

# The Joy of Salvation

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to continue with our Advent series going through Luke's gospel. Yeah, this account of Jesus' life and now his account of his birth. But why don't we pray before we do that, before Annabelle comes up to read, because this is God speaking to us. So let's pray.

Father, thank you that you are speaking, God. Thank you that you speak to words of love, words of hope, words of joy, words of salvation. Father, we pray that each of us would hear you speak today through the reading as Annabelle reads.

Also, as I try to explain this passage, pray that you would speak to each of our hearts and would each of us hear what we need to hear from you today. Thank you for your love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Annabelle. The scripture for today comes from Luke chapter 1, verses 39 to 56.

Please follow along on your Bible, on the bulletin, or on the screen. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah.

[ 1 : 24 ] And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thought of their hearts.

[ 2 : 44 ] He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his offspring forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. This is the word of God. Thank you, Annabelle.

That was really well read, as we'll come to in a moment. Because you could hear the excitement, right? You could hear the joy. Because, yeah, that is what's happening today.

I mean, last week we talked about movies. If you were here, I want to do so again. Why do we often use movies as illustrations? Well, because movies are, well, they are art, right?

[ 3 : 41 ] They are usually art that's supposed to have a message to us. And that's a bit like the Bible. The Bible isn't a dry theology textbook that you read, and it's all true.

But, you know, it has theology, but it communicates it with literature, with poetry, right, with stories. It's supposed to be art, and that is supposed to communicate something.

And that's what we see again today. Today, actually, we're in a musical, right? You know, a musical, right? It's a movie, and then suddenly everyone breaks into song, or someone breaks into song.

And you kind of know this is an important moment. This is when the story kind of stops, and we sing. And that song kind of communicates some of the importance, some of the meaning, some of the emotion we should be feeling at this point of the story.

And that is what we're doing today. And, I mean, it's not much of a musical, Luke's Gospel. There's only two songs, only this week and next week, and the rest is all stories. So these must be important, right?

[ 4 : 44 ] If you were here a few weeks ago when we finished 2 Samuel, there were all stories. But then at the end we had that psalm, that poetry, and that kind of really stood out.

Okay, here is the big message. And again, today we stop. And, yeah, because Mary breaks out in song. That's what we're going to look at.

I mean, we read slightly more, but I'll focus on this song that should give us the meaning and emotion of Christmas. Because we need that, right? I don't know how you feel.

December is always so busy. It's the end of the semester. It's a Christmas concert for the kids, and gift exchanges and office parties and all these kind of other things.

And it's just so rushed and busy. And we don't stop and think, what is Christmas really about?

That's why it's great to come to church and it's great to look at this passage. Now, this is a very famous passage.

[ 5 : 41 ] That song has its own name. Maybe if you have a Bible, it says, in my Bible, it says, Mary's Song of Praise to Magnificat. If you ever hear Magnificat, you wonder, well, that's this song.

Basically, it comes from the Latin title. Magnificat mea anime dominum. My soul magnifies the Lord. It just means magnifies in Latin, if you wonder.

But, yeah, it's a wonderful song. And what do we see? What does this song communicate? Well, first of all, I guess you can't get away from this passage that there's great joy, right?

You can't avoid it. All through, it's a joy. That's why Annabelle read it. So, enthusiastically, right?

Because people are filled with the Holy Spirit and praising God.

And then there's babies leaping for joy. And Mary says, my soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. You couldn't sing, if you would make music for this song, right?

[ 6 : 41 ] It would all be in a major key. It would all be joyful and happy because that is what it's supposed to be, right? That Jesus has come into the world.

Jesus is going to be born. That gives such joy. Because joy, Christian joy, it's not just a feeling. It's not based on dopamine or whatever.

No, this is because it has an objective basis. God has done something. And God has, yeah, well, he's, what does she rejoice in?

Rejoices in God, my Savior. God has brought salvation. And, you know, no matter what else life is like, I don't know if Mary had morning sickness, but, you know, God's salvation gave her joy, right?

And it should give us joy. Christianity is a religion of joy based on, yeah, what God has done. It's all through Luke, right? In a few weeks, it's Christmas. And what does the angel tell to the shepherds?

[ 7 : 38 ] Behold, I bring you good news of great joy because today a Savior has been born to you.

That same idea. If God comes to save, that is a wonderful occasion of joy.

Actually, something that always has characterized Christians. I mean, if you think about that, you know, Christians always love singing. We sang today wonderful music, right? Full of joy.

It's not a modern thing. You read some history. And like in the first century, there was this, we have this letter from some Roman guy to one of his superiors, and he was supposed to arrest some Christians.

And so, well, I arrested them, and I interviewed them, but they hadn't really committed any crimes.

They just, they met together, and they sang songs to this guy called Jesus as if he's a god, right?

But singing songs, right? In the first century, all throughout history, Christians love singing. I mean, who does that? You don't think of all the other major religions.

[ 8 : 41 ] In which religion do people, do all the believers gather together and joyfully sing songs?

Christianity is slightly different from everything else. Christianity is, yeah, it's about joy.

Joy because God saves. But what about that salvation? We use that word a lot. What actually does this song say God is going to do or has started to do with the coming of Jesus?

And that is what I want to look at today. And the big thing we see here is a great reversal. Right?

When you hear this song, God is going to turn everything upside down.

He's going to reverse everything. The song basically falls into two sections. The first part is about Mary and what God did for her. And then the second part is more general, what God will do for everyone.

That's kind of the structure. And they are related, right? Because what does Mary say? Verse 48. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. And then later in verse 52, he's exalted those of humble estate, right?

[ 9 : 53 ] God is consistent. And what God did for Mary, in a way, is what he will do in some way for everyone. Now, if you're interested, this song is a copy of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel.

Same kind of idea. First her and then everyone. And again, this theme of God reversing everything. It's part of the whole Old Testament feeling. I'm not going to talk much about that.

I talked about it two weeks ago. Next week, Oscar will talk about it. But Mary. What did God do for Mary? Why is Mary so, wow, elated?

What is the reversal for her? I mean, it's huge for her, right? Verse 48. He has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed.

She went from a really humble estate to being blessed by everyone. Because as we heard last week, you know, who was Mary? Mary was a teenage girl, right?

[ 10 : 54 ] Probably quite poor. She was from a nothing town, from a marginalized people group. I don't think anyone outside Nazareth would know about Mary, right, back then.

But now, all generations will call me blessed. Throughout history, she'll be honored. Think about it. Who is the most famous woman in history?

Have you ever thought about it? Who's the most famous woman in history? Who comes to mind? I don't know. Cleopatra? Yeah, the queen of Egypt? I don't know. Marie Curie, who, you know, discovered radioactivity?

Those kind of things? Actually, the most famous woman is Mary, right? Billions of people around the world know her. Throughout history have known this woman.

She is the most famous woman in history. Because, of course, she had the most important job ever. Giving birth to the Messiah, right? Can you imagine carrying the savior of the world around for nine months?

[ 11 : 52 ] That's a very, very important job. But, yeah. But what an honor, right? For this teenage girl. And now she's become the most famous woman in history. Just because God chose her for this really important job.

To be part of his plan of salvation. But it's not just for her. Because then it goes general. God generally, he will, well.

Verse 51. He has shown strength with his arm. He scattered the proud in the faults of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones. And exalted those of humble estate.

And he's filled the hungry with good things. And the rich he has sent away empty. God is turning everything upside down. Again, exalting the humble. The upside down nature, kind of.

Now, in a way, in a way it sounds good. But at the same time, it's a bit weird, right? You'd expect her to start singing about the cross. And you'd start to sing about sin.

[ 12 : 54 ] And something like that. Right? If you'd ask her about the good news of salvation. You know, if I would ask you that. Then I would expect those kind of things. Rather than things about the hungry getting food.

And the rich being sent away. Don't know if you were expecting these verses. And so I want to look at them more closely. Because they feel so social and political.

Right? Bringing down people from the throne. And sending away the rich. That's not really what we expect. I mean, some people think, oh, this is like the French Revolution. Right? Of course, it's not a revolution.

Right? It's not the people rising up. It is God doing it. This is what God one day will do to change the world. It's not about us. You know, so this is not a revolutionary passage.

But still, you know, what does this passage mean? I mean, we think, okay, verse 54, we can understand. Right? He has helped his servant Israel.

[ 13 : 52 ] Okay? It's for God's people. But what about the rich and the hungry? After all, you know, where would you put yourself? Okay? There's the rich and the hungry. How would you describe yourself?

Rich or hungry? I guess most of us would say, hey, aren't we rich? Compared to the rest of the world. Now, what is God talking about here? Well, who will be part of this?

Well, actually, what God is, this reversal, it's all about justice and mercy. That's what we're going to talk about. Justice and mercy. Now, why justice?

Well, actually, it sounds social, but there is a kind of an ethical, there is a kind of God dimension to this, right? Because it's not just about rich and hungry.

It says he scattered the proud, right? And he exalts the humble. So this is about more, the heart is mentioned here, right? Some people, they are more Godward, the humble, and people who are opposed to God, the proud.

[14:55] And actually, in most parts of the world, those things are connected to your social status. I mean, how do people in most of the world get rich? You get rich through injustice, through corruption, through exploitation.

When resources are scarce, if you have much more than everyone else, it's usually by the wrong means. So when it says God will bring down, yeah, bring down the rich, that is about, yeah, people who are corrupt, people who are unjust.

Often, social status is linked to faith. In many countries, you know, Christians are among the poorest people. Why? Because there's this majority religion, and Christianity is just a minority. And the majority religion tends to discriminate against Christians. And so, in many places, yeah, believers tend to be the poorest people. And then the rich are more than the majority.

That's kind of what it is. It's what it was like for the Jews in Jesus' time. It was the Romans who were in charge. And God's people, well, they were the oppressed who were, you know, they were under the yoke of the Romans.

[16:08] So that's the thing here. And that is just a real thing for them. I mean, we say often disparagingly, okay, they were waiting for someone to save them from the Romans.

They needed someone to save them from sin. That's true, but they still needed someone to save them from the Romans, right? It wasn't wrong for them to want to be free of oppression. Because back then, believers generally were oppressed.

And I don't know if you've ever thought about that. Isn't that completely wrong? Isn't how the world is just wrong, right? That the people who are corrupt and unjust, they have the best life.

And the people who are honest and caring, well, they're poor. That is wrong, isn't it? Those who love God and follow him, they are oppressed and discriminated against.

And those who reject God, well, they're in power. Isn't that the wrong way around? Isn't that completely against God's character? Well, it is. And that's why God says, well, he's going to turn that upside down.

[17:13] Or actually, you know, the world is already upside down. The world is the wrong way around. And actually, what God is going to do, he's going to do it the right way up. This is about God making the world the right way up.

Bringing justice, right? It's not, yeah, it's not just random upside down. No, this is making the world as it should be. And you see that when you think, yeah, okay, social status and your attitude to God are linked.

They're like an inverse. And now that's going to be said right. So, by the way, this doesn't mean if you're rich, that's a problem. It depends a bit how you got rich.

If you got rich through injustice and exploiting people, maybe it's a problem. But otherwise, it's fine. Or if you're very successful because you've been hiding your faith, right?

I mean, Hong Kong is a wonderful free place at the moment. It's easy to be a Christian. But I sometimes, yeah, I met some lawyer. And I would never tell my colleagues that I'm a Christian. It might hurt my career, yeah?

[18:20] If that's what makes you successful, that's not quite how Jesus wants you to live. So, justice. And that's a good thing, right? I hope you hear this and think, yeah, that's what it should be.

But at the same time, there's a big focus on mercy. This section on reversal, it's surrounded by mercy, right? Verse 50, and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Verse 54, he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy. In both cases, right, there's mercy for God's people. And that is always good news, right?

Justice depends on what side you're on, but mercy surely is always good news. But why mercy? Well, the Jews, they were maybe God's people.

And they were being oppressed. But if you read the Bible, and I'm sure many of us have done that over the past year, as we read through the Old Testament, they didn't really deserve good things, right?

[ 19 : 24 ] They had rejected God. They disobeyed his law. In some way, their oppression was coming to them. That's the thing, right? They were sinners, and sinners get judgment.

In the Old Testament, what happens when the nation sins, they would get oppressed. So there's a sense in which being poor and oppressed, it's just, you know, being under the judgment of sin, on judgment for your sin.

And for God to then set them free is mercy, because they didn't deserve it. Right? That is, so in a way that this whole, you know, for the Jews, being set free meant being saved from their sin.

And it's true that they were under the Romans, but that was just a symptom. In biblical thought, yeah, if you sin, you deserve judgment.

And that judgment often in the Old Testament came in terms of oppression. And in a way, isn't that the case for the whole world, right? Because in a way, the whole world is sinful, and so the whole world is oppressed.

[ 20 : 30 ] I love that hymn we sang last week, O Holy Night. And there's this line, a long laid world in sin and error pining. But that's our world.

It's lying in sin. It's oppressed by sin. It's covered in sin. And with sin, the suffering, the curse, the brokenness.

All of that is lying on this world, right? And all of that is what affects us. It's what we suffer from. Yes, for them it was the Romans. For us it comes in so many ways.

But in a way, it means that actually all of humanity in some sense is oppressed, right? All of us are lying on our sin. You know, who is really in charge in this world?

Well, it's sin and Satan and hell, right? And death. That is who really rules the world in some sense, spiritually. And so the way the Bible develops, you know, ultimately this points to being freed from sin and its judgment.

[ 21 : 35 ] And so that is something that's helpful for us. Because yes, for them, rich and poor and the mighty and the humble, maybe we don't identify with that.

But how many of us suffer from this broken world? How many of us, yeah, we were rich and successful. But we suffer from sin and we suffer from loneliness and from relational difficulties and from bodies that don't work and from health problems, right?

The brokenness that lies on this world, that oppresses us, that we are in some way victims to, even though it's our fault. That is the world we live in. And God in his mercy will change it.

He sees us oppressed, either by sin or by others. And his heart of mercy goes out to our suffering. And God sees the injustice and his heart of justice goes out to us.

And he sent his son to turn the world right side up, to change all that, to set people free, to set those oppressed by sin, oppressed by brokenness, free.

[ 22 : 45 ] Judge the proud oppressors. Bless his humble people. God is going to reverse, yeah, everything wrong with his world. Of course, he hasn't fully done that yet.

You look outside the world and when you look in our lives, of course, so much is still wrong. So, this is, you know, it's a plan in a few stages.

And one day Jesus will come back. There's a delay to give people a chance to repent. But in a way, the end started, right? The coming of Jesus was the beginning of the end.

The beginning of the end of history when God makes everything right. And that's why Mary is singing. Because can you think of any better news? Can you think of anything more worth celebrating than God putting this world right?

Getting rid of all the oppression and injustice and brokenness and curse and sin. Everything that we suffer from. Right? Freedom and mercy and justice for the oppressed in every way.

[ 23 : 46 ] Reversal of the suffering and brokenness of this world. But it's wonderful. Yeah? So, this is wonderful news. And no wonder we should sing about it. And we have been singing about it.

Though at the same time... Again, it's not necessarily for everyone, right? Because it does talk about some people being brought down.

And some people not being part of it. It's not fully universal. And the angle here, that's an interesting angle, is about the proud versus the humble.

Because, you know, this is kind of wonderful news for the humble. But it's not good news for the proud. But you hear that and you think, oh, that's very straightforward, right? This is about believers. But actually, you read on in Luke's Gospel.

And actually, proud and humble isn't always the same. Right? So, for example, Jesus told this story about the Pharisee and the tax collector. And you come from a basic Old Testament framework.

[ 24 : 48 ] Well, who's the good guy? That's the Pharisee, right? He's religious. He's a good guy. And the tax collector, well, he's a traitor, right? He works with the Romans. He's rich, probably.

And so, that's the bad guy. That's how we think, right? And so, the Pharisee will be exalted and the tax collector will be brought down. But actually, what was their heart like, right?

The Pharisee, oh, God, thank you that I'm so good and I'm so holy and I'm so much better than everyone else. And he was rejected. And the tax collector, he was humble.

Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Right? Sometimes proud and humble isn't exactly who we think it is. Because, in a way, Christmas is a very, it's a humbling message, right?

Christmas is a wonderful celebration. But it's a celebration that God did something we couldn't do. And God came to save because we couldn't save ourselves.

[ 25 : 52 ] And Jesus came to get us out because we couldn't get out ourselves. I don't know if you ever thought about that message. Is that a message that you like? Because a lot of people don't like it because it hurts their pride.

Right? Because, I mean, for me, certainly, I don't like to be helped. Right? You know, I often go shopping and I usually go walking. And then my wife asks, oh, shall I pick you up? And I always say no.

Right? I mean, partly, hey, let's not waste fuel. I like the exercise. But also, I mean, do I look like I need help? Right? I don't need help.

I can do this. You know, my pride gets in the way. But in a much bigger way, isn't Christmas the same thing?

We need help. We are sinners. We are oppressed. We can't get out ourselves. Right? We can't save ourselves. That is the message of Christmas. And for some people, it's really offensive. I have family members and I've tried to share the gospel with them.

[ 26 : 53 ] But the most difficult thing is just, yeah, accepting that I'm not good enough. Right? Accepting that I can't save myself. That is such a message that hurts our pride.

Right? So how do you feel about Christmas? How do you feel about this message that you can't save yourself? That you need, well, you're in such a desperate situation that God needs to come down and become a baby and die for you.

It's a very humbling message. Right? Especially if you're here, yeah, you're not yet a Christian. And maybe that is the thing that holds you back. Right? Because this is such an offensive message that we're not good enough.

We can't do it. Christmas is for the humble, not for the proud. Or maybe it's people who are happy with the world as it is.

Right? Maybe you've built a really good life here. Jesus says, you know, this world needs to be changed. But actually, hey, I've built a really good life here. My life doesn't need changing.

[ 27 : 52 ] Everything's good. I've done that. You know, sometimes there's not pride towards God, but just pride within this world, what we've done, what we've achieved. Actually, God says, well, no, the world needs to change.

It's the wrong way around. And only the humble will accept that. Right? Only the humble will say, yes, my life needs changing. My life is not what it should be. Please come and change it.

And maybe it's sometimes our attitude to other people. You read on in Luke's gospel. And we go on into Acts.

And because that is a two-volume work. So this is, in a way, also an introduction to Acts. And then, well, it's a lot about the Jews and the Gentiles. Right? And you read Mary's song, the Magnificat, and you think, okay, it's the Gentiles who are going to get brought down.

And the Jews are going to get exalted. Except that the Jews, yeah, they were happy to be rescued. Right? Yes. Oh, we need God's mercy. We can't save ourselves.

[ 28 : 52 ] But then God starts saving Gentiles as well. And then, oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, we don't want Gentiles. No, no, only for us. Right? There was a pride, maybe not in their goodness, but pride in their status, pride in their ethnicity, pride in their privilege.

Again, maybe that's some of us here, right? That we think we're better than other people. We're better than, our kind of people are much better than those others over there.

And I'm glad we don't have them in our church or whatever. You know, that's not a good attitude, right? The humble would say, I'm a sinner. I don't care what everyone else is like, but I know I'm not good enough.

I'm no better than anyone else. That's humility. So, it's worth searching our hearts, right? How do we really feel about Christmas?

Is there any pride? Or, yeah, do we see Christmas for what it is? Do we see our needs? Because that's what it is, right? If we feel proud, if we are convicted of our self-sufficiency, our independence, you know, our achievements, just confess your sin.

[ 30 : 02 ] Admit your sin. Admit your failure. Admit your need for Jesus. Jesus, I need you. I can't do it. I can't save myself. I need you.

That is what it's about, right? It's about humbling yourself. Come talk to me after the service if you want to know more. I'd love to help you follow Jesus.

I'd love to help you surrender to him. But, yeah, Christmas, it is for the humble. But if you've done that, it's the most wonderful thing, right? It's salvation. Reversal. The world right side up.

Everything we've been longing for. Everything we've been dreaming about. Everything we've been wishing was true. Everything that God has promised. Everything that we never deserved.

All because Jesus came. Because he was born and grew and died and rose. So that should give us hope, right? That should make us sing for joy.

[ 30 : 59 ] Even if life is hard. Even if we see the world. We see the injustice. Maybe we see the brokenness in our own life. Maybe especially then. Right? Let's sing of Jesus coming.

Let's sing of the change he brought. Let's sing of what he will do. And would that give us joy? Yeah? Why don't we pray for that? And then we'll take the Lord's Supper together.

Father, thank you that you are a good God.

We see your goodness in so many ways. In this great salvation. This great reversal. This great thing that started with the birth of Jesus. And will be completed when he returns.

Thank you for your mercy. For sinners like us. Who couldn't save themselves. Thank you for your justice. That will make things as they should be. That makes things according to your holy righteous character.

[ 32 : 03 ] That the world is good again. Where goodness is everything. And sin is gone. Thank you that you will change the world. Thank you that it's not something that we do.

It's all what you do. Because we can't do anything. Just help us to be humble. Help us to see our needs. Help us to admit it. When our pride gets in the way.

But to come to Jesus. To put all our hope in him. All our trust in him. And to then rejoice in what you have done for us. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.