would deliver them from the bondage of sin and death, and bring them into life, with new hearts and complete restoration. The baby Jesus was that fulfillment of God’s promise of the ages. He would destroy the works of the devil in this present evil age and bring the people of God into the age to come.

- **A God who keeps His promises - that we can trust:**

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel”
(Is. 7:14).

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonder Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.”
(Is. 9:6-7)

Many of the songs of Christmas are about glitter and trees, gifts, and snow. People sing of the joys of the season, but miss the God’s gift. As a result, they have nothing to sing about.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16