

Merry Christmas, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ...

Isn't it a wonderful blessing, that we're able to gather together as the people of God, and worship our Lord, as we celebrate His birth....

This year we've been studying the Gospel of Luke (& next year). And when it comes to the Christmas story (and we see it reflected in the Christmas carols as well), a key theme has to be "praise" and "worship". The shepherds; angels; wise men... all praising and worshipping God. And the reading I've chosen for today, gives voice to the praise and worship of Mary...

It's actually a song, or poetry, and it's known as "The Magnificat". And the reason it's known as "The Magnificat", is because Mary says: "**My soul magnifies the Lord**.. That means "my soul" – that deep part within me – my very personal being, "makes Him great" – her soul praises/extols God...

Now, that might seem a bit strange. God is already great – how do **we** magnify God? But the thing is, when the people of God extol the **greatness** of God, that's putting it out there, for others to hear, and for others to know that our God is Great.

But before we dig too far into this, I want to set the scene a bit.

As I said, we've been studying the Gospel of Luke, and I'm pretty sure I might have told you right at the start (if I didn't, I should've), that The Gospel of Luke actually has two parts to it. The first part, is the Gospel of Luke, and the 2nd part is the Book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles)... They were both recorded by Luke, and Luke himself sees the Book of Acts as the 2nd volume of his Gospel... In fact, Acts 1:1 says: **In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up** And of course, the Book of Acts continues on, with what Jesus continued to do, through His disciples.

So, why am I telling you this now? It's because the Magnificat, some of it is about Mary's personal experience of God, and a fair bit of it is prophetic – it's looking forwards to what God **will** do through Jesus...

And so, we can almost see it as an introduction. It touches on some important themes that will come out in the teachings/parables of Jesus, and then will continue to unfold through the Book of Acts...

E.g., we hear:

- How the mercy of God extends to **all** who fear Him – we see that unfold in the book of Acts, where the Gentile (non-Jewish) God-fearers are filled with the Holy Spirit, and receive the mercy of God.
- And in the teachings of Jesus, we hear how the rich and the powerful will not respond to the Lord, and how the poor and the nobodies are the ones who are blessed. (Sorta like, the first will be last, and the last will be first);

- And how God's covenant with his people Israel, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ...

It's prophetic – it's looking forwards to what God will do through Jesus.

Alright:

So, let's get into it.

We begin with worship, and it's a worship that is intensely personal. Mary worships God – she **magnifies** God, from her soul.

What is worship for you? Is it a going through the motions to blend in with the religious crowd? Or is it deeply personal? Does worship well-up from your soul???, or is your worship dependant on others???

Let me help you to try and sort that out:

Do you need:

- a concert-like atmosphere to get you going?
- moving music, preferably led by a world-class musician?
- dimmed lights; and perhaps a smoke-machine to give a bit of Holy Spirit 'ambiance'?
- need something akin to a cheer-squad to gee you up to worship?
- Or maybe you might need some candles and a pipe-organ to inspire worship???

Something I learned a long time ago, is "If I need some special conditions to inspire me to worship, and if I find it difficult to worship, unless the conditions are 'just so',,, that

says more about the worshipper, (and my shallowness/distance from God) than it does about the **place** of worship.

Are you hearing me??? Your worship shouldn't be dependent on others...

In Jesus Christ, we have every reason to worship, from the depths of our soul, and if you do not worship God from the depths of your soul, are you even saved??? Mary said: **my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour**

Wow. We don't really think of Mary needing a saviour, but she **did**, just like we do.

God didn't choose Mary because she was perfect and sinless. He chose her in His mercy and in grace. She was of lowly position. God saw that / God knew that...

And that's our story too, isn't it??? Mary is praising God, her Saviour. And that's the exact same reason **we** praise God today, for the birth of **our** Saviour. God is fully aware of our state of utter unworthiness, but even so, He sent Jesus to die for **we**, who are unworthy....

And Mary is so humbled (that God would come to her). She refers to herself as a servant/female slave/hand-maiden...

Let's compare Mary, and her humility to the repugnant, modern, self-absorbed, self-important culture of today... Often the Gospel message today, gets presented as:

- "You're so wonderful.

- You've got an inner beauty about you, that God can see and others don't.
- You are so valuable to God that He couldn't possibly go through eternity without you..."...

Yes He can!!!! God doesn't need you, any more than He needs me!!!!

We're the ones who need God.

And when God looks at you, He doesn't see "the beauty within" – He sees the sin!

And that's what makes the Gospel so beautiful... You and I, we **know** we're totally unworthy. And if a person **doesn't** know that they're unworthy before God, they're filled with foolish narcissistic pride...

Why would Jesus leave the glorious throne-room of Heaven to be born in the most humble of circumstances??? Why would He be willing to suffer the scourge of the whip, and the impaling of the nails????

Because we were so wonderful and He couldn't live without us??? **No** – Because we are totally unworthy, and He is merciful. – That's the beauty of the Gospel. God loves you, not because you are lovable – He loves you because God **is** love, and God is merciful.

Mary truly was blessed, to carry the Son of God in her womb. And she was blessed to have the responsibility of caring for the Son of God in His childhood. But, that doesn't mean we praise/worship Mary. We simply recognise, and marvel, that

she was truly blessed (not because she deserved it). Just as **we** are truly blessed, that God has mercy on us, and comes as **our** Saviour, and lives in **us** by His Holy Spirit, even though **we** don't deserve it.

Righto,

There are 3 characteristics of God, that this song draws out:

The:

- Power of God;
- Holiness of God; and
- Mercy of God...

1.

Firstly, the **Power** of God.

He is mighty. He is strong... He does great things. He did great things for Mary. He does great things for us... Think of the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead...

And it's the power of God, that scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and brings the mighty down from their thrones...

Why does He do that? Does God have something against rich people? Does He have something against the high achievers and the ruling-class... No...

Let me tell you why, and this is a generalisation, but it's often true:

- The more power one has;

- The more money one has;
- The more assets one has,

often

- the more pride that goes with it; and
- the more self-confidence; and
- the less a person feels, they need God...

By the strength of God's arm, those who (in their pride) have gone through life not needing God, will be brought low...

And those who go through life, selfishly hoarding what they have, will go away empty..., while those who have nothing, are the first to cry out to God...

2.

Secondly, the **Holiness** of God...

Now, if God is Holy, how can sinful man be in communion/relationship with a Holy God? If God is holy, how could I ever enter eternal life (in glory)??? Well, I couldn't... Which is why God sent His Son...

Part of the covenant promise of God to Israel (right throughout the Old Testament), is that God would deliver His people, and make them holy. And the coming of Jesus, was always God's plan, and V54 says:

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Through Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, sin and death are conquered, and by faith, He takes away our sin, and gives us righteousness and holiness...

And so, we truly can commune with God, because in Christ, our sin is taken away, and He sanctifies us to a state of holiness...

3.

But I reckon, the 3rd characteristic of God – the **Mercy** of God, is the highlight of this song...

We've already talked a fair bit about the mercy of God, but this morning, I want to highlight V50.

**⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.**

What does it mean to fear God? Well, it doesn't really mean to be afraid... I mean, Satan is afraid of God – he's terrified of God – he knows he's beaten, and he's destined for the torment of Hell.

To fear God, is to have a deep, reverential respect for God... To fear God, means we recognise Him and relate to Him as our Lord... He is the Lord God almighty – that means, we bow before Him in total submission... And, if the Lord does not take priority in a person's life, that's a pretty good indicator, that they don't really fear God...

⁵⁰ ... his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

That means, this has been true, right from the beginning, and it **will** be true, right through to the end... Each generation will be judged, by how we relate to God...

In every generation, there will be some who fear God, and there will be some who **lose** the fear of God...

I am in no doubt, that in general, our culture have lost the fear of God...

There once was a time, when, if a loved one was admitted to hospital, and they weren't sure they were get out, their family would call the minister, to come and visit, and to pray with them, to make sure their loved one had the chance to get right with God....

That rarely happens any more... The minister doesn't usually get the call now, until a few days after the undertaker... And what good is that??? ... Our culture has well and truly lost that underlying "fear of God"....

But I want you to hear this today: What I've just referred to as "an underlying fear of God" (that once was part of our culture), that's not the fear of God – that's a **superstition** – it's a just-in-case thing, just in case there's something real about this God stuff....

A **genuine** fear of God, is a deep, reverential respect for God, where we bow before Him in total submission, because He is Lord. And if He is Lord, He gets priority, in all things.

Every generation takes a stand on this. Where do you stand?

Do you fear God?

Do you fear God, like your parents fear God? Is He your priority, like He's your parent's priority?

Do you fear God, like your Grandparents feared God? Is your faith, as strong and deep, as your Grandparent's was? – that you live by it...

Or, maybe there's been no heritage of faith in your family, ever.... And maybe you're the first generation to fear God – to bow before Jesus as Lord, and to be filled with a faith, born from the experience of the saving mercy of God.

Merry Christmas everyone.

The birth of Jesus, is the fulfillment of the promise of God, to bring mercy.

his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we praise You for Your Power;
Your holiness; and
Your mercy.

Lord,
we confess we are sinful;
we are totally undeserving;
totally unworthy...

And yet, by Your grace,
and in great mercy,
You sent Your Son,
to live;
and die;
that we might be saved.

Oh Lord, fill us with a holy fear.
A deep, reverential awe and respect.

And may our lives be filled with genuine worship;
Overflowing by Your Spirit,
from our soul....

To You be the glory on this Christmas morning;

And to You be the glory,
in every part of our lives,

Amen.