**My Soul Magnifies the Lord!**

**Luke 1:39-56 (ESV)**

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We’re going to be in Luke chapter 1 this morning. Merry Christmas! What a great, sweet time it is to celebrate this incarnation. God took on flesh and became a little baby; helpless so that we might not be hopeless. So we’re going to read a bit of that story from Luke chapter 1. We’re going to begin with verse 39. It’s this interchange between Mary and her relative, Elizabeth. We don’t know exactly whether she was a cousin or an aunt, but she was a relative to Mary. We’re going to begin with verse 39 and go through this poem, a song that Mary wrote. This is really remarkable when you think about Mary being probably about 14 years old. Think about that! How many 14 year old’s do we have? I want you to think about what Mary wrote as she was underneath the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But she loved the Lord and she loved His Word and she was deep in her memorization of God’s Word. So precious is her faith, her anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. We’re going to learn from her. She really provides an example for us, an example of worship. We’re going to learn from her today.

***39*** *In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,* ***40*** *and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.* ***41*** *And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,* ***42*** *and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!* ***43*** *And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* ***44*** *For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.* ***45*** *And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

***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.* ***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.”*

***56*** *And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.*

What a blessed story!

Merry Christmas! (Congregation: Merry Christmas!) Have you ever wondered why we say those words, “Merry Christmas,” to communicate well wishes to one another during this season? Well the word “Christmas” is about a thousand years old. It comes from two words, a Greek word, *Christos*, which means “Christ,” or “The Messiah,” and *mass* which is Latin from the Latin word *missa*. And that word, *missa,* was used by the church at the very end of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It literally means “to be sent.” So the church was reminded as they took Communion, as they took the Lord’s Supper, that when they were finished with that worship service, they were sent out by Christ to do His bidding. And so the word Christmas simply means “Christ is sent.” Christ is sent by the Father into this world on a mission that He was to accomplish on our behalf.

Now the word “Merry” wasn’t attached to the word “Christmas” until 1534. There was a guy by the name of John Fisher who sent a letter to his friend, Thomas Cromwell. He wrote, “And this our Lord God send you a Merry Christmas.” We have no documentation of that word being attached to Christmas until that time. And then of course Charles Dickens wrote his famous novel, *The Christmas Carol* in 1843, and he popularized that little phrase, “Merry Christmas.”

Later that same year, the first Christmas card would be published commercially. And what would appear on that first Christmas card? Well, the words “Merry Christmas.” Queen Elizabeth II didn’t like the term “merry.” She thought it implied too much of a party spirit. And so in her Christmas addresses in England, she would always say, “Happy Christmas.” And to this day, as I understand, there are some people from Ireland and England who say, “Happy Christmas.” I think that “Happy Christmas” accomplishes the same purpose.

But here’s the truth. Every time we think of God the Father sending His Son to the world on a mission to save us from our sins, we’re right to be happy. We are right to make merry. We cannot be too happy when our joy is rooted in God our Savior. God is a great and gracious God worthy of ecstatic celebration. So it’s right to greet one another and wish one another “Merry Christmas,” happy that God sent His Anointed, the Christ, on a mission to rescue us.

In modern times, Christians often exert great effort to celebrate and encourage joy in this season. Some risk life and limb climbing atop of the roof of their house to place lights and decorations. Some take to the kitchen and bake cookies and decorate each one with precision and care. Others labor to write that perfect family Christmas letter to send out, and send out dozens of cards to friends. Others hit the mall to find that perfect gift at the perfect price. Others, more mercy-minded, serve food to the homeless or transport gifts to children whose parents are in prison. Others sing Christmas carols or go to Christmas concerts or host parties. What labor, what devotion many make to put some merry into Christmas. And yet, as followers of Jesus, we know that rejoicing in the Messiah whom the Father sent doesn’t require that we do any of those things. Many Christians throughout church history didn’t do any of those things I just mentioned, and yet they remained joyful, merry, in a celebrative time during this season.

You see, true rejoicing requires one thing. And that is that we exert ourselves in worship. That we focus and commit ourselves to make much of God. Our merry in Christmas is joined to magnifying the Lord. And we realize that there is a great danger of seeking joy in the adornments of Christmas instead of the actuality of Christmas. What a tragedy it would be to seek joy in Christmas cookies or Christmas presents or Christmas carols or Christmas cards or Christmas lights. Joy finds its completion only in Christ Jesus. And so it’s right for us to take some time every Christmas and ask ourselves in the midst of the hustle and bustle of this holiday, how can we focus our energies upon simply making much of God?

This morning, we look to a young, teenage girl to help us in this pursuit. This teenager becomes a model for us of worship, of what it means to make much of God. She reveals the wonder and awe of God sending His Son to the world to rescue sinners. She helps us shake loose of our spiritual dullness and see afresh the divine mystery that breeds gladness into our hearts. She does so by composing a song. It’s a poem that is likely sung as well, as a song of worship. Luke tells her story in the first chapter of this gospel account. Let’s recall some of the details.

This young teenage girl, her name is Mary. Again, she’s likely only about 14 years old. Think of that for a moment. It’s really astounding when we think of this! Mary, this one that we consider at Christmas time as bearing the Christ, was listening to the angel while she was just 14 years old.

I want to speak to teenagers for a moment. Teenagers, please know that God delights to use your faith and your worship in profound ways to bring glory to His name. God does not ask you to wait until you’re 20 or 30 or 40 or older to do something really significant for him. Consider Mary. We don’t know much of anything else Mary did in her later years to advance God’s name in this world. She likely was a worshiping woman all through her life, but God used her when she was 14 years old to do something spectacular. We’re talking about it on this very day. So keep in mind that it just might be that the most significant way that God will use you in your entire life is not when you’re older, but right now as a teenager. That’s possible. So be ready! Be faithful! Be obedient! Keep your heart open, knowing that God has designed you for an infinite and eternal purpose. Here’s the counsel. Be ready to listen to God’s call and to worship Him in your life today. We don’t know what God would call any of us to do. What God called Mary to do was special, to be sure. But we do know that God has designed us for something that He considers to be eternally significant.

So as we think of this story, we’re reminded of Mary being visited by this angel, an angel named Gabriel, while she was in her house in Nazareth. Mary is a pure young woman. She’s obedient to God, and she’s formally betrothed to a young man named Joseph. And what a shock Mary has when Gabriel appears before her! The Bible tells us that angels are everywhere present, it’s just that hardly any of us get to see one. And there’s no record that Mary saw an angel before or after. This is a special event. And so, what a shock when this angel, Gabriel, appears and says

**Luke 1:28** “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

It’s almost too much for Mary to take in. She gasps! She can hardly breathe. She thinks, “What is this angel doing here in my house, speaking to me? And what does he mean when he says, ‘O favored one’?” Well Gabriel explains.

**Luke 1:30-31** “ Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

Think of this for a moment. This is a 14 year old girl, pure, betrothed to a young man named Joseph.

**Luke 1:32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.

And at this point, this young girl, whose heart is saturated with the Word of God, begins to roll all these Bible prophecies through her heart and through her mind as she’s trying to take in what this angel is saying to her.

**Luke 1:32-33** And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

So many questions pour through Mary’s heart. She knows her Bible. She’s listened to the prophets proclaim the coming of this Messiah. It’s been a daily hope in her heart. And now she’s being told that she will be the vessel through whom the Messiah would come. Now, Mary is not ignorant of the facts of life. And one question jumps out at her.

**Luke 1:34** And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

That’s a reasonable question.

**Luke 1:35-36** And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

“There’s going to be a miracle, Mary. You know Elizabeth, Mary. No one had any hope that she would ever have a baby because she was way, way past child-bearing age.” Then Gabriel says, “Mary, we know this…”

**Luke 1:37** For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Now Mary realizes that dozens more questions could be asked. But she also recognizes that now is not the time to ask them. Now is the time to simply receive the Word of God and worship. Now is the time to submit her life to the Father completely. It is to affirm that she doesn’t live by natural contemplation, but by supernatural grace. She understands what the prophet Habakkuk said when the prophet wrote

**Habakkuk 2:4** The righteous shall live by faith.

So she bows her head and her heart to God, and she says this:

**Luke 1:38** “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Through faith in God and through faith in His Word, Mary commits herself in body and spirit to God for whatever God would ask of her. She knows God is worthy.

Here’s the principle we learn. We must not demand for all our questions to be answered before we bow our hearts in submission and obedience to God. God calls us to trust Him. When we have dozens and dozens of questions about what He is doing in our life and how He is working... We endanger the wondrous purpose God gives us when we fixate on the things God has not revealed in His Word, instead of simply obeying the things that God has revealed to us. We live according to the word that God has given us; not according to the unanswered questions that God has not given to us.

Just as suddenly as Gabriel appeared to Mary, he disappears and he’s gone. Now what is Mary to do? Well, the angel announced to her that her relative Elizabeth had conceived a son in her way, way past child-bearing years age, and so she immediately puts some things together and travels to see Elizabeth. Now, she knows that this pregnancy of Elizabeth is not as miraculous as the pregnancy in her own body, but it’s still pretty spectacular. It’s beyond human rationale. And so she immediately goes to Elizabeth.

Now keep in mind that Mary didn’t learn about Elizabeth’s pregnancy through Facebook or Twitter or through a text message. She heard about it through an angel. And that was much more sure than any testimony she would have ever received from any family member regarding Elizabeth, because Mary was a woman who lived by faith.

So she enters Elizabeth’s house when she arrives there, and the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaps for joy. Even before his birth, John the Baptist is giving praise to Jesus. He’s the forerunner. John literally is a bouncing baby boy. And Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit. And as soon as she sees Mary…This is remarkable in verse 42. Do you see what she says?

***42*** *and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

Now, again, Mary is Elizabeth’s much younger relative. And yet, she elevates the favor upon Mary. She said, “Blessed are you among women.” Not above women, but among women.

***43*** *And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* ***44*** *For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.* ***45*** *And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

She remarks on Mary’s faith. Now think about this for a moment. Elizabeth is in her third trimester of pregnancy; Mary is likely in her first trimester. Elizabeth is reminded by little John’s kicking, how sweet this precious gift from God is to her, this baby in her own womb. And yet, remarkably, Elizabeth’s response to Mary’s baby is this: “Mary, your baby is infinitely more special and superior to my baby.” What pregnant woman ever says that? (Congregational laughter!) Can you imagine? “Your baby is infinitely more special and more superior to my baby.” She says that not because she’s in a sort of sentimental phase. She says that because her heart and mind is rooted in theology. It is rooted in understanding who God is and what God has promised and what God is doing in this world. Elizabeth loves John, but she knows who alone is to be worshiped. And she says, “Mary, your baby is my Lord, my God, my Master.”

It’s interesting that John’s mom testifies to Jesus’ superiority well before John the Baptist, in answering his predestined call from the Lord, would say, “I’m not worthy to untie the laces of Jesus’ sandal.” (John 1:27) He’s older than Jesus, and yet he’s going to say, “He must increase, I must decrease.” (John 3:30) John’s mom does this very thing before John has an opportunity to speak. Let’s think about this for a moment.

Parents, let us pray that we create a home where Jesus’ significance far exceeds the significance of our own children. That’s the only way our home will be a worshiping home. It’s the only way that our home will be an eternally significant, blessed home. You see, our children will only find meaning in life when they come to realize that they are nothing in comparison to the greatness of Jesus. And our children need to hear this from us. Our children need to see that our priorities and our commitments and our habits place Jesus at the center, and not them. When we make more of our children than we do of Jesus, we doom them to spiritual dullness now and to a terrifying eternal future. So Elizabeth’s joy in God made placing Jesus over her sweet little John, an easy choice.

Note also that Elizabeth emphasizes the truth that Mary’s spiritual blessing is tied to Mary’s faith in God.

***45*** *And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

So it’s not Mary’s good works. It’s not Mary’s excellent character that connected her to God’s favor. It’s Mary’s faith. This is always the case with a sinful people. Here’s the Gospel truth. We receive God’s grace through faith. This is the Good News. The call of God upon each of our hearts is to simply believe. “Believe in Me. Believe in My Son.” God says, “I will give you the grace of salvation, the grace of eternal life, if you receive my Son as the Savior of your sins; if you believe.” And so Elizabeth doesn’t remark about any other quality of Mary’s other than her faith.

I came across a definition of faith that I thought was helpful, to me anyway. I want to share it with you. It’s from John Rogers. From hundreds of years ago, he wrote: “Faith is a particular persuasion of my heart that Christ Jesus is mine, and that I shall have life and salvation by His means; that whatsoever Christ did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for me.” That’s faith. It's taking what God said and personally appropriating it and saying, “Whatever Jesus has done for mankind…He’s not just the Savior of the world. He *is* the Savior of the world, but faith says He is my Savior. He did this for me so that I could have life, so that I could have forgiveness, so that I could have the hope of heaven, so that I could know God.”

In response to Elizabeth’s word and the reality of God’s plan of salvation, Mary composes this song of praise. And this song is interesting because it’s not about baby Jesus. It’s actually not even about Jesus so much. It’s about God the Father and His grace of sending His Son to be our Savior. So it’s not a sentimental poem from a mom who is stirred up by the fact that she’s pregnant and is going to have a child. It’s a rich, theological poem from a worshiper who has been overcome by the grace of God. As Mary meditates upon what it means for God to choose her to bring the Messiah into the world, her mind rolls Scripture after Scripture after Scripture through her heart.

Here is a teenager who has clearly memorized much of God’s Word; who has meditated constantly upon God’s Word. And now God, as He reveals this new revelation of her being the bearer of His incarnate Son, she dwells and grabs hold of God’s precious promises from the past. She thinks deeply, for instance, about Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2. She thinks about the covenant that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 17 and 22. She also considers psalm after psalm; psalms like Psalm 8, 33, 47, 100, 103. It’s interesting! This poem that she composes is only ten verses long, and yet, there are at least 15 direct allusions to Old Testament Scriptures. Fifteen different Old Testament passages are rolling through Mary’s mind. We know that there’s at least 15 of them, and likely more. And all of this is from memory.

Here’s the principle. Hiding God’s Word in our heart sets the table for our feasting upon God’s goodness and greatness in worship. Where there’s little Word in our hearts, there’s little opportunity for worship. Where there’s much Word in our hearts, there’s much opportunity for worship. Now memorizing and meditating on Scripture doesn’t guarantee that we’ll be worshipers. The Pharisees coated their life with Scripture, but they didn’t believe. They didn’t humble themselves. And so there was no worship. But failing to memorize and meditate upon God will guarantee a lethargy in worship. It is the Scripture that is the necessary fuel that ignites our hearts with passion toward the Lord. We cannot make much of God if we have not been making much of His Word. God’s Word implanted in our souls, quickens us. It makes us alive so that we can grab onto God in worship.

So here is sweet Mary. Her lifeblood flows with God’s Word. If you prick her, she’ll bleed Scripture. And how does her interaction, her faith in God and her love for His Word affect her worship?

***46*** *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,* ***47*** *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

Mary is merry as she makes much of God. Here’s the central idea behind the song that she writes. A worshiping heart rejoices to make much of God. What does Mary mean when she says, “my soul magnifies the Lord”?

Now, we don’t magnify God by making Him bigger than He really is. He’s infinite in His greatness, so it’s impossible to think of God in any larger, greater, more majestic or glorious way than He already is. But we might consider what a telescope does as it looks up at the stars in the sky. A telescope doesn’t make a star larger than it already is. A telescope simply magnifies the star so that our weak, feeble eyes can see more of what we otherwise would not be able to see under our own power. I think that’s what it means to magnify the Lord. My soul is going to take some time and sharpen the lens through God’s Spirit, through the Word, so that I see more of who God is in His power, His goodness and His glory. And as she does so, as she considers Elizabeth’s words to her, considers Scripture as a result of Elizabeth’s encouragement, she shouts out with spontaneous joy,

***46*** *And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord,* ***47*** *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

I want us all to just take a moment and think about our own soul, about our own life. Let’s ask ourselves the question: Has my soul magnified the Lord this past year? In other words, have I done something with my soul that allows me to sharpen the lens through Scripture, through God’s Spirit, through my faith, so that I see God as bigger than I saw Him last year, and I’m more excited about it? I’m really excited about who God is. I’m more excited about God now than I’ve ever been because I’m seeing Him and His grace and His goodness to me, His mercy and His sovereign power and His wonder. I see Him, and I get overwhelmed by it. Has my soul magnified the Lord?

There’s a warning here to us as well. Let us beware the danger of a heart in which God is shrinking. God never shrinks, but our heart’s capacity to see Him and to know Him, may. That’s a tragic condition for a believer. It’s a tragic condition for a church. A believer who is vibrant is a believer whose soul magnifies God. Every day they see Him as bigger than what they saw Him yesterday. But a believer’s soul is decaying, it is weakening, it is growing feeble, when the opposite happens. The opposite is what will happen naturally. If we just let time go by without any intentionality of faith, without any effort that is born of God’s grace, what happens naturally as a result of our own selfish focus, as a result of sin, as a result of Satan’s work to distract us and drain us of spiritual insight, will be that our vision of God begins to shrink. He becomes more ordinary and less special, less great, less glorious. And as a result, our passion for Him begins to wane.

There’s a book written by a man named Joe Thorn, and I liked what he writes. He says: “Take note—your view of Jesus tends to shrink over time...and as your shrinking Jesus becomes small Jesus, He is easily eclipsed by your idols and ego. The bigger and more biblical your understanding of who Jesus is, the more likely He is to be such an object of love and adoration that the idols that aim at capturing your attention and swaying your allegiance will lose their power…because small Jesus does not inspire awe, command respect, lead to worship, or compel us to talk of Him…so please remember—Jesus is bigger than you tend to think.” (Preaching to Yourself)

In a distracted heart, our vision of Him begins to grow narrow. It begins to blur. There’s grease on the lens. And it begins to close so that what once seemed to be a spotlight of unapproachable light that is blinding in its glory, becomes a little pinhole of light. And the darkness seems to close in upon a soul. Friends, I urge you again, let’s take action today. Let’s take action this week. Let’s take action this year and commit to doing whatever it takes to magnify the Lord. That’s central. And I just want to remind you of three commitments that magnifying the Lord requires.

1. We commit to focus our hearts upon God and not upon ourselves

Mary doesn’t write a song to share her story of her experience of her pregnancy, or of her experience of bearing the Christ-child. This song is a song about God. It makes much of God, not much of herself or her experience. Her song contains twenty references to God. Eight times she praises God for what He has done.

2. We commit to learning more about God’s Person and actions through His Word.

Again, we’ve already touched on this. God loves to show us His glory. He’s a gracious God and He’s willing to reveal Himself. But He doesn’t show us His glory in the same way a needy little boy at the swimming pool keeps shouting, “Mommy, look at me! Look at me! Look at me!” That’s not God. God shows each of us His glory not so that He Himself would receive something He needed in order to complete Himself. He shows us His glory so that we would receive something we need to complete ourselves, to complete the purpose of our lives. God is not far from any one of us. And He’s seeking worshipers, Jesus says in John 4, people that worship Him in spirit and in truth. So God’s not calling us in worship to more outward rituals, not to more meetings, not to more activities. He’s calling us to faith and seeing who He is as He reveals Himself by His Spirit, through His Word and His Son.

The 17th Century puritan pastor Stephen Charnock writes this: “Without the heart it is no worship; it is a stage play; an acting a part without being that person really which is acted by us: a hypocrite…We may be truly said to worship God, though we [lack] perfection; but we cannot be said to worship him, if we [lack] sincerity.”

And so again, let’s check our hearts. Of course we’re all growing and we are feeble and we are failing. And so, God’s call is not a call to perfection, but it’s a call to sincerity. To say, “I really want to make much of God in my life.”

3. We commit to helping others see how amazing God is in His Person and actions.

We’re going to be doing a series in the church in the month of January. It’s going to begin next week, actually. And we see this modeled here with Elizabeth and Mary. So Elizabeth’s worship of God and her exclamation to Mary when they meet, lights a fuse in Mary that explodes in passionate praise. So Elizabeth stirs up Mary’s heart so that Mary…We don’t know when she wrote this, but Luke tells the story in such a way for us to connect Elizabeth’s worship and Elizabeth’s encouragement to Mary, to Mary’s rejoicing in God, her Savior.

Friends, we cannot make much of God in isolation from other believers. God calls us into community so that we would be like those firesticks in the fire. Together, we’re able to burn brightly, but isolated, we begin to grow dim and cold. We need our church family. And we need our church family not just for fellowship. Fellowship is very important and necessary, but we need our church family for worship, to see more of God. We need our worshiping brothers and sisters to fan into flame our own spiritual life to help us see more of who God is and to make much of Him. The Psalmist understands this. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 34,

**Psalm 34:3** O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together.

May God help us to build those kinds of relationships in our church so that together, we would make much of God. We need each other.

Now there are four graces that ignite our worship, and Mary communicates these through her song. Worship is not ignited by looking at our own heart and saying, “I want to become a better worshiper. I want to become a more zealous person. I want to change.” Those are right desires, but we will never have that transformation by looking inside and seeing what’s wrong and trying to fix us. We have that desire by looking up to God, by having a vision of who God is and setting our sights on Him. And this song teaches us that. It’s all about an upward look. And there are at least four graces that Mary concentrates upon and communicates.

**Grace #1: God’s Lowly Bend**

***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.*

So Mary marvels that God has looked upon her “humble estate.” She realizes, in other words, that she’s a nobody in herself. She’s a poor Jewish girl living in an obscure village in Israel. She has no connections to important people. And she knows it’s not just socially and economically in which she’s humble, but she knows it’s spiritually as well. Mary knows that she has sinned against God. That’s why she exults in God her Savior. She’s not worthy to be favored by God. She has a fundamentally flawed spiritual condition. And she knows that God would be just to neglect her altogether. In other words, God would not be unjust if He had passed Mary by. And that’s why she’s saying, “How is it that You would regard me in my humble estate?” In taking notice of Mary, God is setting grace upon her. He is bending down.

God is a God who reigns high in the heavens. Mary dwells in this tiny, insignificant country village. God is a God who is holy, holy, holy, inaccessible to sinful man. Mary is finite, feeble and failing, unworthy of God’s presence. In other words, God is huge and Mary is like dust, small. In order for God to take notice of Mary, God has to stoop low to see her. It is not Mary that rises to the heights of heaven through moral excellence, through spiritual discipline, in order for God to say, “Oh! Here’s Mary. She’s finally come up to the heavenly realms.” No, it’s God that has a downward bend. And that’s really the message of Christmas. It’s that God bent low, took on human flesh, so that we could have a Savior, we could have a High Priest, we could have One who would intercede for us and sacrifice Himself for us.

God humbly condescends to give her His blessing. And when we understand the condescension of God, it ignites our worship. It causes us to have a zeal and a passion to make much of God in our lives. Here’s the principle. We will make much of God when we become convinced of our own finite smallness and of God’s infinite largeness. We will make much of God when we become convinced of His holiness and of our sinfulness.

It was Augustine who would say, “For those who would learn God’s ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second thing, and humility is the third thing.” It’s a recognition that God bent down so that we could know Him. Mary knows that God’s choice of her to be the earthly mother of the Messiah had nothing to do with her and everything to do with God’s grace. And she marvels that God chose a sinful young girl to bear the Savior of the world. What is true of Mary is true for every one of us. We’re all sinners. And if we would be forgiven and if we would know God and if we would worship Him, it’s because He stooped down to consider us.

**Grace #2: God’s Saving Mercy**

When God did lowly bend toward us, He willingly in love, expended Himself so that we could have mercy. Notice in verse 47 she says

***47*** *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

Contrary to some teaching, Mary is not sinless. She is not a co-Redemptrix. She’s not a mediator to God. She does not give grace to others. She’s a recipient of God’s grace. She’s full of grace because she has received much grace from the Lord. She’s a model of worship because she’s a woman who rejoices that God is her Savior, that God forgave her of her sin. She moves from a personal testimony of God being her own Savior to a more public testimony of God being a merciful Savior to everyone. Look in verse 49.

***49*** *for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

She acknowledges God’s holiness, that God never yields His righteousness in order to rescue us from our sin. Holy is His name. And yet, wouldn’t you agree that we would never make much of God if God were only holy and not merciful? That would be terrifying! We would flee from ever thinking about God. We wouldn’t want to draw near to such a God. And so she emphasizes first His holiness, but look at now right on the heels of that in verse 50.

***50*** *And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

She moves from being personal about God’s mercy, “God is my Savior.” What does it mean for God to be merciful? God’s mercy is His refusal to punish us as our sins deserve, because Jesus has already received the punishment our sins deserved. So we can’t think about God’s mercy without thinking of the cross, without thinking of both Christmas and Easter. That’s the reason why when the angel came to Joseph in Matthew 1 to tell Joseph that Mary was going to have a baby and that the baby conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit, he said

**Matthew 1:20-21** Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

In Jesus, God’s righteousness and God’s mercy will meet. They’ll kiss. They’ll be reconciled. God doesn’t ever break His law in order to show us mercy. God fulfills the law in order to save us. So all the righteous requirements both for reconciliation, to have a right relationship with God, and for cleansing, to be pardoned of all our sins, they’re met in this One whose name is Jesus.

Now mercy, Mary says, is going to be given only to those who fear Him. Did you notice that in verse 50? He is merciful to all those who fear Him, all those who tremble when they think of His righteousness and who fall upon their faces in humble contrition and repentance saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Every person who would humble themselves before such a God will receive mercy. And as Mary thinks about that, her heart rejoices and magnifies God. We will make much of God when we become undone by the clear realization that His saving mercy is applied to us through faith in Jesus. So let’s often rehearse the mercies of God and exult in them.

**Grace #3: God’s Just Reversal**

***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.*

Now, what Mary is thinking of is all the work that God foretold the Messiah would do in this world. Mary knows that the world in which she lives is a messed up world. Can you agree with me that this world, underneath the reign of sin, is a world of chaos? It is just messed up. So, things that should be, are not, and things that should not be, are. It’s not right that proud, arrogant, evil people gain positions of power, whether it’s at a company, or whether it’s in a nation. And they use that power to abuse people who are weaker than them. And to build off the backs of weaker people, more power, more affluence, more prestige in this world. That’s not right! Yet, it happens all the time. It’s not right that people who are so blessed with affluence should take advantage of the poor. They don’t need the poor’s money, and yet, all through the world, there’s examples of the rich taking advantage of the poor. That’s not right. Mary knows that.

And so, what does she do as she begins to give praise to God? She thinks about the Messiah’s mission. And she knows the promise is made that when the Messiah comes, He’s going to reverse everything right side up. This upside down world will become right side up. He’s going to remove proud, evil kings and dictators from their positions of power. He’s going to replace them then with humble leaders. He’s going to take the wealth from the rich who have gained their riches from robbing from the poor, and He’s going to bring prosperity to those who are honest and hard-working, who previously were without food. He’s going to take sickness and disease and He’s going to eradicate it. He’s going to cause the lame to walk. He’s going to cause the blind to see. He’s going to give freedom to those who are enslaved. Mary thinks about this great just reversal of God on a future day, and she exults.

Here's the question: Has that already happened? Well, there’s one sense in which the kingdom of God is present. It is the humble who are spiritually wealthy. But there’s another sense in which all the promises that God gave about the Messiah and the things that Mary talks about, they’ve not happened yet. Mary doesn’t know that her son will leave this world and come back. That’s going to be revealed later. She only sees this great mission of the Messiah. So Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection and when He did so, He said I’m going to return to finish this mission of being the Messiah. And all those things that Mary talks about here are going to happen. They’re yet future to us. They were future yet to Mary, yet she rejoiced in God as though they had already happened. Why? Because of faith.

And that’s why we as believers are a people who in faith, eagerly await the appearing of the Lord Jesus, when the government will be upon His shoulders. When all that is messed up in society will experience a great reversal. Those things that are wrong will be declared as wrong; those things that are good will be declared as good. When there will be economic justice and prosperity. When there will be all these things that trouble this world right now, whether it’s disease or sickness or wars and all those issues that affect mankind. All those things will be reversed. Listen to what Peter says in Acts 3. This is after Jesus ascended into heaven.

**Acts 3:18-21** But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

So Mary makes much of God as she thinks about the whole entire mission of the Messiah, including the mission that is yet to be fulfilled in the coming kingdom, when Jesus returns. So let us make much of God by continuing to wait with eagerness for this blessed hope, this great appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. If we want to make much of Jesus, we are right to make much of His second coming and the absolute completion of His mission.

**Grace #4: God’s Covenant Faithfulness**

***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.”*

So what Mary is doing is she’s going back 1400 years to the time when God spoke to Abraham, her forefather, and made a covenant with a specific nation. He said, “There’s going to be a nation, and I’m going to bless this nation. In fact, through that nation, Israel, all the nations of the world will be blessed.” Mary knows that her nation of Israel had wandered from the heart of worship. They had wandered from allegiance to God. And yet, she believes that God is going to be faithful to her nation, Israel. That God will not violate His covenant or alter the word which He promised to Israel.

Now, God’s faithfulness to the promises to national Israel might not be important to you because we’re not of the nation of Israel. At least, most of us. I don’t know if any of us are Jewish believers. It might not be that important to you whether or not God is going to be faithful to national Israel. But remember that Mary is a Jewish girl, living in Israel. She loves the country of her birth. She has learned the promises that God made to her nation. And these promises are important to her. And she says, “God is going to be faithful to those promises and I exult, I magnify God because I see His faithfulness. We as a nation do not deserve to be blessed by God, but we in Israel know that God will be faithful to fulfill His promises. Not because we deserve God to be faithful, but because God is true in every word He speaks.” So she says, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” And we take joy in that because we know, like Mary, that every promise that God makes to us in His covenant will be absolutely 100% fulfilled. So let’s take some moments and ask: Are we making much of Jesus?

Many years ago I went to Ukraine and I saw the most amazing museum. I couldn’t fathom what I was seeing when I was there. The entire contents of the museum could be held in a communion cup. It’s a big room, but every display they had could be held in a communion cup. What do I mean? Well at first, it seemed very unimpressive. Why was there a big, long line to get into this room? I don’t even know what they’re seeing. But then at each display, they had a little microscope. You look into the microscope. Do you know what was there?

The first display was a little flea, a real flea. It was dead, but it was a real flea. It had gold boots on every one of its little feet. And every boot had laces. And every lace was tied in a perfect shoelace bow. I’d never seen anything like that. I couldn’t imagine it. The second display: A guy had chopped a poppy seed in half. Okay. I looked in the microscope and there was the etched image of one of Russia’s dictators. The next display was a little pin. I could see the pin. I looked in the microscope. On top of the pin is a chessboard with perfectly carved chess pieces, ready for a game. There was a human hair in the fourth. I saw the hair. It was interesting. I looked in the microscope. Inside the hair is a long-stemmed rose with individual petals and individual leaves on that stem, placed inside the human hair. How in the world do you do that? The museum at first didn’t seem like a big deal. But when there was magnification… To this day, I still am astounded when I think about what I saw. Even as I tell it, I ask myself the question, “Did I really see that? I think I did. But did I really see that?” And the answer is yes. My soul magnifies the Lord!

Now of course, God is not small, but it is by His Spirit through the lens of His Word that we can see Him. Our lack of passion, our lack of joy, our lack of enthusiasm is never because there’s not someone who is grand in front of us. It’s because we don’t see what is true. So let’s pray that we might see, and in seeing, we would rejoice, and we’d truly be able to say “Merry Christmas!”