

## Songs of Advent: A Song of Remembrance and Reversal

Luke 1:46-56

Well, we are going to press pause on our series on the gospel until the New Year. We still have two more parts to that series, and I am greatly looking forward to getting to those. But, as I'm sure you know, today is the first Sunday of Advent, a time when we anticipate the coming of our Lord and wait, with patience, to celebrate His incarnation.

I'm sure many of you have family traditions over the next few weeks that help you to celebrate this time of year and the birth of Christ and I'm confident that many of those traditions involve Christmas music. There's not another time of the year that is as defined by music and has its own unique songs like Christmas does. I'm sure if I asked you to name your favorite Christmas album that most of you could do it and those of you who said Michael Buble's Christmas album would be correct. Songs matter immensely in our lives and to our spiritual lives in particular. Songs ground truths deeply in our hearts and shape our view of the world and ourselves. It's important that we sing and that we pay careful attention to what we sing.

It's never really struck me till this year that when you begin reading in the book of Luke with the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus that there are several songs given to us in these early chapters. All of the songs are Christmas songs. So, this year, in the four Sundays of Advent this year, the four Sundays leading up to Christmas, I'd like to spend some time meditating on these 4 songs.

What's amazing about these songs will be the way that all of them present the coming of the Lord Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel in the OT. This fits very nicely with what we talked about a few weeks ago regarding the Gospel. The incarnation, life, and death of Jesus is the climax of a story that began long ago. It's a story that begins in Genesis 1-3 but continues throughout the OT. Let me show you what I mean.

Open your Bible to Luke 1:1. Here Luke gives us his purpose in writing this gospel account and look what he says. Now, the word that we read in the ESV as "accomplished" is actually the word translated most other places as "fulfilled." What Luke is saying is that he is writing this to give an orderly narrative regarding

the events that were fulfilled among the people. The events Luke recounts fulfill the expectations and hopes of the OT promises and you will see this quite clearly in our first song, the Magnificat, the song of Mary the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:46-56. And in this song we will see **3 Ingredients of God's Salvation for which He is to be Magnified.**

### **1. Personal Deliverance (vv. 46-49)**

Of course, each of these songs is sung as a song of worship to God. So, everything we talk about today is meant to be turned from meditation to exaltation. We do not just think about these realities for our own benefit but as we benefit from them and are filled with joy over God's salvation we worship and praise Him in song.

It's certainly easy to see how Mary's song is a song of worship. Look at verses 46 and 47. This song is often called the Magnificat because the first word of it in Latin is the word magnified or Magnificat in Latin. So, what exactly is Mary praising God for? Look at verses 48-49.

You can see that Mary's language in these first few verses is very personal. She talks about all that God has done for her. And in particular He has looked on her humble estate. This word often speaks of people who are socially and economically deprived. They don't really matter much in society. Mary was not an important young woman and she certainly didn't expect special attention from God.

But here, Mary is praising God for his special and direct grace toward her and the way this fits into God's larger plan for His people. So, what has God done for Mary, and thus, for His people, the nation of Israel? Why is Mary singing this song of praise and worship to God?

Let's go back up in Luke 1:26-38. Let me read this to you. Mary's personal praise to God fits within a much bigger story. She understands that this isn't just about a baby being born to her. She heard the words of Gabriel and knows what can be expected from this baby. She also sees in her story the type of thing that God does. **She is a microcosm of how God works.** He exalts the humble, the poor, and the needy. Ultimately God does this through the birth of the baby that would come to her. Mary's song reflects Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2. Both women had

babies at crucial moments in Israel's history and both babies ended up bringing deliverance to the nation as a major part of God's plan.

So, what does Gabriel tell Mary about this baby? Look back to verses 32-33. There are three major parts to Gabriel's message about this baby. First, he will be great and will be called the son of the Most High. Second, God will give him the throne of His father David. Third, he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will have no end. One author put it like this:

*"The effect, then, of Gabriel's words is to kindle the reader's expectation that God's ancient promise to David will now find its fulfillment, despite the intervening years of exile, in an everlasting kingdom ruled by a king who is both son of David and son of the One who gave the promise."* - Richard Hays

When Mary calls God her Savior in verse 47 she isn't thinking of personal salvation in the same way you and I do. She is thinking of God bringing deliverance to the nation and her being caught up in what God is doing. She's also praising God that she gets to be involved in bringing this about by God's gracious choice. Since this is primarily about God's deliverance of His people, we need to move from personal deliverance to the way in which God accomplishes the salvation of Israel. This is our second ingredient of God's salvation.

## **2. Eschatological Reversal (vv. 50-53)**

Verse 50 sets the principle in place that will be worked out in verses 51-53. Look there with me. I want you to notice the movement from God's holiness in verse 49 to God's mercy in verse 50. We often think these two cannot exist together, but they are both fully active in God. He is perfectly holy, set apart, and morally pure and is at the same time incredibly merciful and gracious, but notice He is merciful toward those who fear Him.

To fear God is to be humble and to rightly relate to Him by recognizing your position as a sinful creature and God's position as the Holy Lord of all. To fear God is to do exactly what Mary did. She received God's Word to her and obeyed without question. She recognized her status before God as a servant.

This is the picture we get throughout the OT of the disposition of God toward His people. He wants them to fear Him and promises to do good from generation to generation. Notice how this works itself out in verses 51-53. Mary puts all of these

events in the past tense, but they are actually all in the future. That's why I call this ingredient "eschatological" reversal. She is so confident that God will do this that she speaks of these actions as if they have already happened.

God has mercy on the humble who fear Him, but He will not allow the proud to stand. Pride has a way of competing with God and wanting a share of His glory. But God will set things right by reversing the riches and power of the prideful and bringing them low while at the same time exalting the lowly and humble who fear Him.

As you think about this characteristic of God and the principle Mary gives us in these verses, I want you to consider your own life. This is stated in a way in verse 50 that helps us to know that God always acts in this way. He always has and always will. This is still true today for you and I. We may not see this reversal in the present. The rich, powerful and ungodly may triumph in this life. The humble who fear God may not triumph. In fact, they may struggle. But, God sees and God will work out the great reversal. His salvation is built on this reversal. I want you to listen to part of Psalm 73 as the Psalmist is struggling with this exact problem. He's watching the wicked prosper and trying to reconcile their prosperity with God's justice. Listen to Psalm 73:1-17.

How can Mary be so confident that God will bring about this reversal? How can we be confident? Because of our last ingredient of salvation.

### **3. Covenantal Remembrance (vv. 54-56)**

Here is the basis for God's work on behalf of Israel and His mercy to those who fear Him. It's His covenant with His people. Look at verse 54.

Notice in verse 54 that God calls Israel His servant. Listen to Isaiah 41:8-10. God makes it clear that Israel will not be cast aside because she is His servant. He's committed to her.

The Lord mentions his promises to Abraham in Isaiah 41 and Mary mentions them as well in Luke 1:55. Look there. We talked about this a few weeks ago but here is what Mary is getting at. She is confident that God will fulfill His promises to Israel and help them because of the covenants He made with them in the OT. She specifically mentions the promises to Abraham here. Of course, God promised Abraham that He would make a great nation of Him, that He would give that

nation a land to dwell in and that through that nation God would bring blessings to the nations of the earth. Then, of course, God carried that promise through the nation of Israel and then through King David and His line. That promise of blessing received further clarification in the New Covenant that God promised to Israel and Mary is confident that God's promises to Abraham will come to pass.

And this is where we need to zoom out a bit and think about all 3 of these ingredients of salvation for which God will be magnified and consider how these ingredients will be brought about. How will God bring personal deliverance, eschatological reversal and covenantal blessing?

It will all happen through the birth of this baby boy promised to Mary. He will bring about the personal deliverance of many as He dies for their sins. He will exalt the humble and tear down the proud as He himself is humbled in death and exalted to the right hand of the Father. And He will inaugurate a New Covenant with His shed blood. And He will bring blessings to the nations as Gentiles are grafted into the promises made to Israel and fulfilled through the Davidic King of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What so amazing about this song of praise to God is that God is the subject of nearly every verb in the Psalm. In other words, God is the one acting, working, initiating. He does not require the humbled sinner to rise to His heights. He sends His Son to be born and die for those humbled sinners He loves. Look at the language beginning in verse 48 and how over and over again God acts for His people.

Here's my exhortation to each of us today from this passage. Rest in the activity of God for you. Rejoice and magnify Him for what He has done. Stop trying to work your way into His favor and slow down and sink into His grace and mercy displayed in the glorious reality of the incarnation. Let's pray.