

Joy for the Humble: Mary's Song

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- [0 : 0 0] In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from 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 the saying 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 shall 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.
- [1 : 3 2] 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 Baden. 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. And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.
- And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.
- [3 : 2 0] And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them.
- And the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people.
- For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you.
- You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, Good will toward men.

And it came to pass, As the angels were gone away from them into heaven, The shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, And see this thing which has come to pass, Which the Lord has made known unto us.

[5 : 10] And they came with haste, And found Mary and Joseph, And the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, They made known abroad, The saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it, Wondered at those things, Which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, And pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, Glorifying and praising God, For all the things that they had heard and seen, Just as it was told unto them.

It's never been the story of Christmas alone, Enchanting as it is, That makes people want to sing. The multitude of these lovely carols, They were written by people who understood, What the story means.

In our last reading now, We're going to listen to Mary, Just a humble peasant girl from Galilee, But singing her song of joy, About what Christmas is really all about.

[6 : 33] And she of all people, Ought to have a good grasp of it. Listen to the words of her song, Which has come to be known as the Magnificat, From the first words, Magnify, In Latin.

Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 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, For he who is mighty, For he who is mighty, For he who is mighty, For he who is mighty, 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 proud, 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. Well Luke's gospel, That we've heard several readings from, This evening, Was written by a first century physician, It's a carefully ordered, Well researched work, It's one of the best attested pieces of writing, Actually in history, And in fact we've got copies available, At the back in our bookstall, If you've never read through it, Let me encourage you to take one, We'd be delighted to give you one, If you promise to read it, One of the features of Luke, Is the songs that he records, In his first couple of chapters, Which are really the very first songs, Of Christmas at all, Christmas songs abound now of course, When I was young, The great excitement about Christmas, Was which was going to be, The Christmas number one, Those days long ago, You still bought singles,

Little black things called 45, Some of you will remember, But most of you won't, My first single actually, Was the Christmas number one of 1977, Anyone remember? Mull of Kintyre, Didn't have much to do with Christmas, But it was a classic nonetheless, The next year actually, 1978 was more about Christmas, Mary's Boy Child by Booney M, I could still sing it to you, But I'll spare you, We all love music at Christmas, Don't we?

That's why we're here I'm sure tonight, One of the reasons anyway, Singing, But I wonder if we reason why, I wonder if we wonder, Why the reason is, That we love Christmas, And the reason really is, Because in the story, Of the birth of Jesus Christ, Coming into our world, That is rightly the focus, Of all the joy of history, All the joy of eternity, In both earth, And in heaven, And that's what Mary's song, Magnificat, Expresses, Her whole soul, She says, Magnifies, The Lord, Because, She understands, The massive significance, Of what the angel had told her, About the miraculous birth, That was to come, Of her son, Who would be called, God, The savior, That he had come, At last, As promised, In human flesh, And he would be the son of God, Come to reign with a kingdom, Without end, Forever and ever,

[10 : 21] And the angel, Remember, Had also told her, About another extraordinary birth, That was about to happen, Of John the Baptist, To her elderly aunt, Called Elizabeth, And he was going to be, The prophet, Who would go, Before the Messiah, And proclaim his coming, To the people, So when Mary, Goes off, To visit Elizabeth, Both of these women, End up singing, Songs of praise, To God, They're full of joy, In this, Shared experience, That they're going to have, Of coming motherhood, In such an extraordinary way, And yet, I wonder if you noticed, When I read the words, Of Mary's song, It's not actually, Much about her motherhood, Of course she, Does speak about her part, In what's going to happen, But the main focus, Of her song, Is actually on a much, Much bigger story, It's not just, A story for her, But it's for the whole, Wide world, And it's a song, All about what God, Is doing, For the whole world, Through this birth,

Of the one, Who will be called, The son of God, Mary's song, Actually echoes, Another song, An older song, From the Bible, From the Old Testament, The song of Hannah, The mother of, The prophet Samuel, That was hundreds, Of years before, And she also sang, A song about a coming child, That God had granted her, And it was, Very very precious to her, Because she'd long, Been barren, Very painfully, But also, In her song, She too was singing, Not just about the son, That God had given her, But about someone, Far greater, Because her son, Samuel, Was going to be the prophet, Who ushered in the whole era, Of David, The great king of Israel, And Mary's song, Actually echoes Hannah's, In many ways, But, In a far greater way, And with a far greater significance, For the whole world, And that's why Mary, Isn't really singing, About her pregnancy, And coming parenthood, Wonderful as that is, And these things, Of course, Should be celebrated, But no,

Instead, She sings, About the vast, Significance, Of a birth, That will be unlike, Any other in history, And she understood, That this birth, Brings an extraordinary message, To the whole world, For all time, That God, Is a God, Who saves, His people, And that Jesus, Now proclaims, That salvation, To the whole wide world, And Mary, Mary's song explains, How it is, That Jesus, Is God's, Ultimate message, Of salvation, To the world, And how it's going to be, Made known, Let me try and make, Make clear for you, What Mary's message is, We'll start at the end, Of her song, And work backwards, Because the first thing, That we need to grasp, Really, Is that in, Jesus Christ, Coming into the world, All history, Is being explained, By God himself, History being explained, By God,

Mary is saying, That in Jesus, There is meaning, That banishes, All the mystery, About the world, As we know it, And all the history, Of the world, Very end of her song, Mary looks back, Over the whole, Of past history, And she sees, That in the coming of Jesus, God has kept, All of his promises, To human beings, Right from the very, Beginning of time, He's remembered, His promises of mercy, They go right the way back, To Abraham, The very, Very start, Of Israel's history, As God's people, Jesus Christ, Is at last, The explanation, That history, That history, Has waited for, For, Our world, Our world's history, It's hard to fathom, Isn't it?

Even today, With its shifts, In geopolitics, Changing powers, All that we've witnessed, Of progress, Throughout history, And so on, And yet in some ways, The world changes, Very, Very little, The Middle East, Is just as troubled, A place today, As in the early years, Of the first century, And for a peasant girl, Living in Nazareth, As Mary did, On the west bank, Of the river Jordan, Well it was then, Occupied territory as well, Although, Back then it was Israel, That was occupied, By the hated Romans, And the Israelite people then, Were very oppressed, And moreover, They lived with, With a terrible mystery, Because God seemed so absent from them, Or at best, He was very distant from them, And Israelites then, Also had many enemies, That is not a new thing either, And our history in many ways,

[15 : 17] Was agonizing, Involving subjugation, Involving, Exile outside, Far away from the land of promise, Which was a terrible curse, For those who were called, To be a people, In that land of promise, Then they later on, Returned to the land, With great expectations, From the prophets, Of a wonderful bright future, And yet, Centuries and centuries, Had passed, And still nothing seemed, To materialize, It was just another year, After year, After year, Of more of the same, And I guess that's, In lots of ways, A very familiar thing, To people today, Isn't it?

People live, And die, And at best, Life's full of mystery, Often, Often apparent, Meaninglessness, Just a treadmill, That we're stuck on, All the way, To dusty death, Tomorrow, And tomorrow, And tomorrow, Creeps on, This petty pace, From day to day, As Macbeth, Famously vocalized it, But, Suddenly, Into that world, Everything changed, For Mary, And she grasped, That in this birth to come, Somehow, All history was, Was being explained, By God, All the, The heartfelt longing, Of the past, All the yearning, Because now, At last, In Jesus, God, Was fulfilling his promise, His promise to Abraham, That, That through him, And through his seed, All the nations, Of the world, Would at last, Know ultimate blessing, That is an extraordinary claim,

Maybe even it's a shocking claim, To some of you, In our world today, In our multicultural, Pluralist world, Perhaps even it's an offensive claim, To some, That in Jesus Christ, Of Nazareth, Alone, All history, Is explained, And finds its ultimate meaning, And its ultimate purpose, Sounds like, The height of arrogance, But that's Mary's claim, That's what she's saying, In her song, That's what's causing, Her great rejoicing, All the prophecies, That we've heard read, This evening, Spanning centuries, They're coming to be, In this birth, The hopes and fears, Of all the years, Really are being met, In that birth, To come in Bethlehem, This is what all history, Has always been about, Explains the past history, Of Mary's people, The Jews, And it explains, The whole of human history,

For all the rest of us, That's the claim, Of the Christian message, Nothing less than that, Does that sound unbelievable to you? Well maybe it does, But let me ask you this, Isn't it true, Isn't it true, That deep in our hearts, Whatever we, Whatever we think, Our beliefs may be, Deep in our hearts, We know, That there must be more, To this world, There must be more, To our lives, There must be more, To our loves, Than just, What seems to be seen, On the surface of history, And what we experience, Of the relentless cycle, Of ashes to ashes, And dust to dust, There must be, More to that, Than that, Of course we don't allow ourselves, To stray into thinking, About these things, Too often, We don't think much, Beyond the immediate, At all really, But, It's unnerving, When we do, So we, Let the noise, Of activity, Of entertainment, And of other things, Fill our minds,

Most of the time, But when we're, Honest, When we allow ourselves, To ponder more deeply, The real nature of life, We know, That there is, Something within us, C.S. Lewis, The writer called it, An inconsolable longing, An unappeasable want, Deep in our spirits, For something more, For something better, For something, Greater than just, The life that we see, On the surface, We hanker for something, That we feel, Must be possible, Somewhere, Somehow, Because we can imagine it, Can't we, In our minds, And yet it's something, We don't see, At least not yet, Isn't that right?

[19 : 53] Well that brings us, To the second thing, In Mary's song, Because she tells us, Not only, Is all history, Explained, By that birth, But she says, In Jesus, Eternity, Is being proclaimed, By God, To the world, Proclaiming it, As a message of hope, That banishes despair, That there is a future, That there is, That future, That we all long for, We do instinctively, Long for a better world, Don't we?

We long for a world, That's, That's different, To the world, As we know it, Not, Not losing everything, That's beautiful, And lovely, And wonderful, In the world, We want a world, With that, But, Without, The injustice, Without the horrors, Without the, The miseries, The perplexities, That so shred our world, Why do we long like that?

If everything's, Just explained by chance, By meaningless, Banging together of atoms, By our selfish DNA, Just doing its thing, Why do we long for that?

Why do we even ask the question, Why? About things that happen? Well again, I think C.S. Lewis, Gives us the real answer, He says, If I find in myself, A desire, Which no experience, In this world, Can satisfy, The most probable explanation, Is that I was made, For another world, And that's true, According to the Bible, We were made, For a different world, For an eternal world, And that world, Did exist, Once, In this world, For a very brief moment, A bit like when you, When you switch on a light bulb, And immediately the bulb blows, And suddenly you plunge back, Into darkness again, That actually is the story, Of our human world, Human rebellion against God, Plunged us very quickly, Back into darkness, And now this is, And now this is, The only world, That we know, And experience,

But you see, Hints, Memories, Of a world, That once was, They remain, Deep within us, In our hearts, Because, That is the world, That we were made for, And in Jesus Christ, You see, God, Proclaims, The certainty, That that world, Shall exist again, Forever and ever, And in his very coming, To this world, It's begun, It's assured, A world of total transformation, Look at verses 51 to 53, On the screens there, They speak, Don't they, Of a transformed world, A world, That's turned upside down, Where might and power, Is brought down, When the hungry, And the humble, Are lifted up, And exalted, And do you notice, In those words, The tense, It's past tense, Isn't it?

[23 : 00] Because, It is so certain, That God is proclaiming it, As though, It had been already accomplished, And it has been accomplished, In the coming of Jesus Christ, In Jesus, Eternity, Is proclaimed, To the world, By God, A certain future, As it ought to be, As we long for it to be, Filled with true justice, It's justice, Justice for the arrogant, And for the proud, And for the powerful exploiter, And justice, For the humble, And for the hungry, And for the lowly, And that is not, Just some naive, Utopian hope, That is not, A fantasy world, Of the kind of idea, That oh, If only we can change, Our politicians, The world will be, A better place, Do you have any hope for that?

It's not, It's not a fantasy, Of economic theories, That will suddenly, Change everything, By having magic money trees, And things like that, It's not, A faint hope, Of changing the world, Through wars, Through military alliances, Or through new treaties, On climate change, Or pandemics, Or anything else, Like that at all, There's no treaty, There is no government, There is no pharmaceutical, That can tame, The human heart, Isn't that so?

But out of the human heart, Said Jesus, Comes all manner of evil, And that is what really, Spoils our world, That's what makes, The problems of our world, Intractable, Unsolvable, By mankind, Or indeed, By artificial intelligence, Which will simply, Make quicker, And more efficient, All these things, That emanate out of the heart, Of man, Now what Mary, Gives voice to, Is something totally different, It is a transformation, On an absolutely, Cosmic scale, That last word, In her song, Forever, Forever, Because you see, In the coming of Jesus Christ, The son of God, Eternity, Is invading, Time, And history, It's taking it over, Forever, Forever, And that is the real, Christmas message, Nothing less than that, The birth of Jesus Christ, Is the beginning,

Of a new world, Of that new world, And that's why, When you read through, The life of Jesus Christ, In the gospels, Like Luke, Or any of the other ones, You see, Glimpses, Of that new world, In his presence, The power of the world to come, You see, Could not be hidden, It kept breaking into this world, And so you see, Water, Turned into wine, You see, Lame men, Leaping about with joy, You see, Deaf people, Suddenly hearing, You see the blind, Seeing, Even the dead, Raised to life, And Luke's gospel, You see, In showing us these things, It's like a, It's like a film trailer, Just gives a taster, Of that whole main story, That's still to come, But it gives us enough to know, I need to see that story, I need to see it, See friends, The Christmas message, Is not about, Human goodwill, Being somehow, Harnessed to make this world,

A better place, A little more loving, A little more peaceful, A little more hopeful, No, No, No, The Christmas message, Proclaims the birth, Of a whole new world, A new universe, Altogether, The eternal world, Is proclaimed as real, And as certain, And as beyond all doubt, The world where, Everything, Everything, Is transformed, Into that world, Of our inconsolable longing, It's no accident, I think, Is it that, That kind of longing, That ache in our hearts, So often, Is something that wells up, Within us at Christmas time, Because we know, Don't we, That the great, Sorrow, For many, At Christmas time, Will be the empty place, At the table, Won't it?

[27 : 27] It'll be the painful memories, Lovely memories, Of Christmas past, That tinge with that pain, Of a dear loved one, Who will no longer, Be celebrating with us, On this earth, Beautiful memories, Things to, Things to treasure, Things to bring joy, But there will be, An inescapable sorrow to it, Won't there?

For some of us, Because death, Defeats us, Always, Always, In this world, But Christmas, Proclaims you see, A future, Eternity, Of a world without, Injustice, And sorrow, And pain anymore, And above all, A world without death, Christmas, Proclaims, The beginning, Of what, In C.S. Lewis's novels, About Narnia, Aslan declares, To be, Death, Working backwards, In Jesus Christ, God proclaims to our world, Eternity is real, It's coming, Death is working backwards, And he does so, With a shout of great joy, In Jesus, There's meaning, For all history, History is explained, And in Jesus, There's hope for the future, Eternity, Is proclaimed to us, But finally, And just as importantly, Mary also tells us, That in Jesus, Humanity is reclaimed, By God,

The message for Jesus, Isn't just about the past, It isn't just about the future, It's about the present, And it's not just about the world, And about history, And about the cosmos, It's a message, That's deeply personal, For human beings, Each one of us, Right at the very start, Of her song, Mary is absolutely clear, That there's joy, There's real joy, Right now for her, Joy that banishes fear, Forever and ever, Because our personal world, Is transformed, By the coming of Jesus Christ, He who is mighty, Has done great things for me, She says, For me, You see, When like Mary, You see in Jesus, The Savior, Who can forgive sin, Who can reverse, The tragedy of the human heart, Reverse, The frailty of the human body, One day, That is to find joy, That's to find joy, Unspeakable, Right now, And it's to know peace,

That is indescribable, Even now, In this dark world, That's why the Christmas songs, Are so full of rejoicing, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, From depths of hell, Thy people save, And give them victory, Or the grave, Disperse the gloomy clouds, Of night, And death's dark shadows, Put to flight, Forever, That's why, Christians rejoice, To sing with Mary, In her song, My soul, Magnifies the Lord, My spirit rejoices, In God my Savior, Because he's our Savior too, Because of Christmas, He's looked on the humble estate, Of his servants, And he who is mighty, Has done great things, For me, That's why I'm up here tonight, Speaking to you, Because he who is mighty, Has done great things for me, That's why so many of us, Come here to this building,

Week by week, That's why, Someone's invited you here, Tonight probably, Because we want you, To know that joy as well, We want you to share it, Mary found that joy personally, Yes, She grasped what it all meant, She grasped the meaning of history, She grasped the hope of eternity, But more than that, She entered into that story, Personally, Herself, This humble peasant girl, From Nazareth, Was taken up, Into the great story, Of God, She became part of that story, What she said is true, All generations, After, Will call her blessed, Not because of, Anything special in her, But because, Of what God did, Through her, In bringing Jesus, The Savior, Into our world, God did do great things, For her, But he did so, So that he might do great things,

[31 : 54] Also for you, And for me, Mary, And Joseph, And Elizabeth, And Zechariah, And all the others, That we know so well, In these stories, The shepherds, The wise men, All the disciples, They all entered, Into that story, The greatest story, Of all, The eternal story, The story, That invaded our world, Invaded time, In the coming of Jesus, And came to answer, Every inconsolable longing, Of our human hearts, And that friends, Is the story, That goes on forever, It's a story, Where every chapter, Is better than the one before, And they all, Entered into that story, And the real message, Of Christmas, Why it matters, Is that you also, Can enter into that story, Look so careful, To emphasize, That the wonder of Christmas, Isn't just, For humanity, In general, That they're reclaimed,

By God, But in people, In particular, Real people, Individual people, Who have names, Who have personal stories, People just like, Like you and me, Don't miss those wonderful words, Mary, Utters there, In verse 50, His mercy, She says, Is for those, And she means, All those, Who fear him, From generation, To generation, His mercy, Is for everyone, Man and woman, Boy and girl, Poor and rich, Old and young, Asian, African, American, European, Wherever, Everyone, She says, Who will fear him, That just means, To humbly trust, The message, That Mary has sung to us, That's where Mary's joy, Came from herself, She believed, When the angel, Brought her the gospel message, Of Christmas, What did she say?

She said, Let it be to me, According to your word, That's faith, Faith is simply saying, Yes, To the Christmas message of God, The message of Jesus, Come to be Savior, Let it be so, For me, The message that explains history, That proclaims eternity, To you, The message in which God says, To all of us, Says to you, I have come to reclaim, You, For that world, That you've yearned for, But you've never seen, The message of Christmas, The whole of it, Is one great song, Actually, It's a song, God is singing, To his world, And he's singing, To every one of us, Here tonight, Let it be for you also, Through Jesus my son, Mary responded, She sang back to God, Yes, Let it be so for me,

And she found that joy, That was immediate, And also eternal, So will you let it be for you also, This Christmas, Why would anyone want to not, Join that song of everlasting joy, Join the joy, Join the joy, This very Christmas, Amen, Let's pray, Oh come, All you faithful, Come joyful, And come triumphant, Come to Bethlehem, And behold him, Born the king of angels, Who come, Let us adore him, Jesus Christ, The Lord, Gracious God, Grant that this would indeed, Be the response, Of all of our hearts, This Christmas, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,

Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen,