

Birthing Hope

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our reading for this morning, and Josh is leading us in Luke's Gospel. So please turn to Luke. If you don't have a Bible with you, I have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side, so do grab a visitor Bible.

And Luke chapter 1, page 856, page 856, if you have a visitor Bible. So Luke chapter 1, and we'll be reading from verse 5.

Luke 1, verse 5. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah.

And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now, while he was serving as a priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

[1 : 2 2] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard.

And your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.

And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

[2 : 3 0] And Zechariah said to the angel, How shall I know this? For I am old, and my wife is advanced in years. And the angel answered him, I am Gabriel.

I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.

And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple.

And he kept making signs to them, and remained mute. And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. After these days, his wife, Elizabeth, conceived.

And for five months, she kept herself hidden, saying, Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me to take away my approach among the people. 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.

[3 : 54] 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 he 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 Lord 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.

[5 : 07] And this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren, for nothing will be 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 leapt 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 leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

[6 : 08] And 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 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.

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. Amen. May God bless his word to us.

[7 : 25] Well do open your Bibles once again to Luke chapter 1. Christmas is coming. And one thing Christmas often captures is a sense of wonder.

The songs, the lights, the decorations, the festivities. And all of this is so very fitting. Because Christmas helps us to remember and mark one of the most truly remarkable things that has ever happened.

The incarnation. The miracle of God taking on human flesh and stepping into this world. Which was the arrival of hope.

It was the sunrise of righteousness amidst darkness and despair. It was the arrival of all that was long promised. It was the beginning of a new era. The dawning of a new humanity.

And we're going to be spending the next four weeks listening to Luke. Not only to hear his documenting of the real historical events surrounding the incarnation. But primarily to hear Luke's declaration of the real importance of the events surrounding the incarnation.

[8 : 41] As he beckons us to respond aright to them. Remember Luke tells us from verses 1 to 4. That he is writing a carefully crafted message.

Relying on eyewitnesses. So that his details are real history. But he's doing this to, verse 4. Bring certainty. Concerning things that have been taught about Jesus.

And verse 1. He's interested in things that have been accomplished. Or fulfilled among us. Luke's explanation of Jesus is shaped by fulfillment.

Jesus doesn't just drop out of thin air. He didn't appear in a vacuum. Luke wants to make clear that Jesus is, in a very real way, the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament scriptures spoke of.

He is the realization of all prophetic expectation. Now, Luke 1 and 2 in this book serve as the introduction to Luke's whole gospel.

[9 : 48] They are a harbinger of the gospel as a whole. So the first half of the gospel, as we've been seeing in previous months, up to 951. The first half pictures the wonder of Jesus' arrival from heaven in all of his glory.

And the second half of the gospel, from 951 to the end, is all about Jesus' journey to and through Jerusalem and the cross to be taken up in glory.

And likewise, we find Luke chapter 1 focuses on the wonder of Christ's arrival. And chapter 2 shows the shadow of the cross hanging over Jesus, even from his earliest days.

And the careful account that Luke has put before us is more structured even than that. These opening two chapters are constructed around 10 events, and they have some narrator's comments separating them.

So the first event that we're going to look at a little bit later, Zechariah in the temple, that's the very first event. And it stands on its own. And then the last event also stands on its own.

[10 : 55] It's Jesus in the temple at the end of chapter 2. There are the bookends. Both happen in the temple. And then in the middle, we have four sets of two events, and each set is divided up by narrator's comments again, showing the passage of time.

So you can see verses 24 and 25, an narrator's comment after this instance of Zechariah, and five months pass. And then we have two more events.

First, the announcement to Mary, and then second, her visit to Elizabeth. And they're bracketed again by an narrator's comment, and the passage of time, verse 56.

And with these ten events, there's something of a mirror structure between the chapters that has the birth of Jesus, the birth of John, and its significance at the end of chapter 1, and the birth of Jesus in its significance at the start of chapter 2.

They are the heart of this great introduction, the two great events at the heart of it all. And so we can see from all of this that Luke isn't interested in fairy tales.

[12 : 02] He isn't interested in a kind of romantic notion of Christmas. Now, Luke wants to give us certainty about the absolute significance of Jesus' arrival from heaven into this world, into history, to be all the hope that we'll ever need, to be the fulfillment of every longing that needs to be satisfied.

And so the first thing Luke shows us, verses 5 to 25, is certainty for the dispirited. certainty for the dispirited. God's word will always come to pass, no matter how impossible it might seem, and indeed no matter how feeble the faith of his servants.

It's possible to be so weighed down by present circumstances that we're caused to doubt the full wonder, complete miracle, of God's salvation drawing near to us.

Zechariah here is confronted with the fulfillment of all that he longed for, and yet he struggled to believe it. Here is how Luke begins his grand message of the incarnation.

Verse 5 and 6, two people, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who belong to the faithful remnant of God's people. But notice what sticks out instantly, verse 7.

[13 : 28] They're barren. It's not a very happy beginning, is it? To a great story, a great event. Barrenness is a scourge, and one that we can be sure has provoked much heartache and tears wherever it's been present.

And its pain isn't just in wanting desperately to have something you don't have, you can't have, frustrated at every turn and seeking something that's right, something that's a normal part of marriage.

Often the pain of barrenness is multiplied by its obvious and public nature, so that being amongst those not so afflicted brings a sense of reproach. Look ahead to verse 25.

That's Elizabeth's own word for it. It had brought reproach to her among people. It is perhaps worth pondering in a church like ours where there seems to be a new baby every month, wonderful as that is, it's worth pondering how to avoid heaping a sense of reproach on those who would so desperately love to have what some of us, many of us, have been blessed to receive.

Well, Luke begins with a barren woman, and those familiar with their Bibles will be thinking at this point, we've been here before, because the Old Testament shows us again and again barren women who through the mighty hand of God are blessed with sons, and usually sons who have shaped the entire future of the Lord's people.

[15 : 02] We've been seeing it in Genesis, the line of promise, the seed of Abraham himself, seemed so totally unlikely, and yet we read, and Sarah conceived a Boreas son, and Rebecca had similar struggles, and Rachel, until God intervened.

When it seemed impossible, God worked to maintain his promise and to bring salvation to his people. God's modus operandi is to take situations that seem hopeless, and then to get to work in them, so that it is beyond doubt that it's he who works salvation.

We see the same thing with Samson, as he's raised up as the rescuer, again with Hannah, driven to despair, knowing terrible reproach at the hands of the prolifically fertile Penina, and yet her agonized tears brought forth Samuel, the kingmaker.

Similar with Ruth, barren in her first marriage, yet the great-grandmother of King David. We have been here before. And so into this situation, once again, God moves remarkably.

Zechariah is off to the temple to serve as priest, verse 9, and it's the high point of his priestly career. He's been chosen to burn the incense. Owing to the number of priests that served, it might only be once in a lifetime that you get the opportunity to enter the holy place with the incense.

[16 : 34] And here is Zechariah, verse 10, with the multitudes of the people outside praying, hoping, longing for some sort of hope, or some sort of revelation from God that he would keep his covenant.

Longing for an end to a dark period in the history of God's people. And as all this happens, suddenly an angel appears. Verse 11, standing beside the altar, prompting fear.

But verse 13, the angel says, do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth will bear a son who's to be called John.

Now I notice, Luke pulls together this event in the temple with this couple's barrenness. The people were praying outside, praying and longing, and here is a prayer that's answered.

But the answer is a child for the childless. Now I take it that Luke begins his gospel with Zechariah and Elizabeth, giving them a prominence in order to give us something of an enacted parable, a living illustration.

[17 : 45] Luke seems to be lining up this couple's plight as a picture of Israel's plight. As the people pray and Zechariah burns the incense, this couple receives news they'd long given up hope of receiving.

And what better way of encapsulating the prolonged agony of longing for centuries for the appearance of some glimmer of hope, some possibility of fulfillment of a covenant long promised, at some possibility of exile's specter finally being totally undone, so that once again the light might shine again from the throne of David upon the people of God.

What better illustration than the agonized longing of barrenness? But then what better illustration to show the lifting of gloom, to show the joy of fulfillment, than the arrival of a pregnancy that was long given up on?

Elizabeth's barrenness mirrored a spiritual barrenness in Israel, where the prospect of the Messiah coming must have seemed remote at best. Four or five hundred years have passed since a word of revelation from on high had been given.

But Gabriel's appearance births hope. Because however dire the circumstances seem, God will keep his promises.

[19 : 08] His word will never fall to the ground empty. And nothing is impossible for God. And to confirm the magnitude of this event, to show the link between this couple's plight and the plight of Israel, the angel says, verse 14, you will have joy and gladness, but also notice, and many will rejoice at his birth.

Why? Not just because they're delighted that this couple have had a baby. No, because he'll be great. Indeed, he'll be the great forerunner to the Christ.

There are echoes of Samuel here being born in the baby John. The detail in verse 15 about not drinking wine or strong drink. An echo of Samuel, the great kingmaker, the one who prepared the way for the king.

And now here, John, the forerunner to the everlasting king. But more than that, more than this little echo of Samuel, Luke shows us John as the Elijah who was to come.

Now, the very last words of the Old Testament, words spoken in Malachi, indeed the last words spoken by God before Zechariah went to the temple. Centuries before, the last words spoken were, behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

[20 : 32] And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. And here we have verses 15 to 17.

The new Elijah, John, the forerunner to the great day of salvation. 400 years of silence, a dark night of 400 years. But now, as Malachi says, the sun of righteousness was rising with healing in its wings.

hope for this couple in the birth of a child. Hope for the nation in the birth of the forerunner. But notice, Luke wants us to take heed of the reactions to these events.

Verse 18, Zechariah asks, how shall I know this? Perhaps that's a question that some of us have. All this stuff about Jesus sounds good, but come on.

You don't really think all this supernatural stuff can really happen, do you? Or perhaps it isn't the outright skepticism like that. Perhaps for some of us it's more a case of being so worn down by life lived under the sun, of life filled with disappointments and discouragements and distress, where our Christian lives just feel like an uphill battle filled with all manner of obstacles.

[21 : 55] And we want to be all in with Jesus. But the prospect of his glorious return just seems too far off. Perhaps a little ethereal or fanciful.

How shall I know? How can I be sure? Everything seems stacked against it. We're too old. And the angel responds, verse 19, I am Gabriel.

Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God and I was sent to speak to you and to bring this good news. Basically, he says, this is the word of God and his word does not fail.

And so Gabriel causes Zechariah to be mute because of this instance of unbelief. This priest who at the high point of his ministry was visited from on high with earth-shattering news with the answer to all of his longings and instead of it being the crowning glory of his life, instead of it, it is instead a means of discipline upon him.

Instead of being able to exit from burning the incense to proclaim a blessing on the people, he cannot even speak. Before uttering again words of grace to others, Zechariah needed to be taught of the certainty of God's word.

[23 : 21] However, discipline as this was, we must remember that Zechariah was a real believer. That's what we see back in verses 5 and 6. Both he and his wife were from good priestly families and they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

They were not like the Pharisees with their mere external show of religion, knew Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous before God. They were real believers. And notice, Gabriel doesn't withdraw the blessing.

The child is still going to come. God is true to his word always. But also, Zechariah's silencing here serves as a confirmation, doesn't it?

He's given a form of discipline that in itself is laden with grace. Zechariah can take it that the baby is as sure as his silence.

Perhaps some of us knew dispiriting circumstances akin to Zechariah's and we feel our faith might fail. We begin to doubt what God says. Or maybe when what he says seems to be too much at odds with the flesh and blood reality before us, with what we can see with our own eyes.

[24 : 40] maybe in such instances, the Lord might need to help us to trust him. Might need to help us to trust him completely through some means of discipline to learn that his word is unfeeling, unbreakable, without blemish and that it's good news.

But when God does such a thing and he does bring discipline, it's laden with grace. But also, we must note, a momentary stumble ought not to be fatal to our faith.

It wasn't for Zechariah as we'll see in future weeks. And listen to Calvin on this. He writes, sometimes one who trusts in God for salvation will waver on some point, will be too much alarmed by the dread of death, too solicitous about daily food or too anxious about his plans.

Such was the unbelief of Zechariah. For while he held the root and foundation of faith, he hesitated only on one point whether God would give to him a son.

Let us know, therefore, that those who are perplexed or disturbed by weakness on some particular occasion do not entirely depart or fall off from the faith.

[25 : 58] And that though the branches of faith are agitated by various tempests, it does not give way at the root. Don't let a momentary stumble.

Don't let a rising doubt be the something that's fatal to faith. It doesn't have to be. The message of good news to Zechariah is a message of good news still.

For we know with certainty now that John did come and so did Jesus. It's a historical fact. But we also know something of Zechariah's experience because the church now has been waiting for 2,000 years for Jesus to come again.

Longing for the day when all wrongs will be made right forever. Longing for the day when everything that the prophets spoke of is brought to full fruition. And when we feel embattled in this world, as our nation gets sucked more and more into the fallout of losing our mirrorings in the gospel, it might just seem like a faint dream that one day this world will see the kingdom of God spread throughout the whole earth.

An earth that's been made new. But remember, God's word, his promise, is good news. It's good news spoken out from heaven itself.

[27 : 22] And we cannot afford to not trust it. God's word, God's word, God's word, I think it's telling that Luke starts here in his gospel. He wants to give certainty about what has been taught about Jesus, and the first thing we see is doubt.

From the off, Luke wants us to grasp that however unpromising, however barren our situation looks in this world, God's word will not fail.

It will always be fruitful. Well, secondly, Luke also shows us a chorus from the delighted in verses 26 to 56.

A chorus from the delighted. When God's salvation draws near to us, it beckons us to glad rejoicing. Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy and Gabriel is at it again.

This time, this time, however, he isn't delivering good news to the childless, but rather gobsmacking news to the chaste. And the setting for this great announcement is not a celebrated one.

[28 : 34] It isn't in Judea. It isn't in the temple this time. No, it's in the little backwater of Nazareth. Nazareth in Galilee, the place that Isaiah prophesied would birth the wonderful counselor, the prince of peace, who would sit on the throne of David.

And Gabriel's second appearance mirrors his first. Again, do not be afraid. And again, a remarkable announcement.

But this time, it's not one that we've seen before. God has previous with barren women, but this is something of a different order entirely. Indeed, a unique birth, a miracle of a new and different order, because this is the dawning of a new humanity.

All of the barren women we've mentioned are contending only for a best possible prize of second place in the contest for most impossible mother.

Because head and shoulders above all else is a virgin conceiving a son. And not just any son. Do you see? A king in David's line.

[29 : 41] King David's line, his throne, his covenant, hangs all over this passage. Verse 27, Joseph was in David's line. Verse 32, the child will be given to the throne of his father David.

Verse 33, he will be the forever king in David's line. Here was a staggering announcement, not just because of a miraculous conception, but also because Mary will birth the long-promised, long-expected Messiah king.

The one through whom God would establish his rule, forever, his blessed, wonderful rule that will be good for his people. The one through whom God would rescue his people.

And more still, Mary will also birth the God-man. Her son would be God himself taking on human flesh.

Look at the other titles he's given. Verse 31, the angel gives him a name, Jesus, which means God saves. Verse 32, he'll be great, just as was said of John, but notice the difference here.

[30 : 51] Not just great, but the son of the most high. Here was God himself stepping into the world. Momentous news. And Mary asks, how will this work?

She's accepting of the news, but asks fairly legitimately. Virgins don't have children, so how will this happen? It's a different question to Zechariah's, who was asking, how can I know this word is true?

Mary asks, how? And Gabriel's answer is just extraordinary. Verse 35, how will you conceive? Well, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you.

God himself will cause a child to be conceived in your womb. In some miraculous and mysterious way, God will spark life in Mary's womb. And the words here about the spirit overshadowing, those words are akin to the words we read at the very beginning of the Bible, the very dawn of creation, as the spirit hovered over the face of the water, and out of nothing God created.

And so here again, the dawning of recreation, the spirit hovers. New creation, a new humanity, a second Adam are on the way. And so this child would be both man and God.

[32 : 18] Born of women, but through God's spirit, also the Son of God. Born in the line of David, but God. Born truly and fully human, a legitimate and appropriate representative of mankind, a second Adam, so as to bring redemption and recreation.

And born truly and fully God, so as to be able to perfectly bear the weight of such a thing. And that dual reality is something that Luke makes plain throughout this narrative.

We get historical markers, we get kings and places and governors, and we also get heavenly messengers. Luke brings together history and heaven to show us unmistakably that Jesus is the promised one who will bring together David's line and David's throne with the throne of heaven and eternity.

Well, it's such momentous news. Mary is given further confirmation of what's to happen by being told of Elizabeth's pregnancy. And she can take Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy, verse 37, as a sign that nothing is impossible with God.

It's another echo from of old. It's the very phrase uttered at the time of the original unlikely mother, Sarah, back in Genesis. Do you see?

[33 : 42] Luke is making clear that God's covenant promises will not miss a seat. This is a story that has been woven, planned, patterned, and unfolding from the very beginning.

But now Luke is telling us it has come to blossom. The lengths to which God will go to preserve his covenant with his people, the ways he'll accommodate himself to a frail, feeble, and failing people is staggering.

Nothing is impossible with God. His word is sure. Now again, Luke's message in these opening verses is crafted around reactions.

And notice Mary's reaction. The climax of these great announcements, the response par excellence that Luke puts before us when it comes to the news about Jesus' incarnation is verse 38.

Mary submits to the will and works of God. Let it be to me according to your word, according to your unbreakable word. Mary says, I am a servant of the Lord.

[34 : 49] I submit to your plan and purpose, even though it could turn my life upside down. That was no small thing. There was a great deal at stake for Mary.

Being betruthed, for her to be found pregnant could have resulted in the death penalty. And who would believe a story like this? Yeah, good one, Mary.

It happened to you magically, supernaturally. Yeah, pull the other one. You're at it. Or rather, you've been at it. Even Zechariah, a priest and a believer, struggled to conceive of such miraculous power to bring out a baby.

So who would believe Mary? Well, regardless of all that was at stake, Mary says, I'm devoted to you. And isn't that the model of faith?

Here is news, so captivating, so crucial, that whatever it might cost me personally, I'm on board with God's plan for this world and his plan for me.

[35 : 48] Because the prospect and indeed the reality of Jesus, whilst it may cause hassle here and now, and it will and it does, regardless, he's worth it.

That's faith, isn't it? Because God's word is sure, it's certain. Nothing is beyond him.

But we struggle with that idea, don't we? We weigh things by what we deem possible. So if it's beyond our imagining, if it doesn't match what we see happening in the world, then we're skeptical or cynical.

But faith is taking God at his word, knowing that he is as good as his word. But there's more to Mary's response.

She doesn't just submit in faith, she sings. She doesn't just take this duty upon herself, she takes delight. And so Mary didn't wait around to see if there were any signs of pregnancy in herself and she just dreamt this.

[36 : 52] No, verse 39, she sets off. She hears and responds straight away to this word. She sets off to see her relative. And this is a meeting with Elizabeth, laden with joy and rejoicing.

Elizabeth greets Mary and at the greeting is prompted to cry out, verse 42, blessed are you. Blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why? Why am I granted the privilege that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

And yet even more is going on here. Notice the two leaps that are mentioned. The baby, verse 41, leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, which prompts her praise and joy.

But more than that, verse 44, it wasn't that Elizabeth's joy prompted the baby to leap. It's the other way around. When Mary came near to Elizabeth, the baby leaped for joy.

Do you see the sheer delights at play in this story? Even a baby in the womb is rejoicing at what Gabriel has said to Mary. And that baby has then prompted his mother to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to cry out in praise.

[38 : 10] You see, John was the forerunner. The Elijah who was to come, even from the womb. He's acting as a forerunner. Here in Elizabeth's womb, verses 15 to 17 are being enacted already.

John, filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb, turning the children of Israel to their God. Here was John preparing the way for Christ, proclaiming Christ to his own mother from the womb.

And so Elizabeth rejoices greatly, prompted by her baby. But there's greater rejoicing still to come from Mary, for she breaks out in prayer and song and praise, and all in the language of the Bible.

Her song is littered with Old Testament references. It's worth noting at this point that the Bible does give us suitable language with which to praise God.

Here was a young girl from a backwater, breaking forth in words of extravagant praise, but praise shaped by God himself in all that he has revealed.

[39 : 20] For those of us who aren't ever quite sure how to pray, what to pray, we can do a lot worse than speaking God's own words back to him in praise and in faith. We can't exhaust all that's in Mary's words here, but let's look briefly at the overall shape and message of the Magnificat, Mary's song.

Verses 46 to 49 show us God's close care. God's salvation, his wondrous work of redemption, his covenant-keeping faithfulness is personal.

Mary rejoices in what the Lord has done for her. Her soul magnifies for God. Her soul magnifies because God is her savior.

She rejoices because God's salvation has reached down to this humble peasant and has brought the grace of the gospel to her. Notice this chorus of praise doesn't actually mention the baby.

She could see beyond the baby and her focus is all in what he would accomplish. Mary rejoices at receiving the undiluted kindness of God that she, as a believer, might know the wonders of God's salvation brought near to her.

[40 : 40] And yet she doesn't dwell on herself because she knows what she has received is simply something that is, verses 50 to 53, it's something consistent with God's character. The magnificent kindness to Mary is simply an act in keeping with how God works.

His salvation isn't just personal. It's a pattern that's present throughout history. God is in the business of blessing his people, of working mightily to bring salvation to them.

Verse 50, his mercy is for those who fear him throughout the generations, all the way back to Abraham, through all the history of God's people, through to Mary, through to the church today.

It's how God works. God moves with all of his might to scatter the proud, verse 51, to deal with those who had set themselves up as gods and rivals to the one true God, to deal with those who would oppose the one true God.

His pattern, verse 52, is to unseat the wicked, the proud and the powerful. A pattern that consistently sees God foil the one who sits in the throne of this world, Satan.

[41 : 50] And one day he will vanquish him completely. His pattern throughout history is to exalt those who are of a humble estate, those like Mary, those like Elizabeth, those who reach out in faith with nothing to cling to but the promises of God.

It is God's way of working. His pattern to you, verse 53, fill the hungry with good things. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

That's how God works. Mary rejoices because she knows this about God. She knows how he works, not just here for her, but throughout history for his people.

And he does this because his actions, verse 54 and 55, are rooted in his covenant commitment. He always keeps his promises.

Notice verse 54, he has helped Israel, his chosen covenant people. And he does that in remembrance of his mercy.

[42 : 58] Do you see? God remembering his covenant is the hope of all believers, that he remembers and acts in accordance with his promise. That's the assurance behind all his gracious deeds.

Promises spoken, verse 55, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. Promises that are now coming to fruition in the true offspring of Abraham, the child of Mary.

There are few signs quite as telling as a believer's joy in the face of the gospel. Few signs quite as telling as a desire to sing and praise and rejoice in what God has done.

One of the first things I noticed when I started coming to this church was the singing. It's a wonderful thing to be amongst hundreds of brothers and sisters who clearly trust the Lord Jesus and reflected in song.

Let's always be a singing people who sing with gusto because we knew Christ, because we knew the fruit of all that's been revealed here.

[44 : 03] when the good news draws near, when the gospel is at work in the lives of the Lord's people, then it will prompt joy.

It will draw out praise. Not affected sentimentalism that puts on a shoe or that pretends that all's happy when life is falling apart.

No, no, no. But a deep rejoicing. A joy that lies deep within that won't ever be quite extinguished no matter what life does throughout us.

A joy that knows in the midst of whatever life throws at us. A joy that knows God has reached down into my life and worked mightily for me. That the sunrise of righteousness has risen in this heart of mine and brought healing in its wings.

That my darkness, my sin, my feeling has been dealt with. And my life is now part of the big story of all that God has planned for this world. A story that is a glorious end.

[45 : 08] And I would trade that for nothing. That is a joy that is available to any, to all of us. Because it's the fruit of believing that God is true to His Word.

It's the fruit of seeing the news about Jesus. And knowing that He is all that God has promised. And all we need to do is say with Mary, Behold, I'm a servant of the Lord.

And then each of us can sing. My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God. My Savior. For He who is mighty has done great things through this child for me.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we know that this world is always mounting an assault on the genuineness and the goodness of Your Gospel.

And so grant us the grace to ever submit to Your unbreakable Word. And as we pray this, we also ask that You would graciously fill us anew with the joy of our salvation.

[46 : 39] And grant us to always see in Jesus a message of good news of which we'll never let go. Help us, we pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen.