

The Characters of Christ's Birth

Mary

Luke 1:46-56

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Mary

Introduction

Commentator Tom Wright asks the following question, “What would make you celebrate wildly, without inhibition?”

He then offers several suggestions.

Perhaps it would be the news that someone close to you who had been very sick was getting better and would soon be home.

Perhaps it would be the news that your country had escaped from tyranny and oppression, and could look forward to a new time of freedom and prosperity.

Perhaps it would be seeing that the floods, which had threatened your home, were going down again.

Perhaps it would be the message that all your money worries, or business worries, had been sorted out and you could relax.

Perhaps it would be the telephone call to say that you had been appointed to the job you had always longed for.

Whatever it might be, you would do things you normally would not.

You might dance round and round with a friend.

You might shout and throw your hat in the air.

You might phone everybody you could think of and invite them to a party.

You might sing a song. You might even make one up as you went along—probably out of snatches of poems and songs you already knew, or perhaps by adding your own new words to a great old hymn.

And if you lived in any kind of culture where rhythm and beat mattered, it would be the sort of song you could clap your hands to, or stomp on the ground.

“Now,” says Tom Wright, “read Mary’s song like that.”¹ Mary’s song, the *Magnificat*, is an expression of enthusiastic, excited, and exuberant praise of God.

You may recall that after the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was going to conceive and bear the Son of God (1:31), he told her that Elizabeth, her relative, had also conceived a son and that she was in her sixth month of pregnancy (1:36). So Mary arose and went with haste to visit Elizabeth (1:39).

The meeting between the two relatives was a time of great joy and celebration. Elizabeth burst out singing the *Benedicta*, pronouncing a blessing upon Mary, Jesus, and all who believe in Jesus. Mary responded with equal joy and elation by singing the *Magnificat*.

The *Magnificat* is a song of praise to God. Mary praised God for a number of his attributes. In our lesson for this evening, we are going to look at only one of those attributes.

¹ Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 13-14.

Scripture

Let us read Luke 1:46-48:

⁴⁶ **And Mary said,**

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ **and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

⁴⁸ **for he has looked on the humble estate
of his servant.**

**For behold, from now on all generations
will call me blessed....”** (Luke 1:46-

48)

Lesson

In this lesson, we learn that we should praise God for his condescension.

Mary began her song by saying, in verses 46b-47, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”**

“Magnifies” translates a form of the verb *megalynō*, which means, “to make great,” “to magnify” (hence *Magnificat*), “to enlarge”; figuratively it means, “to extol,” “to exalt,” “to celebrate,” “to esteem highly,” “to praise,” or “to glorify.”²

² John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 79.

“**Rejoices**” is another intense word. It is an expression of supreme joy.

Mary began her song by expressing supreme joy and delight in making God’s name great. That is foundational to praising God. We are to magnify his name, and no one or nothing else.

But why was Mary expressing supreme delight and joy in making God’s name great? It was because of God’s condescension toward her. She praised God that he took notice of her. She said in verse 48a, “**For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.**”

Mary was stunned that God would choose her to bear and give birth to God’s Son. She knew that she was a sinner. She had just praised God as her **Savior**. Mary was not sinless or immaculate, as the Roman Catholic Church claims. She was very aware that she needed a **Savior** to deliver her from her sin. Mary would vehemently deny that the reason God chose her to conceive his Son was that she was without spot or blemish. As Bishop J. C. Ryle, in his rather antiquated English, said, “We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to reprove the honor paid by the Romish Church to the Virgin Mary, than the Virgin Mary herself.”³

Mary was astonished that God had **looked** on her **humble estate**. She was just an ordinary girl from an insignificant Galilean village named Nazareth that was

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke, Vol. 1* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 35-36.

scorned by other Israelites (John 1:46).

Mary did not view herself as exalted in any way. In fact, she saw herself as God's "**servant**" (see also 1:38). The Greek word for "**servant**" (*doule*) is the feminine form of the word for "slave." Mary was the first person in the New Testament to identify herself as the Lord's slave—a designation that became the norm for Christians after the death and resurrection of Jesus (see 1 Corinthians 7:22; Ephesians 6:6; Revelation 1:1).

And even though Mary was God's servant, she also recognized the incredible blessing that God was bestowing on her. She said in verse 48b, "**For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.**"

To be the mother of Jesus was an incredible honor. No other woman in all history would bear that honor. And yet, Mary recognized that God choose her, not because she was sinless or meritorious, but rather because of his grace. He condescended to bless Mary, and for that she praised him.

We also should praise God for his condescension. None of us has any merit to present to God. Rather, we deserve God's judgment. But, in mercy, God has reached down to us and has given us his grace.

Conclusion

So, let us, like Mary, praise God for his condescension.

Are you a Christian? You should praise God for his

condescension that he has demonstrated to you. You have been adopted into the family of God by the finished work of Mary's son, Jesus, who was born, lived a perfect life, died to pay for your sin, and then was raised to life for your justification. You have a multitude of reasons to praise God.

Are you not yet a Christian? I invite you to ask God to give you the gift of faith. Ask God to help you believe that Jesus really is the sinless Savior of sinners. And then repent of your sin and ask God to forgive you. Then you too can join with Mary, the angels, and all the redeemed throughout history who praise God for all that he has done for you.

And if you should do so tonight, I believe you will have the best Christmas ever. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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