

Christmas Requires Humility

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[0 : 00] Well, do keep your Bible open at the passage read in Luke chapter 1. And let me pray and ask for God's help as we look at these words together. Let's pray.

Our gracious God, we thank you that you speak through your word, and we pray that by your spirit, your word would not just come to us so that we understand it better in our heads, but that it would touch our hearts and it would change our lives.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, a few years ago, Costa Coffee conducted a survey on the most hated Christmas songs.

Christmas songs are out and about to this time of year, and we have our favorites, but we also have those that we cannot stand. And so the aim of Costa Coffee was to get a top 10 of the most hated songs, and then when they got the most hated song, according to their survey, then they would stop playing that Christmas song on the playlists on all their Costa Coffee shops.

And so I wonder if you can guess what the most hated Christmas song was on Costa Coffee's survey. Well, it may be obvious to you, it may not be, but it was Sir Cliff Richards' Mistletoe and Wine.

[1 : 20] I don't know about you, but I think that is a worthy winner of the most hated Christmas song. Well, rather than waste time thinking about the most hated Christmas songs, what we're going to do today in this series of messages from the Gospel of Luke is we're going to look at the original and the best Christmas songs, because the Gospel of Luke records for us the originals, but they're also the best.

And so as we listen to Christmas songs and Christmas music this season, let's not have nonsense words running around in our minds or in our brains, but let's fill our minds with the true and best lyrics of Christmas.

And they come to us from the Gospel of Luke, because as Luke writes his account of the birth of Jesus for us, his narrative includes five songs, and we could call it his classic Christmas playlist. And so we've got Elizabeth's song. We looked at that last week. Today we're going to look at Mary's song. Then there's Zechariah's song. There is the angel's song. And there's Simeon's song. And so Mary's song today is there in Luke chapter 1, verse 46 to 55. Mary's song has come to be known as the Magnificat. You may have heard that title before. The title comes from the opening words in the Latin translation.

[2 : 39] And so it's a song that seeks to magnify God or glorify God, to give him honor and praise. And so in this song, Mary is praising God for the personal impact that Jesus has made on her own life, on her own heart, her own life.

And she's praising God for the universal impact that the coming of Jesus makes on this world. And so Mary knows God's activity in sending Jesus doesn't just affect her personally, but it affects everybody.

And so on that first Christmas, Mary is singing about the God who came to save his people. And so Mary sings about God as her savior, but she sings about God's great salvation plan that is for all people who have lived throughout the history of this world.

And so it's not just Mary's song. It's a song for everybody. A song for everyone who has experienced the coming of Jesus in their own heart and life.

And so Mary's response to the coming of Jesus shows us how we should respond to the coming of Jesus Christ. Because when Jesus impacts our lives personally, then we have got something that is worth singing about.

[4 : 01] But if we don't find ourselves singing along with Mary to her song, then perhaps it's because we haven't yet grasped the true significance or the true meaning of Christmas.

And so let's think about two things this afternoon. First of all, we'll think about the personal impact of Jesus. That's verse 46 to 49. And then we'll think about the universal impact of Jesus.

That's verse 50 to 55. So first of all, the personal impact of Jesus. So Mary praises God for the personal impact that Jesus has made on her own life.

And so what is it that prompts Mary to sing? Well, the backstory is that earlier in Luke, Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she would give birth to a son. And he was to be called Jesus, the son of God.

And so Mary was also told, along with this amazing news, that her relative Elizabeth, an old woman, was also pregnant. And so Mary went off to visit Elizabeth.

[5 : 02] And we looked at this last week, and we saw how this teenage virgin went to this old barren pensioner, and they praised God with joy for what God was doing in them.

Because they recognized that they were part of God's great plan for this world. And so we pick up the story today. Mary is still with Elizabeth, but she is bursting with joy.

And she bursts into song. Because she knows that God is about to do something in her, in her very body, that would change the world forever.

So let's look at those verses, verse 46 to 49. And Mary said, Now just remember Mary's personal circumstances at this point.

Mary was a pregnant, unmarried teenage girl. And so there is a lot that Mary could say to God about her situation. But notice that the focus isn't on herself.

[6 : 22] And the focus isn't even on her baby. Her focus is on magnifying or glorifying God. And so she sings about God. She sings about what God is doing.

And she sings about what God will do. And notice how she expresses herself. She expresses herself in the language of the scriptures. And that is one of the striking things about Mary's song. Its lyrics are drawn deep from the well of the Old Testament part of the Bible. The language and the themes of Mary's song echo the words of so much of the Old Testament.

And specifically they echo the words of a song from another woman in the Old Testament. Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 2. In Hannah's prayer she said many of the same things that Mary is saying here.

And that's why we started our service and our preparation for worship by saying together words from Hannah's prayer. And so both these women, Hannah and Mary, are expressing what God will do.

[7 : 28] They recognize the significance of God doing something quite remarkable and quite amazing. But of course Mary to a far greater extent. And so Mary's song here also echoes a number of the Psalms.

And it's thought that it quotes or it alludes to at least 11 different books from the Old Testament. And so it is completely saturated with the scriptures.

And the reason Mary sings like this is because she knew God and she knew God's word. And so as a Jewish girl, Mary would have been raised in the scriptures.

She would have been taught them from a very young age. And remember, the words that are being sung here are the words of a teenager. And so in the synagogue, Mary would have heard the Old Testament being read.

She would have sung the Psalms in worship. And at home, she would have heard and she would have memorized. She would have sung and she would have prayed the scriptures.

[8 : 31] And so her mind was informed by what God had already said in his word. And so when it came to praising God for what he was doing in her life, her lips sang the great truth about God that was embedded in her mind and had sunk deep into her heart.

And so if we are going to praise God, just as Mary did, then how do we know what to say? Well, we will say what God has already revealed to us about himself in his word.

And we will repeat that to him in praise. And that's what Mary is doing here. And so that's why we ought to be reading the Bible, memorizing it, singing it, praying it, not just when we come to church, but at home personally and with our families.

Because the best way to train children or teenagers like Mary to know and love and worship God is to saturate our lives with God's word, to let it sink into our minds and into our hearts.

And then we will properly praise God as we should. So what is Mary saying? Well, she sings, Now the soul and the spirit aren't two different things here.

[9 : 50] Mary is worshiping God from the very depths of her being. She is holy and fully caught up in seeking to give God's glory. And so she rejoices in God as her savior.

So Mary is well aware that she isn't free from sin, like some people would like to think that she was. Mary knew that she was a sinner.

And like every other human being, she knew that she needed a savior. And that's why she sings, For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

From now on, all generations will call me blessed, For the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. And so she humbles herself before God, Amazed that all of this is happening to her.

She's aware that it's only by God's grace that she has been chosen to be the mother of God's son. And so she will be blessed by all generations.

[10 : 56] Not because of anything in her, But because the mighty God has done great things for her. So God had been preparing the world for the momentous arrival of his son.

And now the time had come for this son, Jesus, to arrive. And he would arrive through Mary, a poor, unmarried teenager. And so Mary can recognize and see the great purposes of God for this world taking shape inside her own womb.

And so she's astonished that God would honor her in this way. And so full of praise for what God is like and for what God is doing.

Because she's not just singing here about the personal impact that Jesus is making on her life.

She's singing about the universal impact that Jesus is making on the world.

And so she grasps a far bigger picture than the story of her own pregnancy. And so before we see this universal impact of Jesus and Mary's wonder and amazement of what God was doing, we need to just think for ourselves.

[12 : 08] Do we have the same kind of wonder and amazement at what God is doing or what God has done for us? Because I guess many of us here, in person or tuning in online, many of us can truly echo Mary's words, that the mighty one has done great things for me.

Now, of course, God was doing something unique for Mary. But in her humility, Mary knows that she is no more deserving of this than anyone else.

And yet, God chose her to be the mother of Jesus. And so she's astonished that God would do this amazing thing for someone like her.

And so if we're here today and we would call ourselves a Christian, then we should never cease to be amazed by the fact that we are. We should wonder, why me?

Why has the grace of God reached down to me and taken hold of me? I don't deserve to be blessed with God's salvation.

[13 : 17] I've done nothing to deserve it. Because if we don't realize that we are actually an undeserving nobody, we have grasped little of this unmerited favor that Mary's singing about.

Because Christianity should humble us to the very core of our being. Because it is the fantastic news of God reaching out to us to do something for us that we could never do for ourselves.

And I guess that's the test, isn't it, of whether we have really understood the message of Christianity. Well, no, we are not a Christian because of anything we have done ourselves, but because of what God has done for us.

And we'll have no sense that it's our right or due to be a Christian. Which really is the opposite to the rights-based culture that characterizes our society today.

Because everybody today is encouraged to demand their rights. And so society breeds this sense of entitlement in all of us that we should get what we want or at least are due.

[14 : 27] And so we expect it. And yet we've got to be careful that we don't harbor this attitude when it comes to God. Because we see none of this in Mary's approach to God.

Mary recognized the privileged position that she was in. And so should everyone who professes to be a Christian. We're not a Christian because of anything in us.

It is God who does this thing in bringing us to himself. He does it in us and through us and for us and to us.

And so that's why Mary gives this personal praise and gratitude to God. It's because of the personal impact of Jesus on her own life. And so the question is, how has the coming of Jesus Christ on that first Christmas and all that it means, his birth, life, death, resurrection, how has the coming of Jesus Christ impacted your life?

Does it cause your heart to well up with gratitude and your lips to burst with joy and praise to God? That's the first thing, the personal impact of Jesus.

[15 : 41] And the second point, the second thing we see is the universal impact of Jesus, verse 50 to 55. So Mary's song began by her focusing on the personal impact of Jesus on her own life.

And now the focus widens out because the coming of Jesus impacts everybody. It's as if the camera lens changes the focus from just being on Mary and widens out to encompass the whole world.

And that's why Mary says in verse 50, his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation. And so Christmas is only ever going to impact us when we realize our place before God.

Because God will never show mercy to people who are too proud to think that they need it. Mary says God's mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.

And that's why the coming of Jesus has a universal impact. Because it's not just significant for a few people in a small place a long, long time ago.

[16 : 49] It is significant for all people in all places and at all times. And so Mary doesn't just praise God for what he is doing inside her. She praises God for what he's doing outside of her.

For his people Israel, of course, but also for the whole wide world. Because the coming of Jesus Christ changes everything for everyone who has ever lived.

And that's why Mary sings about God bringing some down and raising others up. Look at verse 51 to 53. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm.

He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.

Now do you notice that Mary seems to be singing in past tense? So he has performed mighty deeds. He has scattered. He has brought down rulers.

[17 : 52] He has filled the hungry. So she's singing about what God has done. And yet she's also singing about what God will do in the future.

And it's like she's prophesying about what God will accomplish, but she's singing as if it's already been done. And this is quite common of prophecy in the Bible.

Because the prophets often speak about future events with such certainty that they describe these events as though they've already happened and they've already taken place.

And so the future, as it's meant to be, that Mary's singing about, she's singing about the future, actually, that we all want. And she's saying it is guaranteed to happen and it is coming in Jesus.

That's what she's saying in these verses. But what does this all mean? Well, when we read Mary's lyrics, she's indicating that Christmas is good news for some people.

[18 : 56] We get that. Christmas is good news. But from what she says, she's also saying that Christmas is bad news for some people. Well, why? Well, because God exalts the humble and he brings down the proud.

So God casts down the arrogant and the self-reliant and those who have no fear of him and are full of themselves. But God lifts up the humble.

Those who fear God, Mary is saying, will be exalted. And so Christmas is a message of bad news. Bad news for those who are too proud to think that they need to bother with God.

Who have no fear of God and who think Jesus has absolutely no relevance for them. Mary's words are actually brutal. Because if we really hear what Mary is saying, we'll see that this isn't some nice, sweet, sentimental, soppy Christmas song.

Because she is saying that God will smash all of those who will stand up against him. God will put down the proud and the arrogant and people who think they don't need him.

[20 : 12] He'll bring them down and he'll scatter them and he'll send them away empty. So let's not miss the fact that Christmas is bad news for some people.

And so this year, another Christmas will come and it will go and there will be plenty of people who are so full of themselves that they will not give a second thought to the God, the mighty one who sent his son for them.

There will be people who may acknowledge that Jesus was born, but continue to reject God's loving gift to them. And so Mary's song actually is a warning.

It warns us that this kind of resistance towards God won't go on forever. God won't allow it. He won't accept it. And that's why the message of Christmas is bad news for all who won't accept Jesus Christ.

But of course, Christmas is good news. We know it's good news. It's good news for people like Mary. Because we're told, remember Mary was saying that she was God's humble servant, we're told that God will extend his mercy to those who fear him like Mary did, to those who are humble like Mary was, to those who seek forgiveness for their sins, to those who recognize their need of him like Mary did.

[21 : 42] And God will satisfy those who are hungry for him. And that is good news, isn't it, for all of us. It's good news for those of us who may have messed up big time and we need forgiveness for what we've done.

It's good news for those of us who are desperate in life and who know we need help. And it's good news for all who feel empty and dissatisfied with this life.

The message of the coming of Jesus, the message of Christmas, is such good news for us. Because Christmas is telling us that God, the Mighty One, our Creator, cares enough to step into this world and get involved with our lives.

Who comes to meet us in Jesus and in doing so meets our greatest needs and our deepest longings. And so if we can't see how the message of Jesus has a universal impact on everyone who's ever lived, then we fail to grasp the real and true message of Christmas.

because Jesus has stepped into our history to change our eternity. And that's where Mary's song concludes because her song goes way back in history and yet it looks forward to eternity.

[23 : 05] Look at the last couple of verses, 54 and 55. He has helped his servant Israel remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever just as he promised our ancestors.

Mary's saying here that God is keeping the covenant with his people Israel. In other words, God will fulfill all that he has promised that he will do. And so she's saying that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that God has promised.

God's plan for the universe is centered on Jesus Christ. And so Mary mentions Abraham there in verse 55 because of what God had said to Abraham a long time ago.

So way back in Genesis chapter 12 at the start of the Bible, this is what God said to Abraham. He said, I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So what's God promising?

[24 : 10] He's promising that one day Jesus would come and he would bless all the peoples of the earth. And now Mary recognizes that after all these long years of patient waiting Jesus is on his way.

And that's why the coming of Jesus is really the key that unlocks the whole of history to us. If we want to understand what the world is about and what life is about and our meaning and significance in this world then Jesus is the key that unlocks meaning for us.

For humanity and for history. For our lives and for our world. They make best sense when we see them in relation to Jesus Christ.

Jesus explains everything for us. and this makes sense when we stop for long enough to think about it because what better way for God to reveal himself to us than by coming into the world himself.

And that's why Mary sings because she sees how God's plans and God's purposes are being fulfilled through the child in her womb. It was all happening just as God promised that it would change the world forever.

[25 : 33] And so Mary captures this beautifully in her song that spans the past the present and the future. She's proclaiming what God has done what God is doing and what God will do.

And that's why the message of Jesus the message of Christmas the message of Christianity is relevant for all people at all times and in all places because if what Mary sings is true then we can't go through life too proud or too arrogant to acknowledge our need of Jesus.

Because Mary's song tells us that this is going to backfire badly on us. If we try to do life without Jesus it won't end well.

Because it's easy to take Christ out of Christmas these days. Jesus is basically a victim of cancel culture when it comes to Christmas. And yet Mary's song tells us that Christmas is not about what we think about Jesus.

It's not about what we think about God. As if we can somehow just take him or leave him whatever suits us. No Christmas Mary's song tells us is actually about what God thinks about you and what God thinks about me.

[26 : 54] Christmas life itself isn't about my verdict on God it's about his verdict on me. So Mary's song puts us in the dock as it were.

It puts us under the spotlight and it smashes any illusions that we might have that we can sit in judgment of the mighty God. Because it's blatantly clear that God is the one according to Mary's song who sits in judgment of us.

And so Christmas or Christianity will never make sense if we think it is about the mighty God fitting into our small lives. We are the ones who need to fit into God's plan with what he is doing with the world.

And it's a plan that God has revealed to us and he has spoken loudly and clearly to us in his son Jesus Christ. And that's why Mary sings because she's singing that God our saviour has come to get us.

We deserve to be scattered in our pride and yet in Jesus we're humbled in order that we might be lifted up. Why?

[28 : 14] Because Jesus himself did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Jesus made himself nothing and he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross.

Why did Jesus die? He died for our pride and our arrogance our sin against the God who made us and then God raised Jesus from the dead and has exalted him and so one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And so as we close today can you sing along with Mary these words the mighty one has done great things for me because we will only sing this when we know that God has reached down to us in our helpless state and by his grace towards us in Jesus he has raised us up he has forgiven our sins and he has filled us with good things both now and forever and when this is our experience we will sing to magnify God and to give glory to him.

Johann Sebastian Bach claimed that the aim and final reason of all music should be none else but the glory of God and recreation of the mind.

So can you sing Mary's song and it doesn't really matter if you're like me and you can't carry a tune in a bucket because what matters is not how great your singing is what matters is how great your God is because if you can't sing about what Jesus has done for you then you've got nothing in life worth singing about at all.

[30 : 02] Mary you see looked beyond herself she looked beyond her circumstances to the mighty work of God for her and for this world and God's people always do.

We see beyond ourselves to the God who made us and who loves us and who came to get us in the person of Jesus Christ. Let's pray together.

Mighty God we humble ourselves before you today and we're grateful for your grace towards us in Jesus Christ. We acknowledge our need of forgiveness for our pride and arrogance and so we pray that you would work in our hearts and continue to humble us as we better understand how the Lord Jesus humbled himself and was prepared to give up his life by dying on a cross.

And we pray that you would open our mouths so that we would sing of all the great things that you have done for us. We pray in Jesus name Amen.