

**Advent 03 – Mary's Joy**

**12/15/2024**

**Scripture 1: (Lk. 1:46-55 ESV)**

And Mary said, "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 away empty.
- He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

## Sermon:

After considering Gabriel's prophetic pronouncements to Zechariah and Mary alongside their immediate reactions: namely, Zechariah's disbelief and Mary's belief; the next two Advent stories which we will consider concern their ultimate response to God's work within their lives.

When Gabriel informed Mary of her impending pregnancy, she believed and trusted the angel's word because he mentioned Elizabeth, her elderly relative's, pregnancy. But, although she believed the angel and she willingly submitted herself to the LORD's will and divine decree, she did not take her situation "on faith, alone". Instead, Mary did what every reasonable person ought to do, as they are able: she trusted and she verified; which would surely have made Ronald Reagan glad.

- She had faith. She believed the angel, but she still went to "the source" to get confirmation that what he said was true.

It is very likely that Mary had already heard about Zechariah and Elizabeth's good news through her local and familial rumor mill but, after what she had just been told, she needed to ask Elizabeth herself. So, she went down to the small town where her relatives lived, traveling to Judea from Nazareth, for a quick family visit, because she needed to see the truth for herself.

Then, when Mary arrived and greeted Elizabeth, she received an extraordinary response, as "...*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."*" (Lk. 1:41-45 ESV). Thus inspired and prompted by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth uttered a blessing upon Mary; proclaiming something that she could not possibly have known: Mary's impending {or possibly present} pregnancy; except through divine revelation {unless these stories were a fiction written after the fact; or, unless it was an elaborate conspiracy, which crossed class and social boundaries, over decades of time with the intention of utterly revolutionizing Jewish religion; or, unless these stories are an accurate recounting of history, devoid of coincidence and chance, and the decreed plan of God}.

She proclaimed a tri-fold blessing, calling: Mary blessed, Mary's son-to-be blessed, and naming herself as blessed because of Mary's visit. She blessed Mary because of her faith, and she blessed Mary's child because both she and the unborn child within her recognized Him as the LORD God: her Lord and savior.

- They each were blessed because they recognized and knew that the LORD was very present with them, for He is Emmanuel.

So, between Elizabeth's obvious condition (being a six month pregnant woman) and her prophetic greeting, Mary's initial trust in Gabriel's word was affirmed, and her confidence in the LORD's providence and plan was increased. Immediately after this, Mary responded to her understanding of God's grace upon her life with the words of our Scripture text; a passage which the church has always interpreted as being a joy-filled song which has been known as "the Magnificat", from the Latin term "to magnify" or "to glorify", because that is what Mary's response to the confirmation of Gabriel's word was: to give God glory!

- Mary's ultimate response was to choose joy and glorify God!

*"And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."*

{Without getting into an esoteric debate about whether we are bi-partite (body [*soma*] and soul [*psyche*]/spirit [*pneuma*]) or tri-partite (body and soul and spirit) creatures (the tri-partite view is based on Platonic philosophy and is coupled with the early gnostic heresies, whereas the bi-partite view has historically been held as the orthodox Judeo-Christian view: where either *psyche* and *pneuma* are used synonymously and both are considered to be comprised of the same substance and same essence, or where *psyche* is used in reference to the whole person: comprised of *soma* and *pneuma* [see Genesis 2:7]. I personally agree with the historic, bipartite view but if you are interested in more concerning this debate, because it appears more frequently than you would otherwise expect in Scripture, and is significant to our understanding of both creation and resurrection, please see the footnote below<sup>1</sup>.)}

When Mary said that her “soul” magnifies and her “spirit” rejoices, she described what is our proper attitude for all worship.

- Her response “to magnify” means: to increase God's glory; to rightly ascribe Him glory for all the amazing things which He has done; to recognize and acknowledge Him as Who He Is (the Sovereign of Creation) and to humble oneself before Him as the “Majesty on High”; to say that “He is Greater than I” and mean it, although, while you may have seen it as a bumper sticker, it still remains a truth: ( HE > I ).
- Meanwhile, her response “to rejoice” is the choice which is made by all those who believe; those who have been given the faith and desire to believe and trust in the LORD; to trust Jesus Christ. “To rejoice” means to feel and express the joy that is welling up within your soul; a joy that comes because of who God is and what He has done for you. Joy is different from happiness or gladness: although those mere feelings are borne up within and out of our joy; because, even the redeemed of the LORD still experience bouts of sadness or depression throughout their present life (just as Mary certainly would through Jesus' crucifixion and death) but the joy of the LORD, is the joy which comes from knowing:
  - that we are **beloved** by the King of the Universe;
  - that we were **chosen** as His children from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4);
  - that He **gave** His “only begotten” as a sacrifice of atonement to redeem us from our sin; and,
  - that when He raises us up on the last day, we **shall stand** justified in the righteousness of Christ and we shall hear Him say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant!*” (Matthew 25:21) and we **shall receive** our eternal reward; and,
  - that when that day comes, “*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*” (Rev. 21:4 ESV), and all the sorrows of this life will fade, being out shown by the glory and honor of the King's presence, forever.

The response “to magnify” is the most natural and ultimately the required one because it is what we all must do one day: every person, from every time, and every place in history; because when that day comes and “*every knee shall bow*” (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10), everyone will bow because they must, yet **only** God's Elect will do so while choosing to rejoice in it. Every “soul” shall magnify the LORD, but only some will rejoice in “*God [our] Savior*”, because when that day comes and He “*...[looks] on the humble estate of His*

1 <https://brianjmann.substack.com/p/the-big-deal-about-being-bipartite>

<https://www.puritanboard.com/threads/tripartite-or-bipartite.44280/>

[servants]...”, and we are under His gaze, we shall feel either the grace of His love in mercy and forgiveness or the justice of His love in judgment and wrath.

- Which will you be, on that day?

Then Mary continued, “*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed...*”, but neither she, nor Luke, nor the Holy Spirit intended for the application or practices related to this statement which the Roman Catholic church has established.

- Mary is not a subject for worship or veneration.
- She was a sinful human person, just like any of us; no better or worse than any other.
- She was not particularly special, apart from the specific, unique circumstances and events of her life.

But then, what is meant by us calling her “blessed”?

Sadly, our 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture has a very poor understanding of what it actually means to be “blessed”; it has cheapened it. The term has devolved from being a positive invocation of hope and petition to receive divine favor into becoming a generic statement of well wishing, as in “Have a blessed day!”, and is now habitually used by folks regardless of their faith, beliefs, or Christian understanding. Surely you have heard it from countless Fast Food or other Service Industry professionals who have been trained to say it without meaning it, at least without meaning it in the biblical sense.

So, what is the biblical meaning behind “being blessed”? The Greek term used here, and similarly in the Beatitudes (of Matthew 5), is *makarios*<sup>2</sup> (and the related Hebrew term *baruch*); a term which involves the concepts of happiness or good fortune, and may be used in the same manner that we might wish someone “Good Luck” (except that, as Christians, we do not believe that there is any such thing as “luck”). *Makarios* is specifically used within Scripture to describe both someone, or something, that receives the LORD's favor, and also their response upon receipt of His grace.

Being and considering ourselves “blessed” in this biblical sense is something which we all need to be reminded of and we each should do more of because it would improve our attitudes and our worldly outlook, because:

- We are all blessed with life, while we live.
- We are blessed with sunshine, rain, and the snow.
- We are blessed with family and friends.
- We are blessed with time alone.
- We are blessed to have the Scriptures and even moreso, to have them written in our common language.
- We are blessed to have our church.
- We are even blessed to have our secular government, although sometimes we forget why and we do not feel particularly blessed by it.

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**217668 μακάριος, ἴα, ον** (1) of persons characterized by transcendent happiness or religious joy *blessed, happy* (MT 5.3); without religious connotation *fortunate, lucky* (LU 23.29); (2) of parts of the body viewed as happy because of favorable circumstances (MT 13.16; LU 11.27); (3) of things closely related to God, as hope (TI 2.13); (4) comparative μακαριώτερος, τέρα, ον *more blessed, happier, better off* (1C 7.40)

Simply put, every person is so blessed by the LORD, by our very existence and for everything that we have (as much or as little as that may be), that it is easy for us to forget our blessedness and how extraordinary everything around us truly is because our sinfulness blinds us to it. Therefore, we fail (and thus sin) to give God the glory which He is rightly due. All of us are so well and truly blessed that, at times, we are each guilty of taking it for granted.

However, even more so, all Christians, like Mary, are more extraordinarily blessed because of our **special relationship** with the LORD: our adoption as His chosen people and beloved children, accomplished by His willful condescension by relating to us in covenant. It is this specific sense of “being blessed” that Mary proclaims and claims for herself here; yet, in her specific case, it is also reasonable for us to presume that she has a degree of blessedness greater than ours.

- We should all agree that it is reasonable to say that Jesus's disciples, the twelve Apostles, were more blessed than us (despite their tragic demises) because they had the opportunity to personally {in the flesh} walk and talk, eat and drink, live and laugh with Jesus {Later, speaking to Thomas after the resurrection, “*Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*” (Jn. 20:29 ESV), a remark concerning our blessedness because of faith, but without any hierarchical priority or difference in quantity or quality.}.
- Therefore, being the mother of Jesus and being present for the entirety of His earthly life, Mary surely possessed a greater degree of blessedness than even the Twelve.

We say this confidently because Mary further declared, “*...for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*”. She proclaimed her extra special blessedness since she recognized the great personal things that the LORD had done, was doing, and would do for her {where future things are implicitly assumed done (or guaranteed), as per the God's sovereign decree}; because now that she fully believed, she understood that her Son-to-be, truly will be the “Son of God”.

- Mary's son, Jesus, is the great thing which the LORD had done for her and so, by proclaiming “*...holy is his name.*”, she was reaffirming Gabriel's word to her, that “*...therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God.*” (Lk. 1:35 ESV).
- Jesus would be holy, because God is holy; because Jesus is God.

Then Mary invites and welcomes us into her joy, by proclaiming the blessing which is upon all God's chosen people, that “*...his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*”.

- The “*mercy*” of which she speaks is the LORD's attitude, inclination, and feeling towards His people. This is about God's emotion: the pity and compassion that He feels for us because of our sinful state and for all the damage our sin has done to the world we live in: damage to the world and to our relationships.
- “*those who fear him*” are His people, the Elect; all those who honor and revere Him, who love Him and give Him the glory that He is due as the King of Creation.

But, out of His mercy, what has the LORD done for us? How has He especially blessed His children?

Mary reminds us that:

- “*He has shown strength with his arm;*”

- He delivered the Sons of Israel from their bondage in Egypt; and He gave them the land of Canaan as their possession and repeated victory over their foes.
- *“he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;”*
  - He has brought people to repentance: Miriam and Aaron, when they opposed Moses (Numbers 12); David when he sinned with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12; Psalm 51); and Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, when he asserted his greatness (Daniel 4).
- *“he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;”*
  - He removed His favor from king Saul for his sinful disobedience and elevated David instead; He elevated Jeroboam and humbled Rehoboam, Solomon's successor and son, by dividing the kingdom; He gave the sons of Mattathias victory over the Selucids, enabling them to cleanse and rededicate the defiled Temple and establish their dynasty (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees).
- *“he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”*
  - Israel “plundered” Egypt when they left during the exodus (Exodus 12:36); Israel took possession of Canaan, the promised “land of milk and honey”, after driving out its wicked inhabitants in the LORD's Name; and after the Babylonian exile, the Jews were returned to their ancestral homeland and enjoyed a measure of prosperity and independence.
- *“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*
  - The LORD has proven Himself, time and again, within Scripture and through the experiences of their lives that He is forever faithful to His covenant promise, made to Abraham and his heirs, that He would be their God and they His people (Genesis 17:8).
    - that, as their God, He would be merciful and bless them;
    - that He would protect and defend them, preserving them;
    - that He would deliver them and save them.

Thus Mary recalls the LORD's past works of redemption and mercy in order to fuel her present joy and her hope for the future.

- She understood that God's past performance was indicative of His future: just as the past informed her present, it also instructed her future.

This young girl, who had been given a very good reason to be terrified and fearful, instead chose:

- joy over anxiety;
- faith and obedience over doubt and sin; and,
- courage over fear.

Mary's story (her whole story, actually), reminds us that we must choose joy; that being “always joyful” is a choice and it is not necessarily tied to our state of happiness, as the Apostle Paul regularly reminds us.

So finally, in regards to being joyful and remaining joyful, Mary's song provides us with two important lessons and reminders.

- First, like Mary, we must magnify the LORD with and by our joy. Our being joyful should bring Him glory because He is the ultimate source and reason for our joy. And,
- Second, to increase and support our joyfulness, we must identify and remember our blessings like Mary did. “Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.” (Johnson Oatman, Jr; *Count Your Blessings*, 1897). That way, we shall be less likely to take our blessing for granted.
  - Remembering everything that the LORD has done for you in the past, will surely build your confidence and hope for what He will do in your future.

How do we magnify the LORD?

By declaring His promises and extolling all the things that He has done. This does two things:

- First, it reminds us of His faithfulness and His power.
- And second, this has the added benefit of telling others about His works, for His glory, so that they too might know Him and thus share in our joy and give Him the glory. That is evangelism!

Thus, we glorify Him by our being grateful. Therefore, we give Him thanks for the work of His hands and our received blessings.

How do we remember and “count our blessings” to allow the knowledge of our blessedness to support our joy? (But remember, this is also not a competition to see who is “more blessed”.)

- First, by remembering that everything we have ultimately comes from the LORD (1 Corinthians 4:7): everything we think of as good, and everything we think is bad; so, we remember and trust that “...*for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*” (Rom. 8:28 ESV) both in this life and for the life to come (Romans 8:29-30).
- Second, by intentionally looking to see how and where the LORD is moving and working around you. We remember that because the LORD is concerned about and for all of His creations: the Elect, reprobate, and the environment along with all it contains like animals and plants (Matthew 10:29-31); we know that He is actively engaged with the world, despite the world turning a blind eye to His presence and influence.
- Third, by being on the watch for “everyday miracles”. Oftentimes we only pray for “big ones”: like spontaneous healing or for something humanly impossible; and so we miss, ignore, or forget about the “ordinary miracles” that happen every day:
  - like someone who is restored to full health after a round of antibiotics, after receiving penicillin (a miraculous and fortuitous discovery and a “natural remedy”, thus a gift of God's good creation; as creation itself was the first miracle), which was prescribed to them by a doctor who was given (by God) wisdom, understanding, and the necessary skill (with each themselves being a miracle) to do so. Or,
  - like making it home safely after traveling. Or,

- like the sun shining and the rain falling which help to make a farmer's crop grow. Or,
- like the birth of a child or finding the love of your life and marrying her.
- Fourth, once we start identifying and recognizing the LORD's many blessings around us then, as we notice them, we will pause and give God thanks for them; even if it is just a simple “Thank you”. Not only does this help support our joy, because we are increasing our appreciation, our sense of gratitude also grows. Eventually, our intentionality makes this a “second nature” and we do this without thinking, so that eventually, we forget about and lose our ability to even choose to not be joyful.

I think and believe that it was this kind of attitude and these kind of practices: intentionally looking for God's work around you, recognizing His miracles for your good, and becoming always grateful and appreciative; was the open secret to Paul's ability to remain content in any situation (Philippians 4:11), and I believe that this is the final lesson we should take from Mary's choice of joy: how our joy leads to contentedness.

- By knowing who God is and who we are in relationship to Him gives us the ability to trust Him promises and choose to be joyful.
- By choosing to be joyful in all things, regardless of how we may otherwise feel, we then become able to be and remain content in all circumstances.

So, this Advent season whenever you hear these stories of joy, remember and understand that true Joy only comes from the LORD; that it is only found and known through faith in Jesus Christ and the salvation He has wrought. So, know and remember Christ, believe and trust in Him, and so, choose Joy.

**AMEN**