

The Bride of Christ Rejoices

Luke 1:46-56 (Read 1:26-56)

Halifax: 17 December 2023

Introduction

For some time, I have been planning to do a seasonal sermon about why Christ came, but when we set Katherine's baptism for today, I decided to preach on the Magnificat—

- Here we have the wonderful response of Mary to the blessing of conceiving Jesus Christ our Saviour.
- I looked back and found that I have preached on this text about every five years, but the sermons have been different,
 - often influenced by things we have been looking at recently as a congregation.
- Today is no different. Not only do we have a baptism today, but much of what I am going to say will have some correlation to our relatively recent sermon series on the Song of Solomon and our present series in Hebrews.

Let's proceed with our Scripture reading.

- We will read then from Luke 1:26-56...
- This is the word of God. Be sure to give it the attention that it is due.

Lu 1:26-56: Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name *was* Mary. ²⁸ And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored *one*, the Lord *is* with you; blessed *are* you among women!" ²⁹ But when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" ³⁵ And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.* ³⁶ Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old

age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. ³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord." ⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy *is*

His name. ⁵⁰ And His mercy *is* on those who fear Him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the* proud in the imagination of their hearts. ⁵² He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, and exalted *the* lowly. ⁵³ He has filled *the* hungry with good

things, and *the* rich He has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of *His* mercy, ⁵⁵ as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.” ⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

You see how Luke unfolds the marvellous circumstances surrounding the conception of Christ.

- Mary, a young maiden who is a virgin, betrothed to a man named Joseph, receives a visit from the angel Gabriel.
 - He announces that she is going to conceive and bring forth the one who will be called “the Son of the Highest” (that is, of God) and who will be the promised Son of David who is to reign on David’s throne forever—the Messiah!
- Mary asks how this can be possible because she had never had relations with a man.
 - Gabriel tells her that the Holy Spirit will form the child in her womb.
- In response to the angel, Mary essentially says, “Amen” with faith and submission.
 - Her words are, **“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”**
- Then she goes to see Elizabeth, a relative of hers who is much older than she is.
 - Elizabeth has miraculously conceived a son who is to be the herald of Jesus and whose name is to be John. John is to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.
 - And sure enough, as soon as Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth, Baby John leaps in the womb and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - She joyfully reacts as described in verse 42:
 - **Luke 1:42-45: Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ But why *is* this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”**

Then we have Mary’s Spirit-filled response to all of this in verse 46-55.

- This is what I want to focus on this morning.

I. Look at how beautifully Mary responds to God for His mercy to her and her people in their lowliness.

- She says, **“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.”**

A. She is all in with her praises.

1. She is not here one who is going through the mere external forms of worship.

- Her soul and her spirit are fully engaged and elated with God!
 - Not that her body remains inactive—she is speaking praise with her lips—but her heart is in it.
 - She is thrilled with the Lord and with what He has done.
2. She is an example to us all.
- The Lord confronts us for praying or giving to be seen by men—to get praise from other people...
 - And for going through the forms of worship outwardly when our heart is far away—perhaps singing beautifully or whatever, but not from a true heart of devotion and praise.
- B. Mary speaks of the two great features of a life well lived!
- That we magnify the Lord and rejoice in Him.
1. To magnify Him is to raise our regard for Him higher and higher, and with that to speak of Him and treat Him according to His excellence.
- It is to come up more and more to treating Him in the way He deserves—
 - We are debtors because we have not done that.
 - If we hire someone and we agree to pay them a certain amount for their work and they do the work well, but we don't pay them in full, we owe them a debt.
 - With God, we don't fully see His glory (our sin makes us blind) and we don't honour Him with the honour, obedience, and praise which He is due.
 - We are not thankful to Him, we do not marvel at His love and grace, admire His majesty and power, stand in awe of His holiness and justice.
 - Sometimes, we even treat Him as a nobody who has done little—as if what He has done He has not done well.
2. To rejoice in Him is to respond to His glory and perfection with gladness.
- To look upon Him and to delight in Him and His works, just as we might rejoice in a fine piece of art, a wonderful performance by a gymnast, or a new piece of amazing technology—even a new tool.
 - We sometimes magnify and rejoice in a new tool, or a concert, or whatever more than we magnify and rejoice in God.
3. This magnification of and rejoicing in God are our purpose as people.
- He made us to know Him and to delight in Him and to live for Him in the light of all that He is.
 - The Reformers recognised this when they sought to return to apostolic Christianity.
 - This comes to expression in the first question in our Larger and Shorter Catechisms... “What is the chief end of man?”
 - The answer is, “Man's chief end (or primary purpose) is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”
 - That is the same thing as to magnify Him and to rejoice in Him.
 - That is the purpose of life. That is what life is all about.

- God made us and blessed us and we are to magnify Him and to rejoice in Him.

TRANS> Mary is an excellent example of this.

II. But there is something that might be disturbing to us here if we are honest.

A. Notice what has stirred up Mary's joy and praise.

- She speaks of how God has delivered her and her people.
 - She speaks of her lowliness and the lowliness of her people and how God has brought down those who were exalted above them.
 - That is the emphasis, isn't it?
- 1. Look first at what she says about herself.
 - That she was a lowly person, but that now God has given her this child and she will be highly regarded—all those proud people who thought they were something will be brought down and everybody will have to regard her as blessed.
 - Even her older relative Elizabeth, who had her own special pregnancy, regards her much younger cousin as having a much greater blessing.
 - This makes Mary very pleased.

2. Look next at what she says about her people.

- They had been slaves and often oppressed,
 - As they were slaves in Egypt when God first came to them...
 - And then slaves again in Babylon...
 - And now they are under Roman rulers who tax them and oppress them.
- She speaks of how again and again God delivered them and that when He did, their proud enemies would be scattered and the mighty would be put down from their thrones.

B. There are two things here that might disturb us.

1. First, did Mary and her people really have it that bad?

- She speaks of her lowliness, but she almost sounds like an envious teenager who feels neglected and unnoticed.
 - She was not a slave or particularly oppressed at that time—the world was under Rome and the Romans had brought in a lot of peace and prosperity.
 - She was not rich, but she had sufficient resources and freedom to travel and spend three months with Elizabeth.
 - And she was soon to be married, not to a slave, but to a free man—yes, he was poor, but we know that he owned a donkey and a house—he was a tradesman.
- We have so much envy today—where everyone looks at whoever has more than they do with disdain.
 - And where everyone seems to compete for being the most victimised and oppressed person, or the most unappreciated, the hardest working, the one with the most troubles and hardships.
 - Is Mary revealing a heart like that here?
 - Yes, she speaks praises to the Lord for raising her up from her lowly estate, but is this something like a young woman who is envious of her friends

because she doesn't have as nice clothes or as nice a car who prays for deliverance and having a turn of events, becomes wealthy and then looks with disdain on those who used to be above her now that she is above them?

2. The other disturbing thing is this.
 - If God always favours the lowly over the wealthy, what good is it be lifted up to a higher station by Him?
 - Because as soon as you are lifted up, you become the one He despises—the one who is exalted and will be brought down.
 - You have just switched places and it will only be a matter of time until some poor person is raised up over you and you are the one who brought down, as described in verses 51-53: **He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered *the proud* in the imagination of their hearts.** ⁵² **He has put down the mighty from *their* thrones, and exalted *the lowly*.** ⁵³ **He has filled *the hungry* with good things, and *the rich* He has sent away empty.**
 - So the question becomes, how does God show favour to anyone by lifting them out of lowliness if exalting them puts them in the place of His disfavour?
3. And perhaps there is another question as well.
 - In the scriptures, we see God, again and again, lifting His people out of bondage or lowliness under their enemies,
 - But if that is His purpose, why is it that they always seem to end up in a lowly place again?
 - They come out of Egypt, but then die in the wilderness.
 - They are brought into the promised land, but then are oppressed by the Midianites and the Philistines and the Assyrians, and are eventually enslaved in Babylon.
 - They are brought out, but now, in Mary's time, here they are again under the dominion of a foreign power—Rome.

TRANS> How are we to understand all of this?

- Let me say emphatically that is what I just described it is not what Mary is talking about. She was not a whiny teenager who was resentful of her lowly place in life.

III. Mary speaks here for the whole church of which she is a member.

A. That means that she is of the people that God choose and called to be His wife so that they might be fruitful for Him.

1. God created people to be fruitful for Him.
 - Let me explain.
 - If we go back to Genesis, we are told that God made us, male and female, in His own image.
 - That means that we were created with the ability to live like God, but on a human scale—an image of Him.
 - Our lives would beautifully and gloriously reflect God's love, kindness, faithfulness, wisdom, justice, goodness, holiness, truth and so on.

- And right from the beginning, He blessed us and commanded us to be fruitful and to multiply ourselves so that the whole world would be filled with beautiful image bearers of God!
 - A whole world filled with people who love each other, who are holy and wise, who are just and faithful, who love God and live beautifully.
2. But before our first parents even had their first child, they became barren.
 - They rebelled against God and became dead in their trespasses and sins.
 - Now, they could not longer bring forth children that were like God because they had severed themselves from God.
 - They and their children were still constitutionally made in the image of God, but were now a very poor and distorted image of Him—an offensive image of Him.
 - God pronounced death upon them all.
 - They were barren in that, though they could have children, they and their children would all be dead in their trespasses and sins and would end up being cast away into the place of outer darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth—the pit of hell.
 3. Nevertheless, before God even drove them out of the garden of Eden, He came to Adam and Eve and promised to gather out a people to be His own people.
 - He promised that by His grace, these people He called out would bring forth a Son who would redeem all of those He calls out to be His people.
 - He promises that though they are ruined by sin, they will bring forth this Son... but as the years go by, they are barren.
 - God singles out Abraham and his posterity as the family from which this Son is to come, and He gives him circumcision to seal the promise.
 - There are many hopeful prospects, but all of them turn out to be sinful.
 - Yet God continues to renew His promise for 2000 years from Abraham—and they go forward, seeking God’s kingdom, a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God.
 - They continue by faith, believing that God will give them this son and this kingdom.
- Now we are ready to understand the lowliness that Mary speaks about in her song.
- B. The lowliness she speaks of is the church’s inability to bring forth the godly offspring and in particular the godly Son that God has promised to her.
 1. Everyone in the church shares in this lowliness.
 - When God calls us into His kingdom in truth, He exposes our sin to us.
 - We see our sin and our inability to bring forth fruit in our lives that pleases Him.
 - God would have to pardon them and God would have to deliver them.
 - Before Jesus came, the people also saw their inability to bring forth the Son that would redeem them.
 - They were God’s wife, but they were barren and unfruitful.

- It would only be by His hand that they would bring forth the Son of Righteousness who would save them.
2. So Mary, in speaking of lowly and the proud, the empty and the full, is not speaking about riches and dominion in this world.
- She is speaking of the awareness that she and all the members of the true church have of their inability to be what they ought to be—the inability to please God—and their inability to bring forth the godly Son who would redeem them all.
 - The proud are those who are, on the other hand, those who acknowledge no need for redemption.
 - They do not acknowledge that they have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
 - They mock and disdain salvation by grace.
 - Some of them are atheists.
 - Some of them are Pharisees and churchmen who boast in their own works or ceremonies.
3. When Mary is told that she is going to bring forth the Son of promise, she speaks for the whole church, barren, and in the wilderness.
- God has given the barren woman, who was poor and unable to bring forth a child, the Son that He has promised.
 - Look at v. 54-55: **He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, ^{ss} as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."**
 - It is not that now she and her fellow believers are going to be richer in this world's goods than their ungodly counterparts.
 - It is that they will at last be able to please God because the Son of righteousness has come.
 - He will please God and He will redeem them and He will save them from bondage to sin, Satan, and death.
 - That is what she and her companions in church want.
 - The proud will go on pursuing their own goals without God, and they will be utterly frustrated.
 - At the last day, they and their disdain of God will be fully exposed.
 - The barren bride who trusted in God's promise to Abraham of deliverance and salvation will be blessed forever in God's house as His fruitful bride.

I wonder, where are you in all this?

- Are you part of the true church—the lowly ones, the ones who are poor in spirit, recognising that their only hope is in God's promised salvation?
- Or are you one who sees no need of salvation?