

Introduction: Welcome. Connect Card, Invite to Reception (don't deprive me from meeting your awesomeness), Pg. 856

There are many reasons to love the Christmas season. If I were to ask you to list the top five reasons you love Christmas, I can imagine we would hear ideas like: time with friends & family, parties, gifts, food (anyone?). Some of you would surely mention, an increased focused time to consider Christ and all his coming means for us. There are many other worthy possibilities but one that I believe would make most of your lists would be Christmas Music.

I argued a couple of weeks ago that music is woven into the fabric of creation, and there is no doubt that music woven into the fabric of Christmas.

At the earliest ages, kids begin singing classics like the one written right here in Medford by Mr. James Pierpont. "Dashing through the snow..." That's right "Jingle Bells" was penned right here in our great city. They can't say that Malden, Somerville, or Savannah, you know what I'm sayin. Medfid!

And then you have some radio classics:

- "Chestnuts roasting on a open fire..."
- "Have a holly jolly Christmas..."

But then, of course, there are (believe it or not) songs about Christ (because you can't spell Christmas without Christ! Probably not the smoothest way to talk Jesus with your friends, but hey. ☺)

- Who has heard the song "O Holy Night" sung by a powerful voice that hasn't got chills.
- "O Come O Come Immanuel – disperse the gloomy clouds of night, death's dark shadows put to flight – Rejoice, Rejoice, Immanuel has to come to thee Oh Israel, rejoice!"
- "Joy to the world – he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found..."

Music helps make Christmas, Christmas. I think God wants it this way. On the first Christmas night there were angels singing of the newborn king. As we will see next week, there were also shepherds who had a front row seat for the entrance of Jesus into the world. Something tells me they sang that night.

But before that first Christmas night, before Mary first sang a lullaby to her baby boy, she sang a song of praise to God. Yes, arguably the most famous woman who has ever lived on the planet, Mary of Nazareth, sang a song of praise for the reality of Christmas before Christmas even came to be. That's where we pick up the story this morning.

"The Wonder of the Story: Mary's Song"
Luke 1:39-56

Last week, Pastor Jon, told us about the shocking announcement that came to Mary about her impending pregnancy. It was an amazing moment. Let me try to put it into perspective. #1

1. An angel shows up with an announcement from God. (That's not small. That's frightening!)
2. The angel tells Mary she will become pregnant, perhaps even more shocking than the angel's arrival. Why? Mary was not married. She replied: "That's impossible, because I am a virgin."
3. The angel tops it all off by saying: Don't worry about that. God is going to see to it by supernatural means.

Mary was Confused. Astonished. Scared. Overwhelmed. BUT Full of faith.

Listen: you think it's hard for you to believe in the virgin birth; put yourself in Mary's shoes. Yet, if God is God, this is not hard for him. Miracles bookend the life of Christ. Born of a virgin. Raised to life after death.

It is after this news that the story continues: Read 1:39-45. Pause. 1:46-56

Let's review

- Mary goes and visits her older cousin Elizabeth. To congratulate her. To one up her. You got pregnant when you were older, I got pregnant with the Son of God. Mic Drops... NO, she did not do that. 😊
- Elizabeth greets in a most abnormal way: It's not "Mary, my cousin, it's so good to see you." BUT "Blessed among women and blessed is this child you are bearing! Look at 43: "Why is this granted to me that *the mother of my LORD* would come to me?"
- Did you catch that? The baby in your belly is my Lord, my God, my Savior.

In this moment, Mary bursts into song!

- Two weeks ago we looked at what it means to sing in the Storm. This week, we will look at what it means to Sing in Celebration.
- This song is known as "The Magnificat." It received this name from the first key word we see in verse 46, translated from the Latin, "to magnify."
- You don't have to live in Medford very long to know the influence of Mary stretches into 2016 in more ways than one: Marie, Maria, Marilyn, and Mary with any number of combinations and variations.

T: As we consider the wonder of her story, we will be invited into the wonder of a worshiping heart. Like Mary, we can . . .

The Point: Magnify God for his work for you and all people.

First, we learn that . . .

I. The Wonder of Worship is Intensely Personal (1:46-49).

If worship is anything, it must be a personal response. Look at her opening words: Mary says "My soul magnifies the Lord."

- **Praise is a MAGNIFICATION.**
 - These words came from deep inside.
 - Mary magnifies God by using her words to bring God into view, and as someone taught me a long time ago: this magnification is like a telescope not a microscope. Microscopes make small things seem larger. Telescopes tell us that the tail of a comet is 6,000,000 miles long.
 - God may often seem small to us, but our praise recognizes his greatness and helps others see his greatness.
- **Praise is full of Joy.**
 - Praise and joy go together. No burden here.
 - You know some people can sing, "It's the most wonderful time of the year; it's the hap-happiest season of all." But deep down, they ain't happy!
 - It's manufactured for a moment but not the sincere cry of their soul.
 - Added to that: some people are under the false notion that joy flows from circumstances outside of us. It goes something like this: You give me a bigger present; I'll have greater joy. Nah. Joy don't work like that.
 - Joy is produced, not on the outside by stuff, but on the inside by God. Then it bubbles up out of us and is revealed on the outside.

Mary was so joyful and desired to magnify God, because of his grace toward her. Look at what she says:

"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior"

- "Salvation more than anything else is to be the basic theme of Luke's story; and salvation is what makes the news so good." - Wilcock
- Salvation is what we all need!
- To be saved means to be healed, to be made whole, to be brought out of a desperate situation.
- The name **Jesus** means "**God saves,**" and Mary was experiencing this firsthand.
 - This is why I cannot affirm the doctrine of the "immaculate conception" of Mary, which says she was born without original sin, as proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on 12/8/1854, and lived a sinless life. Why would she need a Savior if that was the case?
- We should never worship Mary or pretend that she is our access to God. But we should honor her and imitate her faith.

BUT, she was a special woman and God showed her unbelievable favor in her humble state.

- We're talking about a young woman who was probably about 14 years old, not a first round draft pick to bear the Savior of the world.
- She was from a tiny village called Nazareth: Nazareth was a hick town, out in the sticks, greatness was not produced in Nazareth. Jesus and Nathaneal: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"
- And . . . Mary was of humble estate. Let me translate: She did not have much. She did not live in a palace. She was probably poor. We see this from the temple offering in the next chapter (just a couple of doves).

Look at where she's from, what she had, who she was. No way this can be the mother of the Messiah! P.

But this is how God works and this is what God does. He loves to surprise us with his favor to the unexpected.

- Maybe you feel like Mary.
 - I immigrated here. People must look down on me.
 - I don't have much... You won't find me shopping at Assembly Row or on Newbury St.
- Hey, I have some news for you. If you are of humble estate, so was the most important woman in the history of the world: Mary of Nazareth, and so was her son, Jesus. You're in good company.

Mary had an incredible story to tell and that is what she does in this song. Look back at 48-49: "For behold..."

- God's long awaited Messiah would come into the world through her. Truly stupefying news!
- But here's the crazy thing for Mary, and it is the crazy reality for us: God's Story became her Story. OR to put it another way: Mary's story got swept up into the story of God.

That's what God does today. Do NOT, I repeat, do NOT think, say, write, post, believe or ever communicate that your story does not matter.

- You are here today because God has pulled you into his story or he is (I believe) seeking to pull you in.
- **So what's your story? What's your song? What story can you share this Christmas Season?**
 - What great things has this holy God (the perfect, spotless, supreme and without rival God), What great things has he done for you?
 - Consider this question: "How has Jesus changed you?" "How has the gospel changed you?" The moment you answer that is the moment you have a story to tell.
 - I worry less. (There's a story)
 - I serve others more naturally.
 - I am not as lazy.
 - I am fighting that addiction.
 - I give more generously.
 - I am more transparent because the gospel frees me to share.
 - I am more sacrificial toward my friends. (There's a story)
 - I trust God more in the storm.
 - I believe in Jesus now. I am a Christian. I have Joy and Peace and Love that I didn't existed. know was possible.
 - I don't get as angry with my coworkers but actually return their malice with kindness. (There's a story.)
- Do me a favor: Don't tell me you don't have a story. You're not shortchanging yourself; you're shortchanging God.
- And do me another favor: Don't keep it to yourself! The Wonder of the Story is all the more

wonderful when we share that story with someone else. Don't you agree?

Here's an ask: Take 5 minutes today to jot down an outline of your story in 2016.

I did that this week: here's my story in 2016.

- **More patient when things don't go as planned.**
- **I am quicker (not just to give help but) to receive help.**
- **And I'm more open about my struggles and my joys.**
- **Value time with my wife and kids more than ever before.**
- **And I'm really thankful for renewed and increased opportunities to talk Jesus with people and see more people step into the life God offers them through Jesus.**

That's part of my story. What's your story?

2017 is going to be the year of the Story around here. We are going to facilitate a Story Culture. How could we build a story culture as a church?

T: Mary had a story.

- It was VERY PERSONAL, and who would have faulted her if she stopped right there, but that's not what happens.
- **Read 1:50-55**
- Not only is the Wonder of Worship intensely personal.

II. The Wonder of Worship Exalts God's Work for All (1:50-55).

Mary's Personal Praise moves to a Flurry of Praise over God's work, for all "who fear him." Worship will naturally move us toward a concern for others.

- Praise is the natural reflex of seeing God.
- Concern for others is the natural reflex of Praise.
- Why? Because God is doing a much bigger work than just my microscopic piece of the puzzle. This is how he's always been and this is how he always will be.

Mary praises God for similar, if not almost identical, reasons that we saw in her personal words?

- He is merciful (50). There's GRACE Theme...
 - "There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us." – Richard Sibbes
 - And this mercy is for everyone who fears God (that means respects and loves him above all) from Generation to Generation to Generation to Generation...
 - His mercy is like an **PIC: avalanche** that builds in greatness as it moves through history with each person that receives his mercy.
- He is strong (51). There's the GREATNESS Theme...
 - "He has shown strength with his arm;
 - How has he shown himself strong?
 - Scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts//Brought down the mighty from their thrones.

- Exalts the humble/fills the hungry/ (rich he sends away empty.)
- If you want to dig a little deeper, go check out another unlikely birth story turned into song from another woman named Hannah with another famous son named Samuel, who was one of Israel's greatest priests. The similarities are striking, which probably tells us Mary knew her Bible, really well.
- I hope you see the paradoxical kingdom of Christ.
 - He makes the filled, hungry and hungry, filled.
 - He makes the rich, poor and the poor, rich.
 - He makes the strong, weak and the weak, strong.
 - He makes the first, last and the last, first

God shows his greatness to those who see their smallness.

- This is why all of this is sooooo critical: if you are not of humble estate on the inside, you will not receive God's gift.
- Humility is required (Matthew 5:3)
- If you see your need for mercy, then reach out your hands and accept what Jesus has done for you in his life, death, and resurrection. (Connect Card)

And his avalanchic (is that word? Is today), his avalanchic MERCY is such a certain deal, that while Mary is certain God has dealt this way in the past, she is really speaking of the future.

- Scholars call this Greek tense a "prophetic aorist." An aorist is a completed action. Prophetic points to the future.
- In other words, these events are as good as done.
- How do we know this? Because this song is all about the Coming Messiah who happens to be in her Womb. He will bring the reversal of all brokenness and the renewal of all things to God's original design. It's coming in the future, through the life of this baby boy, and it is as good as done.

That is what is reiterated in vv 54-55.

- To sum it up, Mary says: "This is all the result, for me, for all for you, of the faithfulness of God to keep his promises.
- God promised in the very beginning that a woman would bear a son who would destroy the work of Satan and bring God's redemption forever. He continued to make that promise with the great leaders of his people: Abraham and Issac, Jacob, Moses, and David.
- *The Wonder of Worship Flows from the Faithfulness of God.*

Conclusion:

Has God been mercy to you? Do you have reason to sing?

What will be the story in your song? Who will hear of God's salvation through you?

Punchy prayer. Roll.