

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Luke 1:46b-55

⁴⁶ *And Mary said,
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

A cartoon depicts a husband and wife sitting in a living room that is gaily decorated for the Christmas season. The wife, however, has a deep frown on her face, and looks completely exhausted. In the caption the husband is saying: "Of course you're depressed - 'tis the season to be jolly." 'Tis the season to be jolly, not melancholy.

Part of the medicine Jesus brought to a weary world is "Be merry"; he is the one whom the Bible describes as "the joy of heaven to earth come down."

The context for today's scripture reading is set in the time period after the Virgin Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and was told that she would bear a son—a child who is the Son of God. Mary then took a trip to visit her Aunt Elizabeth, who being an older, childless woman, was also pregnant. She carried within her the forerunner for Mary's child—one we know as John the Baptist. He would be the one who would announce the coming of the Messiah. There is a heartwarming moment we read about as the two greet each other. The child Elizabeth was carrying leapt within her womb at the sight of Mary as if to express recognition that the child Mary carried was of great importance.

It was while Mary was with Elizabeth that she offers this song of praise that we know as The Magnificat. The song is very similar to that of the song Hannah offered, who having been barren, found out God had answered her prayers for a child and was pregnant. We can read her song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. The joy both of these women expressed was beyond measure, recognizing that their happiness was a blessing from God.

Recognized as a beautiful piece of poetry, the Magnificat is much more than that; it conveys the joyful heart of a young girl who has every reason to be anything but joyful. Imagine how stressful it must have been just thinking about conveying the news to her friends, family,

community, and her fiancé, that she was pregnant with a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. That was going to be a tough sell. Yet, she was full of joy because she understood and believed who God was bringing into the world through her.

Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for Mary? This was something totally out of her control. While she questioned how it was possible, which I imagine any virgin would question, she graciously accepted God's will be done through her. She didn't argue and throw a fit after receiving the news. She didn't try to deny or lie about the reality of what God was doing through her. No, she accepted her role as his blessed servant and trusted God to take care of her.

It's been said that ninety percent of the spiritual life is about letting go and surrendering control over ourselves to God. Most people feel the need to be in control of their lives, to always be the one who is right about everything, to look good and blameless in the eyes of others. But the walk of faith with God is not like that. The old saying, "Let go and let God," is actually what it means to walk faithfully with God; otherwise, what we are doing is trying to put ourselves in the superior position over God. We remove ourselves from helping to fulfill our role of building God's kingdom, not ours, but God's kingdom.

Through Mary's example we recognize that giving up the need for control of our lives to God possibly carries with it some risks and challenges, not only during those immediate moments in her life, but also in the years to come. She obviously knew the road in the years to come would be difficult. This child she carried was going to turn the world upside down. Or as the biblical commentary writer, William Barclay, writes, Jesus would bring about three revolutions of God.

Mary states in her song that through God's plan, he scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. This describes the first resolution—a moral revolution in which there is no room for pride in the life of a Christian. Through Christ we are confronted with our pride that serves only to place a dark cloud over the good God wants to do.

The story is told about a boy who was brought up in a small town. In school he used to sit beside a girl, and they were fond of each other. One day the boy went to the big city and fell into evil ways. He became a pickpocket and a petty thief. One day he snatched an old lady's purse. It was clever work and he was pleased with himself. And then he saw coming down the street him the girl whom he used to know, still sweet with the radiance of innocence. Suddenly, he saw himself for the cheap, vile thing he was. Burning with shame, he leaned his head against the cool iron of a lamp standard. "God," he said, "I wish I could die."

In those moments, he saw himself for who he was. Christ enables us to see ourselves for who we truly are, and because of that we can rid ourselves of selfish pride. Through Christ, the moral revolution began.

Mary also sings of her God that "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." Barclay says this second revolution speaks of a social revolution, meaning that there is no room for the world's labels and prestige in the life of a Christian. Christ came, lived, and died for all people—all people—and once we realize this truth, we eliminate titles such as "lower-class" and begin treating people with the respect and equality we all deserve.

Finally, Mary sings of her God that "He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." Barclay calls this third revolution the economic revolution. A non-Christian society is greedy and materialistic. The goal for the greedy is to acquire as much stuff and power for one's self without regard for anyone else. In a Christian society, we think of each

other, take care of one another, make sure everyone has what they need. Those who have been blessed with much don't hesitate to share with those who do not.

As we can imagine these three revolutions of God, brought to the forefront through his one and only Son were not going to be accepted on easy terms. We see that is true even in our world today. Instead, they would produce controversy and division among the people, as they do today.

Without a doubt, Mary recognized the problems this would bear on her son, problems that she could not save him from, a heavy burden that she would have to watch and grieve. But at the same time, because the child she would bring into the world was God's Son, she welcomed with hope the promises of God's good that he would bring to the world.

Mary was the perfect vessel to carry the Son of God precisely because she was humble and because she was willing to say with Jesus in the garden, "Not my will but thy will be done." In aligning with and finding joy in GOD'S PURPOSES, Mary became the unshakable example of faith that has been revered by Christians through the ages.

Terency Elwyn Johnson, of Margate Community Church (New Jersey), tells the story of Bonnee Hoy, a gifted composer, who died in the prime of life. At her memorial service, a friend told of how a mockingbird used to sing regularly outside Bonnee's window on summer nights.

"Bonnee would stand at her bedroom window, peering into the darkness, listening intently, marveling at the beautiful songs the mockingbird sang. The musician that she was, Bonnee decided to sing back. So, she whistled the first four notes of Beethoven's 'Fifth Symphony.' With amazing quickness, the mockingbird learned these four notes and sang them back to Bonnee. 'And in perfect pitch,' Bonnee marveled. Then, for a time the bird disappeared. But one night, toward the very end of her life, when Bonnee was terribly sick, the bird returned and, in the midst of other songs, several times sang those first four notes of Beethoven's 'Fifth.'"

At that memorial service, her beloved friend, with a smile on her lips and tears in her eyes, said, "I like to think of that now. Somewhere out there (in a big, big world) is a mockingbird who sings Beethoven because of Bonnee."

Are you living a life so full of song and joy that it brings out the music of other people's lives? Mary did, in spite of her personal challenges and what she believed about the revolutions and the challenges her son would bring into the world.

Today is a day to realize that joy does not come from getting what we want, but from receiving what God is doing through us — even when it seems like this is anything but a blessing. The revolutions of God that arose in our world through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and that true Christians continue to give evidence to, though uncomfortable and frightening at times, should fill Christians with joy. May we always, not just in the season of Christmas, but always, let the joy our faith produces shine through our lives. Amen.