

## A Reason to Sing

Sterling UMC  
December 12, 2010  
Luke 1:39-56

You can really tell that Christmas is right around the corner!! Those tell-tale signs of Christmas aren't too hard to find. The Christmas tree lots have sprung up in many places around town, and many of them have already sold off the majority of their trees. Christmas is coming. As you enter and exit stores like Wal-Mart and Target, the familiar sound of the Salvation Army bells ringing will reach your ears. Yep, it's pretty obvious, Christmas is right around the corner.

You know what has really made me realize that it is the holiday season? Apart from all the decorations, apart from all the lights, apart from all the "Merry Christmases!" I receive from friends, the #1 thing that really brings home the reality of Christmas is the music. You know what I am talking about! Christmas music is everywhere! Walk into any department store, holiday tunes are playing. Flip on the TV, many commercials have a "holiday-ditty" in the background. And when you tune into a radio station, odds are you won't have to wait long to hear a Christmas tune.

Many of us have old favorites that are only sung this time of year. And boy do we love to sing 'em! There is something about Christmas and singing that go hand-in-hand.

This morning in our Scripture lesson we have a great example of a Christmas song. What you heard read just a few moments ago were the words of the very first Christmas song ever sung. This song doesn't talk about jingling bells, holly, or reindeer. It has nothing to do with snow or sleigh bells or Santa. This song has everything to do with what really makes Christmas Christmas. This song was all about sin and salvation, the free Gift of God's Grace sent to a fallen human race. This song was all about Jesus.

This song was not sung by angels, or priests, or prophets. No, it was sung by a humble young woman whom God had chosen to bear His Son. Her name was Mary, the human mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. She was just an ordinary girl that God chose to play a part in His plan to save the world.

We call Mary's song the Magnificat. That word, Magnificat, is a Latin word which literally takes its meaning from the first words of this joyous song of praise, "My soul glorifies (magnifies) the Lord," an appropriate name for this wonderful song of praise from Mary to her God.

Let's take a closer look at this song of praise. It is strikingly similar to many of the songs (Psalms) in the Old Testament. Mary was a child of Israel, she believed in God, she had heard the Word of God through the Scriptures of what we now call the Old Testament. It is no wonder then that her song uses some of the same words found in many of the Psalms. Her praise to God is patterned after the praises of the faithful who had gone on

before her. Mary was singing back to God promises He had given in the past, because before her very eyes these promises were coming true. Before her very eyes the Miracle of miracles was taking place in her womb.

God had given her a reason to sing. In the words of Mary's Magnificat she sings of three reasons for her joy; three reasons that we can join her in singing our own Christmas songs today.

### Reason number 1: GOD HAS REDEEMED THE INDIVIDUAL

The first part of the song focuses on the blessing that had been given to Mary personally.

“My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Mary is very grateful for the blessing extended to her. She understands the mercy and grace extended to her. She knows that she needs a Savior. Mary recognized her humble state. She was well aware of her standing in society. Mary was poor and likely from a poorer family. I think if Mary was living in our culture she might have thought of herself as a “Nobody” or even a “loser”.

This all changed when God chose to enlist her as the mother of the Messiah, God in this one act was changing her life forever. From that moment forward she would be significant; she would be honored. Mary was a new person because of this special privilege given to her by God.

Don't miss the application to our own lives. There are many people who feel like Mary. Some of you may feel insignificant, overlooked, and maybe even believe you are a “loser” because you feel unnoticed and unappreciated by the world. Maybe you feel less significant because of:

- your income level
- your lack of education
- your appearance (you're not as pretty, thin, tall, muscular, well dressed as the significant people)
- your struggles (maybe you have been in trouble, you've made bad choices, you've had a failed relationship or two, you had a difficult upbringing, or you have been guilty of a number of excesses.

- your lack of popularity (you feel that no one likes you)

Mary believed she was an unlikely recipient of God's gracious work. She felt unworthy, like many of us do. Mary reminds us that God sees those whom the world rejects. The Lord loves those the world considers "beyond hope". And this wasn't just true of Mary. It is a pattern in the Scriptures. God embraces the disenfranchised, He loves the losers, and He sees those the rest of the world ignores. Consider,

- the Shepherds (social misfits)
- the common fishermen who were chosen to become disciples
- the woman caught in adultery and ready to be stoned by the crowd who was transformed by Jesus
- the Samaritan woman of bad reputation that talked to Jesus at Jacob's well who had been married five times and was living with a sixth man who Jesus invited to drink of the living water only He could give her.
- Zaccheaus and Matthew who were both despised tax-collectors
- Paul who had persecuted Christians and became the church's first missionary and the Bible's most prolific author.

Mary's experience of being loved and honored by God is not unique. It is a blessing that is for all who trust Christ. We are told that His mercy extends to all those who fear Him, from generation to generation. The Lord takes the forgotten of the world and transforms them into sons and daughters in Christ.

God entered our world not as a king or a conqueror but in the form of a tiny baby, and by doing that He turns the values of the world upside down. The rejected become those loved by God. The forgotten are cherished. Nobodies become somebody; and failure is forgiven. When Christ enters a life, that person becomes a new creation. The old passes away and a new life is begun. And that is a reason to sing!

## Reason 2: GOD HAS RIGHTED THE WRONGS

There is a second part of Mary's song of praise.

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

Do you notice where the focus of Mary's song resides? It is not on her or her experience. The focus of the song is on the work of the Lord. Look how often the Lord is referenced in this short hymn. Mary truly understood that it is really not about us; it's about Him. It is God who puts things right, not us.

The mighty deeds that God was doing would overcome the world and turn the world right-side-up. She sang about God scattering the proud. She said that he brought down rulers from their thrones and lifted up the humble. He filled the hungry, but sent the rich away with empty stomachs. In other words, God turned the tables on the world. Those who were proud and arrogant, having power in this world to oppress others, would be scattered by God. Those who ruled with injustice would be pulled down from their thrones, and the humble servants would be put in their place. Those who used their wealth to oppress the poor would live in spiritual hunger, while those who were the poor of this world would be filled with all the good things of God. All of this would take place because of what Jesus would do. He would reverse the fortunes of the proud and humble, the rich and poor, the strong and weak. He was the Savior who would right the wrongs of the world and would give those who were downtrodden great reason to rejoice.

What this means is that Jesus came for everyone — regardless of their status in the world. The humble are valued by God, and even the arrogant can humble themselves and become right with God. The oppressed find mercy and help. The oppressors can stop their oppression, and find grace. Those who are weak can be strong in God. The strong can admit their weakness apart from God, and find true strength. But we have to come to God on his terms rather than ours. We humble ourselves. We admit our weakness. We turn from our sin. And we turn to God for his strength, his wealth, and his wholeness. And that is a reason to sing!

### Reason 3: GOD HAS KEPT HIS PROMISE

There is one final thing Mary includes in her song of praise: She praises God for doing "as he said to our fathers".

He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful  
<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Mary understood that the birth of her child was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. He had promised a Redeemer . . . now that Redeemer had come.

God keeps His Word. Sometimes the promises seem long in coming. Sometimes the promises are fulfilled in ways we don't expect. However, God keeps His Word. He is able to do as he said and He is faithful to accomplish all that He has promised. As we face another Christmas we should be encouraged by His promises,

- At the time of grief and loss we are reminded that those who die in the Lord will live again. Our emptiness and loss may be great, but it is temporary.

- Those who feel alone and abandoned can draw courage from the fact that He promised He would never leave us or forsake us.
- Those who are uncertain of the future can be sure that if they trust in the Lord, He will direct their path just as He said.
- Those who feel they are “too far gone” to know God’s love are reminded that He has promised that WHOSOEVER will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- Those overwhelmed by life’s demands can draw strength from God’s promise that He will supply all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus.

God’s promises are sure and true. God keeps His Word. And that’s a reason to sing!

So what does all of this mean for us today?

Mary’s song reminds us that if we understand the true meaning and implications of Christmas we too should be filled with joyfulness and singing. Christmas is a message of hope. It is a time when we declare to the world that God is not mad at us; He loves us! This is a joyful time. Play the music of Christmas, sing loud, and listen reflectively. Let the melody of the season flow from your heart.

Second, our Christmas singing should be directed to glorifying the Lord rather than focusing on the trivialities of men. Mary’s focus was on God’s greatness. That’s where our focus should be as well.

Third, a true understanding of Christmas should lead to humility, not pride. We have already received from God that which will make every other gift seem puny by comparison. We have been granted a new start, a new life, and a new hope. We are undeserving recipients of a life-changing grace. That should make us soft, not hard.

Finally, we are challenged to sing this song of grace and joy so that all the world may hear. Once we understand that God loves us, we have the joy of proclaiming that message to other by our words and our deeds. There are too many people in the world who feel forgotten, unappreciated, and unloved. Our job is to help people know that God loves them.

This Christmas we aren’t lacking a reason to sing, nor should we be confused about what song to sing. This Christmas and every Christmas, the song of Mary is our song as well. God has redeemed us. God has righted the wrongs. God has kept His promises.

This Christmas as you sing of Him who came to save us, may His joy and peace be with you now, because His love is with you always! You have been blessed, thanks be to God. Amen.