Luke 1:46-56

Mary's Praise to Our Magnificent God

Sermon

It's good to be back here at Trevor. Last week I preached over at Spring Grove and it was great to see people over there I hadn't seen in a while. I have to say though that I really missed all of you! It really felt good to miss you all in that way because I realized that we are becoming a family which is exactly what I desire for our church. So it's really good to be back home with you this Christmas.

This morning I'm going to give the last sermon of our Christmas series where we've been exploring famous Christmas songs. This morning I want to briefly consider the song we all just sang – Mary Did You Know.

This song was written by Mark Lowry who was a member of the famous Gaither Vocal Band. He had a difficult time in school as a boy because he was diagnosed as excessively hyperactive, which if you've ever seen him entertain won't be a surprise to you. He reminds me of Robin Williams, someone who is funny, but at times seems to go off the rails a bit. He wasn't athletic at all and didn't fit in well because he was viewed by most to be an energetic-klutz. He was one of those kids who you can't get to sit still and was placed on medication early. However, His parents chose to see Mark's "hyperactive, wild tendencies" as something that God could use if channeled correctly. At an early age he showed great promise with singing and performing although even on the stage he seemed to be a mini-tornado. They were never sure what he would do next, but he had an amazing voice, loved to entertain, and could be very funny. His parents, seeing his hyperactivity as a blessing rather than a cursing, put him on every and any stage that would take him. Later in life, he was discovered by Bill Gaither, and shortly after joining the band, Buddy Green (one of the band members) put music to the lyrics of a song that Mark had written for a church production years earlier. In the song Mark imagined himself interviewing Mary and asked question after question, the types of questions we all have:

"Did you know your baby boy would one day walk on water?". "Did you know your baby boy would calm a storm with His hand?". "Did you know when you kissed your baby, you've kissed the face of God?".

The song gained a lot of attraction from Christian artists and was soon turned into a hit. Instead of seeing his challenges as a curse, His parents chose to see them as a blessing. Because of their faith in God and confidence that God could use even someone like Mark, he became a popular singer who performed in front of thousands and wrote a unique song about a unique woman with a unique calling.

Can you imagine what it would have been like for Mary to raise Jesus, the Son of God? What was Bible story time like with Jesus, the one who really could teach them? What would it have been like for Joseph to train Jesus at his trade of carpentry? Were the projects He built always better than Josephs'? Did He ever miss the nail when He was hammering? When He missed the nail, did He ever hit His finger? When He hit His finger…what did He say? Mary breast fed the Son of God. Mary had to care for Him when he was sick. When Mary lost him in the crowd and found Him teaching in the temple, how frantic was she…God had entrusted His only Son to her and she lost Him. We know Mary didn't understand God's plans for Jesus perfectly, she is described many times as confused and marveling at the events of Jesus' life. It will be amazing one day to be able to ask Mary questions about all of this.

In the passage we just read we hear Luke's account of Mary's unique story. She is visited by an angel, Gabriel, who is sent from God to give her a message that she will give birth to the Messiah that her people Israel have been waiting for. His name is to be called "Jesus" – Matthew's gospel tells us this is because He will save His people from their sins. Mary at the time is "betrothed" to Joseph, they are in the first stage of marriage where legally they are married but they have not yet "known" each other physically. So this is obviously a miraculous birth and Mary is well aware that being pregnant would be a break from her marriage contract to Joseph to which the punishment under the law of Moses was to be stoned to death. Nevertheless, this brave teenage girl, who is an ***excellent*** model of faith, obedience, and humility (the name Mary means "excellent") offers herself to God as His servant to whom He can do as He desires. Her famous response to the news is seen in v.38 – **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." (1:38).** She then journeys in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth is in her sixth month of pregnancy. Gabriel had already visited Zechariah, Elizabeths husband, and gave them the news that they would have a son in their barrenness. Their son would be the one who prepares the way for the Messiah, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah – John the Baptist. Upon seeing each other the baby, John, leaps in the womb of Elizabeth with joy. All of this serves as a sign to Mary that everything the angel spoke to her will come to pass. She is overwhelmed with joy and breaks forth into praise in what has become known in latin as the "Magnificat" which means "Magnificent" from Mary's praise "My soul MAGNIFIES THE LORD".

Her praise is spontaneous, and carries with it a wealth of knowledge in the Word of God, but it is also a product of the Holy Spirit's work in Mary's life. Her praise is filled with OT theology and Scripture and eloquence – some commentators actually think that the Magnificat couldn't have been originally spoken by an uneducated, teenage girl from Nazareth. ***We know that God can speak through anyone in this way should He choose to, and He loves to use lowly people like Mary.***

Mary is a reminder that when God blesses people in lavish ways, lavish worship is the result. The more God is magnified in your life, the greater the worship you will give Him in return.

Mary is also an example of what comes out of the heart when the unexpected comes. Because she knew the word of God and had a heart that was already surrendered to the Lord, when the unexpected came, what poured out of her heart was not doubt, worry, or an unwillingness to obey – but obedience, faith, and worship to God. She is blown away that God would bless her with such a privilege. Church what are you filling your hearts and minds with? When the unexpected comes, what pours out of your heart reveals what you've been putting into your heart!

This morning I want to consider with Mary three things about our Magnificent God:

1. **Our magnificent God extends favor towards the humble (Luke 1:46-49)**

[46] And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, [48] for he has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; [49] for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

Mary cannot contain herself and bursts forth in praise concerning all that God has done in her life! She can't imagine that God would bless someone like her with such a privilege. This little girl from Nazareth can't believe that "from now on all generations will call me blessed!"

When God pours out His grace into a vessel, into someone who is undeserving, praise to Him is what comes out! Mary is an example of what TRUE and genuine worship looks like. For those of us who have been gripped by God's grace, we have experienced times of praise like this. We are never closer to who God created us to be than when we are overwhelmed with His amazing grace.

Mary describes herself as being of "humble estate" (1:48). She is totally unassuming. She is the opposite of what entitlement looks like. She expects nothing, but gets everything in return. She comes from Nazareth which was essentially "no where". Luke specifies Nazareth as "a city of Galilee" probably because he thought that Theophilus, his reader, would have never heard of Nazareth. Kind of like "Trevor"…God loves to plant churches in "nowhere's" with "nobody's" and turn the "nobody's" into "somebody's". Mary is a young teenage girl, and would not have been treated with great respect or as someone of importance. But God privileges her to be the mother of His only begotten Son.

Gabriel's greeting to her is unique - "**Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (1:28)**. A literal translation could be, "Grace to you O graced one!" Gabriel tells her, "do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God!" (1:30). Everything about this young girl had changed because she had "found favor with God"! This placed Mary into a historical lineage of many saints of old who also found favor with God. The Bible tells us that Noah "found favor with God" (Gen. 6:8). Abraham is described as finding favor with God (Gen. 18:3). Gideon is also described as finding favor with God (Judges 6:17). Mary probably knew these stories, and when Gabriel describes her as "finding favor with God" she is being brought into a lineage of "graced" individuals through whom God did miraculous things. With such a greeting from such a majestic being she is "troubled". "God must be ready to do something big!"…"Why me?"…"what is God about to do with me?!" Gabriel assures her, "the Lord is with you!" God's favor and presence are with Mary, and He will bring to pass all that He will ask of Mary.

You need to know that if Jesus is your Lord, God's favor and presence are already with you – you are in a line of saints who "have found favor with God". A child came to his pastor after a sermon and said, "Pastor, you said that God lives in me…doesn't that then mean that God will do big things through me!?" God has graced you Christian…and He wants to do big things through you. But it has nothing to do with how special you are, it is His undeserved favor.

Consider two parables in Luke which demonstrate this principle of God extending favor towards the humble**. First, in Luke 14 Jesus tells a story of a wedding feast**. Have you ever gone to a wedding and wondered where you would be seated (how close will I be to the couple)? Two men assume two different seats at the banquet table. The first who thinks he is somebody important seats himself in the seat of honor only to be humiliated when the host asks him to move seats and puts him at the worst seat – maybe it was the furthest from the wedding couple. The other doesn't see himself as important, and he assumes the worst seat, the furthest seat, only to be amazed when the host seats him in the seat of honor. **The second parable is in Luke 18. Jesus tells a story of a Pharisee and a tax collector**. In the parable, Jesus is revealing the self-evaluation that each man made. The Pharisee (a religious leader of their day – maybe a "pastor" today) he prays to God and says, "God I thank you that I am not like other men…sinful, undeserving, wicked…". When you and I look down on others – anyone in any way – isn't it true that at that moment we have actually forgotten how sinful, how undeserving, how wicked we really are? Where would I be if God's grace hadn't pierced into my life? The tax collector stands far off - showing the shame over his own sin – he isn't worthy to approach God. He looks up to heaven and

beats his chest and cries out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Jesus elevates the faith of the tax collector, not the Pharisee.

In both parables, the wedding feast, and the Pharisee/tax collector, Jesus closes the parable with this: "**For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11; 18:14).**

Thank God that He exalts the humble! I can be that! I don't know how to be important, cool, have it all together. I don't have to be! Whenever someone thinks I am someone special I'm always amazed. I want to say, "no you don't really know me!" God pours out grace and favor on the wretch, the sinner, the weak, the last one to be picked at recess. Those who are unassuming and undeserving. Those who are gripped with their own sinfulness and need and inability. Who think little of themselves but much of God. God forgive me for anytime I think I'm someone when I'm not. Grace is only amazing grace to those who know they need it.

If you have received through faith the grace of God found in Jesus Christ…you too have been brought into a lineage of saints who have found favor with God. God wants to do big things through you because He lives within you. The Holy Spirit "overshadowed" Mary (same word used of the glory of God resting upon the Tabernacle). Paul would ask the Corinthians, "Do you not know that the Holy Spirit dwells within you?!" God extends favor, towards the humble

2. Our magnificent God will vindicate those who fear Him (Luke 1:50-55)

[50] And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. [51] He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; [53] he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. [54] He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, [55] as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

Mary now turns her attention away from herself to the "God-fearers" who seem to always suffer at the hands of the proud, rich, rulers. There is a principle of Scripture – God gives grace to the humble, *but He resists the proud*. Mary was well acquainted with injustice. The injustice of Rome and Roman taxation upon the poor. The injustice of the religious elite who turned up their noses towards others. The injustice of women being treated at times poorly. The injustice of the money changers in the temple who were getting rich off of the poor who wanted to come and worship. Injustice was all around Mary.

God is depicted by Mary as the God who sees all the injustice towards those who fear Him and He will do something about it. God will be merciful to His people Israel – "to Abraham and his offspring". By the way, did you know that if you have put your faith in Jesus, the Bible says YOU too are the offspring of Abraham (read Romans 4). God will rescue those who "fear Him from generation to generation."

Mary is showing a great knowledge of the OT here. What is pouring out of her she has spent time pouring in. ***Would you have the kind of knowledge of God's Word that this young teenage girl has?*** She understands that God is a God who fulfills the promises He gave to Israel. To Abraham and His

offspring God promised a "seed to come" who is Jesus. To David God promised a son who would rule on His throne forever – that's Jesus, He Messiah, the King of Israel. She is praising God because after hundreds of years of silence, God has finally made good on His promises to Israel and she will be the mother of the King of David, the seed of Abraham, the Son of God! She is praising God that He will finally bring vindication to His people Israel through the Messiah.

When she mentions the "strength" of "His arm" in v.51 she is probably thinking of the Exodus where God told Moses, "**I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment." (Exo. 6:6)**. God humbled Pharaoh and exalted the God-fearers, His people. The rich and the full and the rulers of this world seem to prosper, while those who fear God, who are of humble estate, and are hungry seem to always get the short end of the stick. God sees and He is going to vindicate the God-fearers.

Mary is thinking of prophets in the OT that she learned of in synagogue, who spoke of God's future Messianic Kingdom - a time where positions and fortunes are reversed. The proud are scattered and confused. The rulers of the world are removed from their thrones. The rich are sent away empty while the hungry are filled. Mary is showing a rich understanding of the OT promises of Messiah who would turn everything *right side up*. Now that Messiah is coming, Mary is praising God and looking forward to what God is about to do under the rule of Messiah.

Paul wrote to the church at Rome, that was suffering great injustice and persecution, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, **"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. [20] To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:19-21).** I'm sure that many of you have suffered injustices. Like Mary, we wait for God to right all of the wrongs. But it isn't our place to bring vengeance. God will bring vengeance on those who have done wicked things and worst of all have rejected God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus. They will be repaid. We are to not be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil with good. We are to love our enemies. We are to point them to Jesus. Can you imagine the Christians in Rome who were in many cases facing starvation at the hands of Rome… Paul says, feed them…if they're thirsty, give them water – by doing this you will bring conviction for their injustices and perhaps their conviction will lead to repentance and faith in God. How can you sacrificially bless your enemies and those who have wronged you this Christmas season?

We are called to forgive and that takes a miracle…but when I remind myself of how much God has forgiven me, it helps me to then forgive others. God will execute justice in His time and it will be measured perfectly.

3. Our Magnificent God saves us through Jesus (Luke 1:47)

Look again at 1:46-47 – "**My soul magnifies the Lord, [47] and my spirit rejoices in *God my Savior***

What DID Mary know? When Mary calls God her Savior…what did she mean? She may have meant that God would save her and her people from Roman oppression. That was the common view of God saving His people. However, she also knew that Jesus would save her and her people from their sins. In the book of Matthew, when Gabriel visits Joseph he tells Joseph to name Him Jesus (God Saves)

– "**you shall call His name Jesus, *for He will save His people from their sins*." (Mt. 1:21)**. This may have been puzzling to Mary and Joseph. We don't know when Mary understood this about Jesus, that He would first come to suffer and die on a Roman cross as a sacrifice for sins. Perhaps God mercifully spared her of knowing this…Jesus would speak of it at times to His disciples, but the disciples didn't fully understand all of this until AFTER Jesus rose from the dead. When did this all make sense to Mary? We don't really know.

What we do know is that God did not send Jesus into the world to save His people from Roman oppression - one day He will return and will save the world from all the injustice and oppression and wickedness all around us - but first He came to save us from our sins.

The baby born in a manger came on a rescue mission to die on a cross for our sins and to pay the penalty we owe to God for our eternal sins against an eternal God that demand an eternal sentence of hell and separation from God. This SALVATION is from a far worse evil than the evil rulers of this world. *This salvation is a salvation from the evil that is within each of us and the judgment we deserve.*

Maybe you're here this morning and you feel like the tax collector – and you know you need a Savior. You know that you've sinned against God. You know you've messed things up. You know you don't deserve God…maybe you foolishly think that you need to clean up your life first. Do you really think you could ever clean up your life enough to impress God or to repay God ("wow", THAT'S deserving of eternal life")? It's not true…come to the Savior and let Him clean you from the inside out. Let Him wash you of your sins with the blood that He shed on the cross for you. If you know you're a sinner who deserves nothing but to be punished by God for your sins, you too can be a recipient of the gift of salvation. Put your faith in Jesus this morning and turn away from your sins that have done nothing but left you filled with shame…they will only rob you! Come to the Savior and put your faith in Him this morning and then praise Him for how good He is…He gives grace to those who need it.

In closing, do you know the gift you can give to God this Christmas that pleases Him? Simple, child-like faith. Simply receiving the gift of salvation. To simply be a spectator of God's amazing grace – and then to praise Him for it…because the Giver gets the glory! To be a spectator this Christmas season as we look at the miracle of God. We don't have to perform the miracle…we don't have to perform at all. We don't have to be "grateful enough"…we could never be "grateful enough". We don't have to earn the gift…we never could. We can just be recipients of grace. Jars of clay who contain within us a treasure. Vessels of mercy – God's glory has been poured into us. Sinners who beat their chest and say, "God be merciful to me!" Those are the ones God shows favor to. I don't have to have all the answers, Mary didn't. I don't have to be special, Mary wasn't. All I need to do is simply say, "behold the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."… "God you want to bless me? You want to use me? You want give me purpose and a hope and do miraculous things around me and through me? Let it be to me according to your word…and I will praise you God for all that you do!"

I want to pray this morning and ask for God to help us to be spectators who are able to take in more this Christmas season of the miracle of Jesus…to stretch our vessels so that we can contain more of God's amazing grace that He pours in…and that we'll pour out praise to Him in return for all He pours into us.

Pray