

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come. Amen.

SING ALONG WITH MARY

Luke 1:46-55 | Fourth Sunday of Advent | December 23, 2018

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Jesus Juva

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

What are your favorite Christmas songs? Do you enjoy story songs like *Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer* or *Frosty the Snow Man*? Do you like to sing about jingling bells, winter wonderlands, mistletoe and Fa La La La? How about the holiday classics like *O Christmas Tree* or *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*? Maybe you prefer the great Christmas hymns such as *Joy to the World* or Luther's beautiful work *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*. A list of favorite Christmas songs is hardly complete without the *Song of Mary* before us in God's Word today. We sometimes sing it as part of the service of Evening Prayer. It's not the easiest song in the world to sing, but it's still worthy of our favorites list. We'll see this today as we SING ALONG WITH MARY in our hearts. Her song is one of deep humility, and joyful praise.

I. A Song of Deep Humility

What is it that brought this young Jewish girl to the point that she couldn't help but burst forth in song? Well, let's review. Not long before Mary sang her song she had a special visitor. **In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in**

Galilee, ²⁷ **to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.** ²⁸ **The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you"** (Luke 1:26-28).

As if a visit from one of God's holy angels wasn't enough that angel had some startling news for this young virgin. He told her that she was going to have a baby. Mary was probably only in her early to mid teens. Imagine how bewildered this young virgin must have been. Her head was filled not with melodies but with questions. **"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"** (Luke 1:34). Mary didn't have her doctorate in human biology, but she knew about the birds and the bees. This news came as quite a shock.

The angel assured her that it was all in God's hands. The angel answered, **"The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.** ³⁶ **Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.** ³⁷ **For no word from God will ever fail"** (Luke 1:35-37).

When it rains it pours. Not only was Mary going to have a baby but her retirement-age relative Elizabeth was pregnant too. Mary went to see Elizabeth. When she arrived she greeted Elizabeth. But Elizabeth's reply was more than a greeting: **"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"** (Luke 1:42) It was becoming more and more obvious to Mary that what was about to happen to her was a miracle. She had to sing about it.

It would have been easy for Mary to have a swelled head about all this. After all, God chose her of all the women in Israel to be the one to give birth to the promised Messiah. She must be a pretty special young lady indeed! But that wasn't Mary's attitude at all. In fact, she begins her song on a note of humility. **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."** All of this humbled Mary. She realized that she was a sinner in desperate need of the Savior that she would carry in her own body.

These words of Mary are a smashing blow to those who worship her. Some teach that Mary was sinless and holy. Some teach that Mary is the one who carries our prayers to Jesus and makes them effective. They even go as far as to call Mary the "co-redemptrix." They actually give Mary some of the credit for our salvation. Such teachings are a blasphemy against our Lord. And they simply don't square with the words we have before us. Yes, Mary was blessed to be the vehicle

through which God took on human flesh. She gave birth to the Savior. But Mary was also a sinner like you and me. And she knew it.

You and I don't always have such a clear view of ourselves. Sometimes we would rather sing along with Mac Davis than with Mary: "Oh, Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror. I get better looking each day." Remember that song? Well, we probably don't look on ourselves quite that highly. But sometimes we do think more highly of ourselves than we should. When our heads get swelled with pride, there's no better way to deflate them than to take a look at the Ten Commandments. Do we always put God first? Do we pray to him as often as we should? Are we always eager to hear his Word? Do we always honor and respect those in authority over us? Are we always kind and caring and even-tempered? Are our thoughts always pure and wholesome, or would they sometimes make the devil himself blush? Are we always good managers of what God has given us? Do we always say nice things about others? Are we always content with what we have? The answer is no—every time. Humbling, isn't it? Like Mary, we need to realize that we are spiritual beggars. We deserve nothing good from our God. We are worthy only of his anger and punishment.

Friends, sing along with Mary. Sing a humble song. Cheerful songs about Santa and sleigh bells and halls decked with boughs of holly are all fine to a point. But

a more important part of Christmas is realizing our desperate need for that little baby lying in the manger. Without this realization Christmas becomes meaningless, and all our Christmas songs, just so much sentimental drivel.

II. A Song of Joyful Praise

Friends, when we realize our desperate need for a Savior we need to realize something else: God sent us the Savior we so desperately need. That's why Mary sings not only in humility but also in joy. She knew that the Savior promised to God's people for so many centuries was about to arrive. In fact, she was so sure of this that she sings as if it had already happened.

From beginning to end Mary's song gives all the glory to God. It's a song that gives God the credit he deserves for all his many blessings to his people. That's why it is sometimes called the *Magnificat*. That's a Latin word meaning to "magnify" or "glorify." It's a fitting title.

Let's listen again to her song: **"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."** Mary was a faithful Israelite and, no doubt, knew the history of her people. She knew how God's people had repeatedly rebelled against him. And she knew how God had repeatedly forgiven them for their sinful rebellion. She knew God for who he is—the God of mercy. The same God shows mercy to each of us. That's something to sing about!

"He has performed mighty deeds with his

arm." How often God had intervened in history to help his people! He used Ten Plagues to deliver them from captivity in Egypt. He parted the Red Sea so they could walk through safely on dry ground. He gave them victory over their enemies in the land he promised would be their own. All of this was leading up to perhaps his mightiest deed, his greatest miracle and a bedrock truth of our Christian faith: a virgin would give birth to God's Son. That Son lived, died and rose again to save us. That's something to sing about!

"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors. Over and over again God repeated his promise of a Savior. Now God was about to keep his ancient promise. As we know God did keep his promise. He always does. That's something to sing about!

We can learn a lot from this young Jewish girl and her song. She teaches us how to celebrate Christmas. There are lots of Christmas songs that celebrate decorations and holiday goodies and presents. Again, that's OK to a point. But Mary teaches us to focus our hearts on the greatest present, a present wrapped not in pretty paper, but in human flesh and blood.

At home we have a nativity set that sits on a counter by the window in our dining room. Some dear friends gave us this set one piece at a time as their Christmas gift to us for a number of years. As you can imagine the first piece they gave us was

baby Jesus in the manger. There's a lesson in that for us. They could have given us a shepherd or an angel or an ox. They could have given us Mary and Joseph. But they realized, as Mary realized, that the Savior comes first. He is, and must always be, the focus of our faith, the center of our attention.

Friends, this Christmas, sing a song like Mary's, a song that puts your Savior first. He is the one who came to be your Substitute. By his perfect life and innocent death in your place he has earned for you God's forgiveness and a seat at the eternal wedding feast. He is worthy of first place.

In all your Christmas TRADITIONS put your Savior first. Yes, give gifts to your friends and loved ones. Receive presents and enjoy them. But remember the most important gift—the gift of God made flesh, who came to live among us and save us.

In all your Christmas FEASTING put your Savior first. Yes, fill yourself with Christmas cookies and Christmas ham. But remember also to fill yourself with God's Word and his Supper, so that your love of your Savior and your life for your Savior continue to grow and flourish.

In all of your SINGING this Christmas put your Savior first. Sure, it's OK and fun to sing about Frosty, Rudolph and Santa. But we have someone much better to sing about. We have a Savior. This Christmas season and every season set your heart on him. With honest humility and profound joy, sing along with Mary. Amen.