

# The Magnificat

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] In the sixth month, the angel of Israel said, O God, to a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at this sight, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you should call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. 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. And Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin?

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.

[ 1 : 0 6 ] And behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month with her who is called Baron, for nothing is impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah.

And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

[ 2 : 1 4 ] And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the pride in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever. And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

[ 3 : 18 ] Well, good morning. You might well want to have a Bible open at Luke chapter 1, which we read earlier. As we think together about Mary's song, Charles spoke rather glibly about some of the things which we enjoy together at Christmas.

Which we enjoy together at Christmas. Mince pies, presents, time with family and friends. Well, I wonder if you also enjoy a good Christmas film.

Because in what I consider to be the greatest Christmas film, Elf, Will Ferrell, the six foot two actor, tells us while dressed in full elf costume, that the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.

Well, he might not have got much else right about Christmas, but he was onto something when it comes to singing. Because in Luke's gospel, which we've heard read, as we approach the first Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ, we find lots of singing.

But what is it that led to all these new songs, to all this singing? Well, we're going to see together why Christmas always comes with singing. It is because Christmas really is a message of joy to the world.

[ 4 : 37 ] It is a message that God has come to save his people, to raise the humble into life forever. The song which we have in our passage is the song sung by Mary.

Mary, while she is pregnant with Jesus. And much to our surprise, this song isn't actually about the fact Mary is having a baby. But it's all about what God will do through this baby, through the child to be born.

It's a song all about what this birth will mean, what it will achieve. So far in Luke's gospel, in some of what we heard read, we've seen God's angel come and announce to Mary that she is to conceive and bear a son.

The angel came to Mary, who was a virgin. It was an impossible pregnancy. But the angel from God came and told Mary that nothing will be impossible with God.

It's the impossibility of the situation which causes Mary to sing as she does here. It's a song which we'll take in three parts as we consider together the meaning and the message of Christmas.

[ 5 : 51 ] Because in the birth of Jesus Christ, God was doing a new thing. Through the whole Bible, God had very occasionally given children to barren women.

And that was a mark of a new work of God in the world. And those children, they spoke of a new life, a future for God's people. And what the whole Bible tells us in part, we can now see in full glorious technicolor with the birth of Jesus Christ.

That's why the event comes with its own soundtrack. Sung while Jesus was in his mother's womb. Mary sings a song of personal praise, a song of cosmic transformation, and a song of eternal salvation.

So first, let's consider verses 46 to 50, the start of the song, where we see that this is a song of personal praise. Personal not just for Mary, because the salvation which Jesus was to bring was for me and is for you.

Mary begins with singing of her own soul, her inmost being. The message of Christmas brings real rejoicing to Mary. I don't know what your impression of Mary is.

[ 7 : 16 ] I think we often think of her as an unknowing, perhaps even naive young woman. But as we consider the words of her song, we can see that she knows much more, much, much more of what is going on than we often give credit for.

Because in response to the news of the baby to be born, verse 46, her soul magnifies the Lord. Now we've had very helpful vigils already, and I'm very sorry, I don't have one for everyone.

But imagine those magnifying glasses. Because that is exactly what Mary is doing here. She takes a magnifying glass, as it were, and points it to God. She makes God big through this song.

She makes what God is doing big. Her spirit, her inmost being, rejoices in God. Notice what she calls God.

God, my Savior. God, who is doing this work, is Mary's Savior. Her spirit rejoices.

[ 8 : 23 ] But why? Why is Mary so magnifying and rejoicing? Well, the very fact that she calls God her Savior shows that she believes that she needs saving.

Imagine Mary's position. She was a pregnant virgin in a culture which would have found this whole scenario scandalous. Was it that situation that she needed saving from?

Did she think that perhaps if the baby to be born did some good, then she would be saved from the shame and the scandal of the situation? No, Mary is not thinking that at all.

No, Mary knows that the world is not right. Indeed, she knows that even her own heart is not right. She knows that she needs saving from something far bigger.

She knows that it's not just her, but that it's something for the whole world. Something from which every human being, you and me, needs saving too. You might be here this morning and think, why on earth would you need saving?

[ 9 : 34 ] Well, the world in which Mary lived faced the same big problem that we do today. You see, all through the Bible, God had spoken to his people, telling them that a Savior was to come.

A Savior who would ultimately deliver them from the greatest enemy in the world, from death itself. A Savior to come, God himself, who would lead his people, who would make a way for those who trust in him to live forever.

And that might seem just fanciful, beyond belief to you. Well, if that's you, can I urge you to consider the world in which we live? suffering, pain, loss, on a macro scale and on a micro scale in our own lives.

And at Christmas, we can try and just hide that all away. We can put it behind the tree, put it behind the lights. But the message of Christmas is that we don't need to do that.

We don't need to try and hide it or forget about it. because the Savior, which Mary sings of here, really can save from death. The Savior, which Mary sings of here, saves into resurrection life.

[ 10 : 57 ] That's life forever with God. And he really can be your Savior too. You can join in Mary's song. And the cause for Mary's rejoicing is seen in the next line of the song because it's all about what God has done.

He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. Mary sings of how God, the Lord, who is mighty and powerful and in control of all creation, has looked down on her in her lowly position.

And he has done something which, verse 48, will cause all generations to come to call her blessed. He has done great things for Mary.

And Mary knows from the angel's words what this baby, what Jesus is going to do because the words which Mary sings here, well, they're not all her own. There's something of a remix of another mother's song in the Bible.

Hannah, in the Old Testament, was a barren woman and the Lord came and spoke to her. And God told her that she was to give birth to a son.

[ 12 : 15 ] A son who would go on to bring about a new era for God's people. Making a way for kings to come and to rule God's people. Here's a question to consider.

Does it look like God is saving today? Because I think God's salvation looks as unexpected today as it did for Hannah in 1100 BC and for Mary 2000 years ago.

A barren woman and a virgin woman. A future from that just looks impossible. Yet when we magnify the Lord, when we make him big, we see the salvation that he is working for those who trust him.

A salvation from death itself and from all that is wrong in the world and wrong in our own hearts. That, that is why Mary sings here because the message of Christmas is that God is doing a new thing.

God is doing what he promised he would always do. Sending a saviour to his people. The song moves from a song of personal praise to a song of cosmic transformation because this baby will, this birth, will turn everything upside down.

[ 13 : 37 ] all of creation and each and every human life will be turned upside down by this birth. Because just as the birth of Jesus brings salvation for individuals, it also transforms the whole of creation.

This is not a song about a baby. But it's also not a song about Mary. It's a song that tells of how salvation has come not for one woman and her family, but for all of creation.

It's a message of the whole created order being turned upside down. Those who sit on thrones being brought down whilst the humble are exalted, lifted up.

The hungry are filled, the rich go away empty. Just like today, first century Israel when Mary sang these words was a time when the world was filled with tyrants, powerful, political and military leaders flaunting themselves on the world stage.

While Mary says that through the saviour to be born, God will break into all of this. The reign of kings he will interrupt, the proud he will bring to shame.

[ 14 : 54 ] I think we know something of the scene of Jesus' birth, which is to follow this song, the nativity scene. We'll sing later because it was from the squalor of a borrowed stable to the anguish and the shame of scandal that the saviour of the human race came.

It was not the way power is normally shown on this earth. Yet that is what God chose. Not a palace, not a political rally, not a protest, not a conquering army.

No, God chose to bring his saviour in the humblest way. And in doing so, he shows us the way of his saviour because he is a saviour who is going to raise the humble into life forever.

The proud will be scattered, the mighty will be brought down, but for the humble, verse 52, they will be exalted, lifted up.

Because the proud, those who already have their fill and are confident in their own life, well, they think they just have no need for a saviour, no need for God to come and rescue them.

[ 16 : 10 ] But the humble, those who know and recognize their need, well, they are able to come to God, their saviour. Friends, none of us can see into each other's hearts this morning, but as we approach Christmas, just days away, are you feeling mighty and proud?

Because God says that the saviour, the baby to be born in the manger, has come to turn all of that upside down. He has come to bring down the mighty.

Or, are you feeling your need? how often we can find ourselves looking at the news, seeing worldwide tragedy, or just looking at our own homes and our own lives and seeing suffering and loss, and we can find ourselves despairing.

well, if that's you, then the message of Christmas is that transformation has come. It might not look like it.

A baby in a stable in the back end of nowhere did not look like transformation had come. It might not look like transformation has come in your own life, but for those who know and who trust the Lord, it really has.

- [ 17 : 34 ] see, in the birth of Jesus Christ, God has blessed the world in an upside-down way. The hungry have been filled with good things. The message for the humble, for those who know their need, is rejoice, even though it might not look like it now.

The message of Christmas is a message of cosmic transformation. That's why Mary sings as she does here. And these transformations are summed up in the words of verse 50.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. God's mercy is for those who fear him.

That means to treat him rightly, to recognize who he is, because he is the one who brings eternal salvation. We see in the final couple of verses of the song that this is a song of eternal salvation.

God's mercy is saving. The saving which God is doing through this baby is not a small thing. No, it has been promised and planned from before the creation of the world.

- [ 18 : 46 ] And it's not just for this life. No, it is for life forever, life beyond death. In verse 50, God says that Mary sings that God has helped his servant Israel.

Israel is the name that God gave to his people all through the Bible, the people who God had chosen to be his own. And just think of those words, God has helped his servant.

If you think about our master-servant relationship, we know how they work. The servant serves the master. Yet here, the creator and master of the whole universe, God himself is serving the servants, the humble.

And Mary sings of how God has remembered his mercy towards his people. The baby to be born, Jesus, was God's way of saving his people. In sending this baby to be born, Mary sings that God was remembering his mercy, his promise to his people.

And his promise to them was that he would make a way for them to be with him, to live with him forever. The message of Christmas is a message that God has remembered the plight of his people and has come to claim them as his own.

- [ 20 : 14 ] It's the promise which he spoke all through the Bible to his people, a promise to bring his people into rest forever. True peace, true rest. And we can hardly imagine that, can we really?

I hope and pray that this Christmas time is for you a time of real joy. But true, deep and lasting joy can only ever be found in the sure and certain knowledge that in the person of Jesus Christ, God has saved us from death and brought us into life forever with him.

See, Jesus came into the world to put an end forever to suffering and pain. And it did not look like it then, as this teenage mom sang her song, and it doesn't look like it now, as we continue to feel the weight of pain and loss.

But God has come to save his people, to turn the whole created order upside down, to bring eternal salvation for the humble, for those who come to him and know and recognize their need.

God's promise to Abraham right at the start of the Bible has been fulfilled. See, God had promised for thousands of years that everything wrong in the world would be made right.

- [ 21 : 45 ] That broken relationships, broken hearts, broken lives, and a broken world would be made right. And in the birth of Jesus at Christmas, all these promises find their fulfillment.

The baby to be born would be the one through whom God would save his people. The Lord has come to save his people, to raise the humble into life forever.

forever. And so it's little wonder that Mary sings. It's little wonder that Christmas comes with its own soundtrack, a soundtrack not about a baby, but about all that God through this baby is doing.

How God will use this baby to save his people. And that is what the rest of Luke's gospel goes on to show us of how, as we all sing, death is defeated by Emmanuel.

Luke writes to give us certainty about the things we've been told about Jesus. The right response to the birth of Jesus at Christmas is to do exactly what Mary does in this song, to magnify, to make big, and to rejoice in God the Savior.

[ 23 : 10 ] Friends, without the birth of this baby, without God coming to earth as Savior, Christmas just rings a bit hollow. Because in a few days' time, as the music and the lights all around us begin to fade, what will it all have been about?

Why do we sing? Why do we feast? Why do we gather with those that we love? Well, because we know, and because we can know, that in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Lord has come to save his people, to raise the humble into life forever.

The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear. And Mary, Mary sings the most cheerful song, a song of personal praise, a song of cosmic transformation, salvation, and a song of eternal salvation.

The message is magnify and rejoice in God the Savior. And you can do that this Christmas. You can rejoice that in the birth of Jesus Christ, God has come to save his people, to raise the humble, those who know their need, into life forever.

So will you? Will you join your voice to Mary's and the many millions across the globe and rejoice in God our Savior this Christmas?

[ 24 : 44 ] Let me pray. It will be said on that day, this is the Lord. We have waited for him.

Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. Almighty God, cause us to magnify and rejoice in the birth of the Lord Jesus this Christmas.

May the joy which Mary sung off be ours. May her words proclaiming you to be God my Savior be echoed in our hearts and on our lips.

For we ask it in his precious name. Amen.