

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

Luke 1:39-56

Key verse 47

“...and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”

Merry Christmas! That is what I want for myself and for you; a cheerful time of rejoicing in Jesus at the end of this year. Mary was merry. It wasn't because her situation was perfect, or her nation's outlook. Her religion was led by legalistic people of no shepherd heart. Yet she said, **“My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”** Like Mary, the joy of Jesus' coming this Christmas can fill us to bursting. We can engage God's calling on our lives with joy. It all begins with really hearing and believing God's word. When we believe God's word, we come to know him as, “God my Savior.” Want to have a Merry Christmas this year? Let's learn about God my Savior from teenager Mary.

First, Blessed is she who has believed the Lord (39-45). Verses 39-40. **“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.”** Where did she get this idea? She had been told that she would conceive and give birth to a son, even though a virgin. The angel Gabriel explained: **“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”** (35-37) Faith is revealed not just in what we say. Mary's faith and confidence in God's word is first revealed in her actions. She had heard the message of God through Gabriel, and made a decision of faith based on the word she heard. She didn't procrastinate, but got ready and hurried, by herself, to Zechariah's house. God himself was there to receive her. **“When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”** Even before he was born, John the Baptist was preparing the way for the Lord! In this way God brought Mary, a young teenage girl with a great responsibility to the seasoned Elizabeth, a righteous woman of priestly line. Mary's decision of faith was supported and enabled by God.

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

Elizabeth was likely surprised to see Mary, a teenage runaway, at her door. She had her own exciting things going on. She had grown old without children, serving the Lord faithfully with her aging husband Zechariah. Now God had shown her great favor and taken away her disgrace (25), as she was six months pregnant with the forerunner of the Messiah. It would be easy to dismiss Mary, or just try to draft Mary into what God was doing in Elizabeth’s life. “Thank you God! You knew I needed help with John, so you sent Mary to serve me!” But that isn’t what Elizabeth said. She was filled with the Holy Spirit. He gave her the inspiration to see Mary differently: Verses 42-43 read, **“In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!’”** Seeing past her own situation, Elizabeth realized what God was doing in Mary’s life. She was so happy for the privilege to welcome the mother of the Lord. Her Christ-centered life and attitude became a refuge for Mary to find shelter, protection, wisdom and guidance in that tumultuous time of her life. There is no hint of jealousy or negativity in Elizabeth’s words; only encouragement.

In Jesus Christ we are a holy nation and a royal priesthood (1Pe 2:9), which means we participate in his ministry of reconciliation and mediation. Jesus is calling people like Mary today for his purpose. To be shepherds or mentors who will help them, we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to work together with God. What is God doing in their lives, not just my life? How is he calling me to encourage them to serve him? When we have this insight, we can be a blessing, and have wisdom to know how to help people the best way, just like Elizabeth helped Mary.

For Mary, these words would be a confirmation of the angel Gabriel’s message. But also they remind her that this great responsibility and task, as life changing and imposing as it was, was also the greatest blessing for her. She need only believe that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her. She had already

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

decided as the Lord’s servant to yield and submit to God’s plan, no matter what the cost, if only the Lord’s word to her might be fulfilled. The angel Gabriel called her highly favored (28), and said that no word from God would ever fail (37). God is Almighty and is able to do anything he wants. That is true, but the ability to do something and actually taking the responsibility and action to do it are two different things. For example, America is able to produce and distribute enough food to end hunger in the world. Even smaller, we could easily provide for all the Syrian refugees, if we just built one less warplane. But will we do it, even though we are able? It is not likely. But that is the beauty of God’s word. God is able to do anything, and he tells us what he is going to do through his word. This is his promise, and he never lies. Elizabeth said, **“Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”** (45) Through Elizabeth’s counsel, Mary could see herself as the most blessed woman to have such a promise from God. Mary believed his promise, and so she knew she was the most blessed woman in the world.

The word “blessed” is deep and manifold in meaning. The most simple way of understanding it is this: it means to be happy because of the Lord’s grace and favor, in many forms. We tend to limit blessing to material prosperity or emotional stirring or experiential knowledge. But blessing is all this and more. Are you blessed?

Last week I had a conversation with a fellow staff member, and he shared how his situation was difficult. From my perspective he was the most blessed person. This got me thinking about how important it is to have God’s perspective on our life. I am such a blessed man, and yet struggle with unthankfulness, anxiety, stress and regret. Why? I could give reasons. For example, Amy gets up every morning by 4AM to start work at 5AM. My morning is spent waking, dressing, and feeding young boys. Often I come to my morning responsibilities harried and rushed. I’m busy serving Chicago UBF and more actively involved at Loyola. When I look at myself, I’m disappointed that I don’t do more. When I think about people’s expectations, I’m burdened. This is all the wrong perspective; and misses the most important point. For Mary, Elizabeth’s point was: “You are blessed to be the mother of my Lord; believe it, and the realization of blessing will come.” I’m

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

so privileged to be part of the gospel work Jesus is doing in my generation. My family has been well provided for, and are growing. We have a wonderful task to grow as a holy family for a holy nation. I'm following Jesus my Savior, who called me to serve even as a preacher and teacher of his gospel. I'm really so blessed! Perspective is so important. Believing God's view of our lives changes everything. Do you want to be blessed? You already are! That is the story of Christmas, the good news of great joy for all people. But do you want to feel this in your deep soul? To believe and have this realization of blessing? This has very little to do with your current circumstances, and everything to do with your inner world and perspective. Godly counsel today is this: Let's find God's perspective on my life and the world. This won't happen overnight. It requires us to put God in his rightful place at the center of the universe, and our place in orbit around him, a supporting role, not the main actor in history. It takes some intentional thought. We find an example of this in Mary's Song.

Second, my soul glorifies the Lord (46-56). We are able to see a bit of a person's faith through their actions, like Mary, who hurried to Elizabeth's house. But like an iceberg, that is only the surface. What was going on in Mary's inner world? She could be fearful of people's view of her. She could worry about how to clothe and feed this child, especially if Joseph runs away. But none of these things came out in her song. Not even one hint of self-pity. Look at verses 46-47 read, **“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....’”** Mary's soul and spirit, which are her eternal being, her character and life, were focused on God and rejoicing in him.

Her soul glorifies the Lord. It may be better translated, “magnifies.” Her inner world wanted to reveal, praise, give glory, and worship the Lord. Magnifying something doesn't change what it is. Rather, it makes something very small much bigger in our eye, to study it more deeply. We need to get it into focus to see what Mary saw.

We know Christmas time is the time of joy. But it is also a time of hardship. People struggle financially, with relationships with families, disappointments as the year comes to a close, even the weather can be cold and dismal. Depression

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

increases, statistically speaking. The state of our world and nation is pretty bad. We put on smiles, but sometimes the deep content isn't there, or is rooted in temporary things. What was the source and object of Mary's joy?

Mary said, **“My soul rejoices in God my Savior.”** Instead of peppermint mochas, football, online sales and events, let's take this time this morning to think about God my Savior, based on Mary's song. In what ways did God my Savior make her joyful?

God is my Savior who has been mindful of me. Verses 48-49 read, **“...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.”** Mary saw her humble state as a teenage girl in an oppressed nation. She longed to serve God, having identity as God's servant, but no power or influence to do anything about it. She would marry a man not of her choosing, and live an ordinary life. She knew she was created for more, but what could she do? Now her state was totally changed; she is known as the blessed woman, from all generations, as the mother of God! She could never imagine this; it was what God alone has done in her life, glory to his holy name! God is the Mighty One, who has done great things for us.

“He has been mindful of me...” God thought of Mary. This is also translated as “seeing”: He has seen the humble state of his servant. God saw and understood Mary. Another meaning of magnify is to take something far away, and bring it close so we can see it. For example, earlier this year we saw amazing pictures of the surface of Mars, which is millions of miles away, through the help of deep space telescopes. They “Magnified” the surface of Mars to us, and we learned there is water on Mars. Mary's personal testimony brought the Great and Mighty God of the Universe right into her life, in words, experiences and feelings that mattered to her, right where she was.

That is why Jesus came as a baby in a manger; because God is mindful of you and of me. Has the Mighty One done great things for you? In the Bible there is another young pregnant woman who realized God sees her. Hagar was a slave in

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

Abraham’s house. Due to her mistress Sarah’s lack of faith, Hagar was forced to sleep with Abraham and bear a child. When her mistress Sarah mistreated her, Hagar ran away. There is no one who could understand her. But God did. He spoke to her words of direction and blessing. She obeyed him, calling him, “El Roi” – “You are the God who sees me.” “He has been mindful of me.” God sees you. He knows what is going on. Let’s review God’s work in our lives. Isn’t he the one who sees? Like Mary, can we say, “God is my Savior”? Not just, the Savior? Do we have a testimony of this, like Mary? Then we too will realize we are blessed and will rejoice in God my Savior.

God is my Savior who is merciful. Look at verse 50. **“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”** Also, verse 56 mentions God’s mercy. Moving beyond herself, Mary focuses more on God her Savior. In fact, the bulk of her song is focused on God’s mercy on people in every generation. All throughout history, God has maintained a remnant of people; those who fear him, who believe his word, who obey him. His mercy gives us many reasons to rejoice in him.

Look at verse 51a. **“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm.”** God is able to act in history, because his arm is mighty. He is not a weak bystander or observer. The Bible is full of examples of God’s mighty deeds of mercy. He used Moses to bring his people out of oppression in Egypt. He parted the red sea so they could cross to the other side. He rescued his people through Esther when Haman wanted to slaughter them all. Jesus performed mighty deeds of salvation and healing. He said of his ministry of driving out demons: **“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:20).** God is still Mighty. The war in Syria is horrible. But God is not absent. One church in Berlin had a dwindling membership of 150. The pastor began to serve refugees from Iran, Syria, and Afghanistan, more than 600 weekly, filling his church and reinvigorating his congregation. These people were never given the option to hear and believe the gospel, but are now being baptized, set free to worship Jesus. Their spirit rejoices in “God my Savior.” What a mercy, both to the refugees, and to the church in Germany. Thank God who is working mightily in

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

our world today! Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear (Isa 59:1).

God’s power isn’t limited to the physical world. **“He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts” (51)**. This may seem a bit scary, especially for those of us who are proud. But his mercy is shown to those who fear God. Those who are proud, God is able to humble, no problem. Many years ago I was told, “Asking God to humble you is one prayer he always answers.” What a mercy that God deals with us in full disclosure. He also knows what’s going on in other’s lives. We don’t need to speculate too much, but rather trust God who is able to deal with each one of us.

Look at the reversals in verses 52-53. **“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.”** Human history is kingdoms rising and falling, and behind them is God himself. God lifts up the humble. Mary is one example. The greatest example is Jesus. Although he is God, he humbled himself and was born to poor parents in an oppressed nation, and laid in a manger. He was wrapped in rags. Yet he did not live as a victim. Jesus loved and served, even to the point of laying down his life. God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above all names. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. We serve him, and he fills the hungry with good things. True satisfaction and contentment aren’t found in material blessings, human relationships or meaningful activities alone, as all of these things come and go in human experience. But those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who feed on Jesus, find real and true satisfaction in God my Savior.

Verses 54-55 reads, **“He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”** Mary saw that the baby growing in her womb is the Messiah of the World, fulfilling his greater plan. Israel had failed in every way to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But in Jesus God helped them fulfill their identity and purpose as his chosen people. His scope was far greater than Israel. His promise to Abraham was: **“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will**

“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Ge 12:3) We are counted as God’s people because of Jesus. God is faithful to carry out his purpose in our generation as well. Jesus is making disciples of all nations on earth. This includes a remnant of students on every campus. This is his promise. Let’s depend on his mercy.

Look at verse 56. **“Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.”** Mary came to Elizabeth’s in the sixth or seventh month, and likely stayed until after John’s birth, helping Elizabeth. She saw firsthand just what Gabriel had said: **“Nothing is impossible with God.”** It would be nice to stay with Elizabeth and serve under her tutelage. Going home was hard, but Mary didn’t stay. She stepped out, boldly and courageously engaging her calling. She did so believing she was so blessed, because God would fulfill all his promises to her. Let’s read verse 47 again: **“...and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”** Let’s not get distracted this season from the joy that can be ours through Jesus Christ. Let’s remember his personal grace to us, his good character of mercy, and his world redemptive plan which he is carrying out generation to generation, including our generation. His grace has included us in this work he is doing. Let’s engage it courageously. Let’s sing with Mary: **“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**