

He Has Done Great Things

Luke 1:39-56

I am one who believes that all of Scripture points us to Jesus Christ. That is to say, everything in Scripture is focused upon one grand central theme. The work of God in redemption which was accomplished in the person of Jesus Christ. And so the great climax of God's working among his people is the incarnation. The birth of Jesus Christ. The eternal son of God becoming flesh. Born as a baby to that godly and humble woman named Mary. Born to a virgin, who became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit not by the involvement of a husband or any other man.

How sad it is that the holiday set aside by our own government and culture to celebrate that incarnation has become overridden with sentimental traditions and materialistic indulgences that have nothing to do with Jesus. For merchants, this is the time of year when they make their profits. For consumers, this is the time of the year for the best sales. For advertisers and marketers, this is the time of year when everything happens. At best, it might seem that this holiday is simply a time for family get-togethers, a time for traveling and big dinners.

And so we measure the Christmas season not by the presence of Jesus Christ, but by the number of shopping days left. And we measure Christmas itself by the amount of traffic on the highways or travelers on airplanes. Therefore the best that we can offer within our own culture is that bland and empty expression, "Happy Holidays." Indeed, those who seek to enjoy the holiday season which is fixed as a remembrance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, can't even use the name of Christ in the name of the Holidays. Happy holidays!

Yet for many, those holidays aren't happy. They are anything but happy. They are discouraging, depressing, even painful. For many, it is the most stressful time of the year. Ask someone who has lost a loved one this year, or who has experienced any form of trial or difficulty. This happy holiday is the saddest and most difficult time of the year.

That is because we have missed the whole focus that is intended by Christmas itself. And whether or not you even choose to celebrate Christmas, whether or not the announcement of a public holiday has any effect on your own daily life, the incarnation is a glorious event. The presence of Jesus Christ among men is a glorious event. The glory is so well captured by that one Hebrew word so familiar to us today. Immanuel. God with us. God, the second person of the Trinity, the Word who was with God in the beginning, becoming flesh. And dwelling among us.

This morning, in our text, I will introduce you to Jesus. But not the baby Jesus. Our subject is not the birth of Jesus. For he was incarnate before then. About nine months before then, when Mary, his mother, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. And even as an unborn child, there is unmistakable joy in his presence. We see here in Luke 1,

I. THE JOY OF JESUS.

The joy he brings merely by his existence and presence among others. In this very touching account given by Luke of Elizabeth's visit to Mary, we see first the,

A. Joy to Elizabeth.

Now, in human terms, in an awareness of the flesh, Elizabeth should be filled with envy and jealousy. After all, Mary has just stolen her spotlight. Elizabeth is an older woman, beyond the

years of child-bearing. And what a blessing she has received for herself. She and Zacharias have finally been able to have a child. She's pregnant.

And along comes her much younger relative, perhaps a cousin. And the attention that Elizabeth's pregnancy received is now overshadowed entirely by this young woman not even yet married. But there was no envy. Just the deepest of joy. Joy not due to the presence of Mary, but of the baby already formed within her womb.

v.39-43

Indeed, the joy of Elizabeth was that the mother of her Lord had come to her! Elizabeth, the older woman, rejoiced in the visit from her younger relative, because of the presence of her Lord Jesus.

What marvelous faith these women had. Elizabeth knew that this baby was her Lord, and ascribed to him a divine nature. Elizabeth knew that Mary's baby was the promised Messiah, the incarnate Lord so clearly prophesied in the Old Testament. She knew her Bible, and rejoiced at the presence of the unborn child Jesus. Her joy extended for three months.

v.56

There is something even more marvelous here. It is not simply the joy of two pregnant women encouraging each other's faith, as good as that was. But we read that the unborn child within Elizabeth leaps for joy! There is joy in the presence of Jesus, even for an unborn child. Here it is,

B. Joy to John.

The presence of a baby in one woman brings joy to the baby in another woman! So much for the wicked silliness of our day

that identifies a fetus as a collection of tissues subject to removal at the choice of a woman and her doctor. These were no mere fetuses, and that is a word I really hate. These were two children. Two human beings. One of them was also the son of God, the second person of the trinity incarnate.

And the other was directly and personally struck by the power of the Holy Spirit himself. While in his mother's womb, he leapt for joy!

v.41

And lest you think that was simply one of the ordinary movements common to unborn children at that stage of their development, Elizabeth makes it clear.

v.44

So great is the joy in the presence of the Son of God. Surely, as well, there is,

C. Joy to Mary.

It is a joy pronounced upon her by Elizabeth.

v.45

And Mary responded with that great song we call by its Latin heading, the magnificat.

v.46-47

This young woman today might well be counseled today to get an abortion. Yet she responds with such praise and adoration. Don't forget as well, that this young woman has to tell her betrothed husband that she was pregnant, despite the fact that their marriage had not yet been consummated. This godly, young woman knew and believed that the greatest of all miracles had taken place within the biological organs of her own body. She

had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and there is no hint of confusion. No bewilderment or disbelief. Nothing to overwhelm her or cause her to doubt.

Simply, and completely, joy. Oh, that we would have such simple devotion and adoration today! Oh that this song would be the song within your heart this morning, and every morning. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

And oh that the first thoughts upon our minds on that day called Christmas, would be these words. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

Let me emphasize the order of those words. Joy within your soul will come only when your soul magnifies the Lord! Do you see the connection. Joy is not something that you achieve primarily. It is a byproduct of genuine worship. Joy is not something that you can stir up directly, but something that inevitably develops when you exalt the Lord and dwell upon the greatness of his glory within your soul.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.” Therefore, “my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior.”

And so I declare to you, in the words of the Psalmist,
Ps. 34:1 “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. 3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.”

Let us have joy in the presence of Jesus. Secondly we see in Mary’s song,

II. THE POWER OF JESUS.

This song is very rich in biblical quotations and references. J.C. Ryle emphasizes it this way, “Let us mark, firstly, the full acquaintance with Scripture which this hymn exhibits.” And as his fifth point, writes, “Let us mark, lastly, the firm grasp which the Virgin Mary had of Bible promises.”

In those biblical references, it is the power of God which stands out. Power both to exalt the humble and humble the proud. First,

A. Power to exalt the humble.

Notice how Mary puts herself in the category of the humble. So far from being able to save others or intercede for others, as the Roman Catholics imagine, “she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins.” She expresses her own requirement for a savior for her own soul.

v.48-49

The greatness of the things which God has done for Mary is magnified by her own lowliness! The extent of God’s power which Mary exalts is shown forth by the level of humility and poverty from which he has raised her.

So great is God’s power, that he could take a lowly servant such as this ordinary young woman, and so bless her that she would be honored and blessed by all generations to come. Notice in that how thoroughly Mary ascribes praise to the God who has blessed her, rather than to exalt herself in her blessings. That’s humility. And to broaden that same idea beyond merely Mary’s own experiences, we read in,

v.52-53 “He has ...exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things.”

That's God's power. So marvelously experienced by the humble. Again to quote Ryle, "Humility is the highest grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is a true saying of an old divine, that 'a man has just so much Christianity as he has humility.'"

1 Peter 5:5 "...be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

And that really is the application of this song. To observe the humility of Mary's faith, and to exercise that same humility in your own life. And always keep in mind that great connection between the power of God and the humility of man.

There is a flip side to that power, however. Not only is it power to exalt the humble, but also,

B. Power to humble the proud.

To humble the exalted! That is surely the substance of Mary's song of praise.

v.51-53

That's the power of God! Note that this combination of exalting the humble and humbling the proud involves not only the power of God but also his mercy. And his perfect holiness. So Mary sings in praise,

v.49-50

You see, God's power is not capricious, that is impulsive and unpredictable. God's power is not haphazard or disorderly. He does not act upon a whim. God's power is totally and completely sovereign, which is to say that God exercises his power entirely according to the dictates of his own will, entirely for his own glory.

But that doctrine is not a harsh and oppressive burden we must simply bear, because this God who is powerful, this God whom Mary declares "has done great things for me," is a God who exercises his power in conjunction with his holiness!

v.49

That's what makes God's exercise of power different from Saddam Hussein! God's power and his attribute of perfect holiness never contradict. There is never the least tension between them.

And he is merciful!

v.50

So don't ever be afraid of the doctrine of God's power, his sovereign, omnipotence. There IS nothing too difficult for God. So don't ever be afraid to declare God's absolute and unlimited ability to do whatever he chooses to do. Instead, sing his praise because of it! Exalt his glory as a God of power. And worship at his footstool!

v.49-53

There is one more thing about God from this song of Mary that I would identify, and that is,

III. THE FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS.

I hope you can begin to see just how deeply Mary understands who Jesus really is! It seems that every line of this song is connected with some passage from the Old Testament, especially the Psalms. And from identifying her own unborn son her savior, to the reference to God's promises to Abraham, she knows Christ. She knows Jesus, because God has promised him. Little by little, generation by generation, prophecy by prophecy, Jesus is shown forth with increasing clarity in the Old

Testament. And Mary knows that what God has said is true, and what he has promised will come to pass.

If God is anything, he is faithful. Faithful to his mercy as well as to his justice. Moses proclaimed that,

Deut. 7:9 “Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 “and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face.”

God keeps covenant. And that covenant is generational. It extends from one generation to another. God is,

A. Faithful from generation to generation.

So Mary sings,
v.50

And in that, Mary knows full well that God is,

B. Faithful to his own special people.

God is faithful to his own treasured possession, the people defined at Mt. Sinai,

Ex. 19:5 “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 ‘And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

Peter clearly speaks of the same thing when he writes,

1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now

the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”

God is faithful to his own special people. God discriminates among men, and declares himself to one group, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” And so Mary sings his praise,
v.54

Mary includes herself in a group that goes far beyond her own individual existence. And this great psalm of praise is not merely about her own personal experiences. For those experiences are part of a larger whole, and that’s the context which we ought to maintain in our worship, as well. Not just me and my experiences. But me and my experiences as part of the live of the corporate body, the body of Christ.

God has done great things for me, we might sing or pray, because I am a part of his body. I am a member of his people Israel. I am among his special people. And God has been faithful to his special people.

You ought to appreciate how Mary is able to transcend her own experiences in this song. And because of the ever-present emphasis upon individualism in our day, you must really work at seeing yourself as part of something much larger than the sum of your own experiences.

“He who is mighty has done great things for me...[Then] He has helped his servant Israel.”

Notice then how verse 54 ends and how verse 55 continues.
v.54b “In remembrance of His mercy.”

v.55 “As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

“As he spoke...” You see, Mary knew how God had spoken. She knew what he had spoken. She knew the promises to Abraham and his seed! And she now knows that they are fulfilled in Christ! For she knows that,

C. God is faithful to his own promises.

Let me remind you briefly of that promise.

Gen. 12:2 “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

And, Gen. 17:6 “I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. 8 “Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

And God is faithful! And don't think for a moment that the fulfillment of that great promise is for the Jews of today, who inhabit that land called Israel today. For we are the children of Abraham, we, the church of Jesus Christ. And God's covenant promise to Abraham is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. For we are the children of Abraham, we who believe in Christ.

I can certainly prove that to you by reading,

Galatians 3:6 “...just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”

Paul continues with an astounding statement,

Galatians 3:8 “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” [That promise is the promise of the gospel!] 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. [Then skipping down to verse] 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

And Mary understood that! For when she praises God for the blessing of Jesus, she sings of that great promise to Abraham. To Abraham and his seed forever.

So let us this sing with Mary this morning. Sing within your own soul. Sing to the praise of the glory of Jesus. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”

Ps. 34:3 “Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.”