

“A Song of the Humble”—Luke 1:46-55

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A Song of the Humble”, is Luke 1:46-55 → *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 empty away. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Music plays an important part in our lives everyday. The effects of music can never be underestimated. Remove the soundtracks from most movies or TV programs and you soon discover that the acting doesn't have quite the same affect. We hear music playing in our vehicles, at our jobs, in stores, while we exercise or relax. In virtually every area of our

lives we can encounter music on some level.

However, it seems that music takes on a whole new dynamic when it comes to the Christmas season. Radio stations will dedicate the whole month of December to playing exclusively “Christmas” songs. People will go to places they usually avoid, such as hospitals and nursing homes, to sing Christmas carols and many of these people wouldn’t dream of singing out loud—let alone in front of others—at any other time in their lives. It seems that music and Christmas just go hand in hand.

When you consider the songs of Christmas what songs come to your mind? “Silent Night, Holy Night,” “Jingle Bells,” “Joy to the World,” “White Christmas” and other songs which speak about snow? “Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer” and other such songs which speak about a phantom figure called Santa Claus? Maybe your thoughts immediately jump to what could have been the first “Christmas carol” sung by the angels to the shepherds when Jesus was born, recorded in Luke 2:14 → *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men* (KJV).

The songs connected with the coming of Jesus in the Scriptures reveal more than the message of this first “Christmas carol” which is repeated in so many of the hymns and Christmas songs we hear today. Luke chapters 1 and 2 reveal three other songs along with the “Gloria in Excelsis” connected to Jesus’ coming which we will consider this Advent

season: ① The song of Mary, the mother of Jesus; ② The song of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer; and ③ The song of Simeon.

Following the angel's announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptizer. After their encounter Mary broke out in song, responding to being chosen by the LORD to be the mother of God's Son. It has been titled by the Church the "Magnificat," based upon the first word of her song in Latin meaning "magnifies" or "glorifies."

If we consider the circumstances related to her pregnancy we may find it rather strange that she would burst forth with such joy. Consider the situation:

- ① She was engaged at the time she became pregnant. Matthew 1:19 tells us that her fiancé, Joseph, *resolved to divorce her*—in other words, release her from her promises for marriage. After all, it did appear as if she had been unfaithful. Only after some divine "nudging" did he take Mary home as his wife.
- ② When word about Mary's "premature pregnancy" spread it is very possible that she received ridicule from friends which also affected her family. The community embarrassment could have been very intense. It may even be possible that Mary went to visit Elizabeth for three months in light of the gossip, slander, judgments and accusations. In the midst of such cruelty explaining that she was

pregnant by the Holy Spirit probably would not have made matters any better. Would you have believed her?

Mary's song reflected joy because her focus was different. In verse 47 of our text she said: *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*. She focused on the miracle of the LORD at work in her life, in the midst of her situation and the reactions of those around her. In fact, Elizabeth could well have been the first uplifting person she encountered by this time in her situation because Elizabeth's focus was also on the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a confession of her faith, Mary expressed her position before Yahweh—that God chose a humble, seemingly insignificant, not well-to-do person to be an instrument for life-changing history. As He had done so many other times, God *performed mighty deeds* in His peoples' lives in His unusual manner by choosing and using in the most unexpected way.

Verses 51-53 of our text says He scatters *the proud in the thoughts of their hearts*, brings down *the mighty from their thrones . . . and the rich He has sent empty away*. These are all pictures of humbling people. At the same time it says He exalts *those of humble estate* and fills *the hungry with good things*. In other words, God does things exactly opposite of the way the world would expect it to be done. The reason is because God has to deal with sinners even as He sends His Son to deal

with their sin once and for all.

It is our sinful tendency to become arrogant in God's blessings. It is our sinful tendency to think that we are in control of God's grace and blessings. It is our sinful tendency to forget that all we are and have comes as a **gift of God's grace**. We begin the Christian walk by grace but can easily fall into the sinful trap of "entitlement"—acting as if we deserve the blessings of grace and as if they belong to us alone (or maybe to those whom we think deserve them). Mary could have easily given into this temptation. After all, she was the one whom God had selected to be the mother of God Himself.

Thus, to avoid providing opportunity to fuel such sinful tendencies, God's methods are different than those of the world's. 1 Corinthians 1:27-31 puts it this way: *God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.* Why does God do things this way? It goes on to say *so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.* God makes sure that when He acts you will know that **He** is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, **that He is the One acting in your life**. So if you want to boast about your faith *let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*

Mary recognized that even though *all generations* would *call* her *blessed*, it was because the LORD had *done great things* for her. The *strength* rested *with His arm*, not Mary's womb or anything else in Mary. It is truly a song of the humble.

As Mary saw her sinfulness in the midst of God's working in and through her life, she experienced His grace and love with an attitude of humility. She rejoiced in the undeserving nature of God's choice. Do you rejoice in the undeserving nature of Jesus' choice to suffer and die, experiencing the judgment of your sin so that you do not have to experience eternal judgment in hell?

Mary also recognized that her situation was based upon God's faithfulness, not hers. She sang in verses 54-55 of our text: *He has helped His servant Israel, **in remembrance of His mercy**, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.* She expressed the promise God gave to Abraham in Genesis 22:15-19 → *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore . . . and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* This same promise is repeated over and over throughout the Scriptures. Mary recognized her baby as God's faithfulness to fulfill His age old promise.

Functioning in our lives in a humble manner happens only as we focus on God's purposes for us sinners in the Person & Work of Jesus.

Humility grows out of a continual recognition of our sinfulness in the sight of God and those around us. We are truly undeserving of His benefits to us.

It is exactly this humble state which the LORD uses to do *great things* in and through us as well. Jesus put it this way in Matthew 23:12 while describing servanthood: *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.* Humbling us is God's way of making us truly His servants who desire to dispense His gracious benefits in Christ to others as we serve them. Such recognition of our own sinfulness in His presence by repentance and faith is the **only** way we can truly experience His grace and love with an attitude of humility.

The Magnificat is not about Mary. It's about Jesus and God's salvation for all people through faith in Him alone. Neither is it about Mary's humility. Rather it is about Christ Who humbled Himself so that we undeserving sinners might be saved (i.e. *lifted up* or "exalted"). Mary simply recognized the blessings involved with being the mother of our Lord for herself **and** for all people as God's faithfulness was being revealed in the birth of the Christ.

God has chosen us undeserving sinners to be His people and experience His blessings completely by His grace in Jesus. Recognizing God's blessings of grace in our lives through Jesus we can sing Mary's song of a humble servant along with her. **What better reason for joyful**

singing at Christmas time! Amen.

*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another,
because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand,
that He may lift you up in due time.*

(1 Peter 5:5b-6)

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