

# Mary's Song

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 December 2018

Preacher: Brian King

- [ 0 : 00 ]     Father, I pray indeed that you will be at work through your spirit this morning. Please work in our hearts. Bring us to yourself and help us to see and hear your good news of great joy once again.
- In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. Those are the opening lines of Mary's song and I wonder how your hearts and your minds process them when you heard them read out.
- Perhaps a number of you were going, yes Mary, yes. That's right. My soul does glorify the Lord and rejoices in him.
- It's Christmas time. It's a happy time. That's how I feel. Those are my emotions. I'm in high spirits. I can join with Mary's song. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
- But perhaps there's also quite a number of us who are shaking our heads and saying, No, Mary. No. I mean good for you, Mary, if you're happy.
- [ 1 : 18 ]     Good for you if you're joyful. But that's not me. I had someone in my family die this year at all too young an age.
- I have all sorts of things wrong with my body and my mind. I'm just carrying too great a load of anxieties at the moment. Maybe I ought to glorify and rejoice in the Lord.
- But that's not me. Certainly not now. So good for you, Mary. But please excuse me if I choose to mute your song and close my ears.
- And then there's arguably an even greater number of us who are kind of neither here nor there. Mary's song? Oh, it is nice. It's not unpleasant.
- It's not offensive to me that she's sharing her joy in God. But I don't feel strongly about it. I'm neither wanting to join in nor wanting her to shut up.
- [ 2 : 25 ]     Mary, your song is a bit like hearing about my distant cousin whom I hardly know having a baby. I might smile upon hearing the news and seeing the cute photo.
- But I'm not exactly jumping around for joy. Mary, your song is what the emcee at the recent wedding reception I was at caused soft music.
- The kind of song that plays in the background and is generally ignored. And that would be a great shame. Once upon a time, Mary's song was as well known as the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23.
- Her song even has its own name in church history, the Magnificat, which is the first word of the first line of this song in Latin. But I suspect in our audience today, many of us are no longer familiar with this song or its significance.
- And that's a great shame. Because, you see, this song is not just soft music. It's not just a personal song of an individual who lived long, long ago and who just happened to be feeling very happy.
- [ 3 : 43 ]     No, Mary's song is far more than that. It's a song about why we can have joy no matter what's going on in our lives. It's a song about where joy comes from.

It's a song grounded in truth. And so it's a song that's permanently applicable whatever our history, whatever our culture, whatever our circumstances.

And so appropriately, it's a song that makes the Christmas playlist. So let's have a look at this song in its wider context and let's discover where joy comes from.

And this passage has three things to tell us. Firstly, joy comes from knowing God keeps promises. God keeps promises.

That's in verses 39 to 45. But first, let's quickly get up to speed with what Luke, Jesus' biographer, has told us so far. In verses 1 to 4, he makes clear to us that he's being an investigative journalist, recording for us in an orderly fashion what's happening in first century Palestine.

[ 5 : 00 ] And he's helping us to make sense of it all. And then in verses 5 to 25, he introduces us to this couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priest and his wife, old and without children.

But an angel comes to Zechariah while he's in the temple, tells him Elizabeth is going to have a son, and he would bring them great joy. That's John the Baptist, in case you didn't know.

And sure enough, Elizabeth falls pregnant. Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, Luke now brings us to a town called Nazareth. That's verses 26 to 38.

And this time it's a young couple, not an old one whom we're told about. Joseph and Mary. They're engaged, not yet married, when an angel also comes to marry.

And he tells her something shocking. She's going to be with child, and the one to be born will be called the son of God.

[ 6 : 09 ] Now how can she be confident that this miracle will come to pass? Well, the angel says, look at your relative, Elizabeth. Elizabeth. She's very old.

No one believed she would ever conceive. But hey, she's well into her second trimester of pregnancy. For no word of God, from God, will ever fail, the angel says.

And Mary is astonished. And that's where we pick up the story in our passage this morning. Having been told that her cousin is pregnant, Mary, verse 39, hurries to go and visit them.

Now what you need to know is that Zechariah and Elizabeth live about 70 miles from Jerusalem. So it's a rather long and unconventional journey for a young, unweathered girl to be taking.

Furthermore, the angel did not give her explicit instructions to go. But she's in a hurry to do so. You see, she's eager for confirmation.

[ 7 : 25 ] Remember, the angel has just relayed God's promise to her that she's going to bear God's son. And the angel suggests that if she's looking for evidence, God keeps promises.

Well, just look for her miraculously pregnant cousin. So that's exactly what she does. She wants to see the truth for herself.

She wants to see God's grace in action. Mary has faith that God will keep his promises. I am the Lord's servant, she says in verse 38.

May your word to me be fulfilled. And now she goes to seek out confirmation for her faith. Confident she will find it.

So let's follow along to see what happens. In verse 40, Mary enters Zechariah's home and greets Elizabeth. In the customs of her day, she's honoring her cousin.

[ 8 : 29 ] That's appropriate. Elizabeth should be the focus of attention. She's the one with a miracle pregnancy. She's much older. She's the wife of a priest.

And yet, the focus shifts as soon as Elizabeth receives Mary's greetings. Notice what happens.

Verse 41. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And then down in verse 44, Elizabeth interprets her own baby's movements. As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, she says, the baby in my womb leapt for joy.

Just think about what's happening. Back in chapter 1, verse 15, the angel had told Zechariah, the father, your baby John will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born.

[ 9 : 38 ] And here he is now. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, dancing for joy while still in the womb. This in itself is a miracle.

A six-month-old fetus giving the warmest of welcomes to Auntie Mary. But why is John leaping for joy?

His mom tells us, verse 42. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

Elizabeth recognizes that because Mary is in her presence, that means the Lord himself is in her presence. As soon as her own unborn baby leapt for joy, she knew the Lord was here in her home.

In other words, she knows from the movements of her baby that Mary too is pregnant with God's son. And so John the Baptist, even from the womb, is already pointing people to Jesus.

[ 10 : 55 ] His leap of joy signals to his mother that Jesus himself is in the womb. Isn't that amazing? Back in Luke 1, verse 15 to 17, God had promised his parents that he would make ready and prepare people for the Lord.

And here he is doing exactly that without even being born yet. He's shifting the focus from himself to Jesus.

So John's mother responds to God keeping his promises with joy. Now we don't know how Mary greeted her, but it wouldn't be surprising if she said something along the lines of, Oh, Elizabeth, congratulations.

How happy you must be to be having this baby. But see how Elizabeth replies, verse 43. But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

The joy is all mine, she says. I'm the favoured one. I'm so privileged because your baby is visiting me. After all, this is the mere baby you're carrying, Mary.

[ 12 : 22 ] This is, verse 43, my Lord. And even from the moment of conception, Elizabeth is already bowing the knee to this baby.

And do you see what Elizabeth is now doing? Having seen God keep his promises to her, she's now affirming that God is keeping his promises to Mary.

This is the first time in Luke that we get confirmation Mary is properly pregnant with the Lord Jesus. That actually hasn't been confirmed yet until this point.

And that will cause Mary to explode with a song of joy. Because, verse 45, blessed is she who has promised that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her.

Can you see how extraordinary this simple domestic meeting between just two ordinary women is? God is showing again and again that he keeps promises.

[ 13 : 33 ] He keeps his promise to Elizabeth that her baby's destiny is to point people to Jesus. He keeps his promise to Mary that she will bear God's own son.

He keeps promises. Do the women understand everything that God is going to do through this child? Maybe not. But they understand enough to know that God is doing something wonderful in their midst.

They understand enough to know that God keeps his word. They understand enough from the Old Testament that the birth of someone they call Lord means that God is putting into motion his plan of restoration.

And the amazing thing is that God is choosing to do so through ordinary means in their ordinary lives. After all, they are ordinary people with their own problems.

Elizabeth must have suffered much heartache going childless for so long. Mary must have suffered much uncertainty being told out of the blue that she is going to be pregnant while unmarried.

[ 14 : 48 ] They had no idea what God is up to. But they both rejoiced because although they don't know the precise details of what God is up to, they know the Lord has come to them.

In the case of Mary, the Lord is coming through her. God is involved in their personal stories and embedding them into his biggest story of redeeming the whole world.

That's how God works in the intimate details in our lives, no matter how ordinary or even bad they currently seem. We need to know that God never stops working in our lives.

So just about everyone is joyful. John, Elizabeth, Mary. Their joy comes from their faith in a God who keeps promises no matter what.

It's not a vague kind of faith, not the kind where people just say, oh, just have faith, without ever specifying faith in what. Their faith is in something concrete and specific that this God keeps his word.

[ 16 : 10 ] And if we are Christians, their experience is ours too. We have the same word. We have the same promises. We know Jesus is here with us, like these women did.

We know Jesus is going to come, like these women did. We know Jesus is our Lord, the one who governs the entire heavens and earth, who sets things into motion, who's going to bring redemption, and who knows what's best for us, just like these women did.

So we trust in God's promises, like these women do. What gospel promises do we receive in Christ? We are promised the freedom of forgiveness in Him, no longer racked under the shadow of regret and guilt.

We are promised the power to live new lives in all circumstances through the Spirit of Christ. We are promised justice will eventually be done, as we heard last week.

And that leads to a great rejoicing, no matter what. Joy comes from knowing God keeps promises, and that He weaves those promises into the fabric of our life's stories.

[ 17 : 42 ] Secondly, joy comes from knowing the Savior personally. Knowing the Savior personally. that's verses 46 to 49.

We now get to the actual song of Mary. And notice how personal it is. My soul glorifies. My spirit rejoices.

God is my Savior. From now on, all generations will call me blessed. Knowing God keeps promises verses, it's not theoretical knowledge for Mary.

It isn't like she's looking in her Old Testament and saying, oh, this verse says there's going to be a Messiah, and then turning to her New Testament and saying, oh, in this verse it says everything is fulfilled.

A matches B, formula complete. No, no, no, that's not the kind of knowledge she has. Her knowledge is experiential. That's why she sings.

[ 18 : 44 ] Poetry isn't likely to flow out of someone who simply looks at her beloved dispassionately. It flows out of someone who knows she is loved personally.

And Mary knows full well she is loved. Let me read again from verse 46. My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.

That word mindful is more literally translated look upon with favour. God has looked at this nobody who has nothing and has come down to touch her, to bestow her with his favour and use her as his great instrument.

God could have used somebody with lots of possessions or a supremely gifted person or even a lady with a strong religious reputation.

But in love, he reaches down to this humble girl and uses her for his glory. And her song shows that she is very aware of that.

[ 20 : 06 ] You see, we might think that Mary is special and we are not. So God might work in her life but not in ours. But no, God isn't using someone special.

He's just using a humble girl. And that's how God has always worked, hasn't he? Personally using people we never expect.

We see that all the time in the Old Testament. Like Jacob, an unfilial son and a con man. Like Judah, a conspirator to murder and a prostitute user.

Like David, a simple shepherd boy even his father overlook. And God used all those flawed people in love.

That's who he is. And Mary's aware of that. Mary knows who she is. She's someone in need of a saviour.

[ 21 : 13 ] For she too is a sinner. Somebody who has caused offence to God in her thoughts, in her remarks, in the direction of her heart which has bent away from the king of the universe.

She knows she has no basis to stand in God's presence. she doesn't deserve his love. But it is precisely because she acknowledges that in humility that she is so joyful.

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in not God my creator, not God my judge, but God my saviour.

she needs a saviour. And because she knows the saviour, she rejoices. How much more personal can it get after all than bearing that very saviour God in your own womb?

You see, this is at the very core of Christianity. Christianity is not rules designed to spoil your fun. Christianity is not rituals with symbols of crosses, and cups to drink.

[ 22 : 27 ] Christianity is not a rock around your neck designed to weigh you down and be a killjoy. Rather, Christianity is a person.

It's about a saviour God. It's about knowing this saviour God personally. And his name is Jesus. And his mission is our joy.

joy. I wonder if you've ever thought of Christianity from that angle. Have you ever considered that Jesus is a joyful person who wants to bring about our joy?

Let me step away briefly from Mary's song for just a little moment to show you that. Later on in Luke's Gospel, in chapter 10, verse 21, it should be on the screen, this is how Jesus is described.

He's full of joy through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in Luke's Gospel, he's periodically accused of partying too much. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 9, speaking of Jesus, says this of him.

[ 23 : 37 ] Hebrews chapter 1, verse 9, Now, that's simply a poetic way of saying that Jesus is filled with joy.

And Jesus is not just full of joy, but he wants to share that joy with us. Look at his words to his disciples in John chapter 15, verse 11, it will be on the screen as well.

I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. And that's why, again, in Luke's Gospel later on, he specifically rejoices when a lost sheep is found, when someone submits to him as Lord.

So, can you see that this Saviour God is working for our joy? And Jesus does this by becoming the man of sorrows.

By entering our world through Mary, back here in Luke chapter 1, he is starting his journey to the horror of the cross.

[ 25 : 00 ] And he does this willingly. as the line in the song How Great Thou Art says, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing, do you hear that?

My burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin. His anguish for our joy.

Mary rejoices in God her Saviour without knowing all that yet. We do. We have the full story of the gospel that Jesus lived, died, was buried and was raised again, not just to pay for our sin, but to complete our joy.

And when we know personally that Jesus did that for me, well, joy emerges in our souls.

Mary is joyful not so much because she is the mother of the Son of God, but because of the rescue his birth will accomplish. This rescue is complicated.

[ 26 : 15 ] God wants to save sinners, and yet he must punish sin at the same time. But God amazingly achieve both goals through Jesus.

Those are the great things of verse 49. Not just random great things like getting a new car or a new job, but the great thing of seeing the mighty one deliver his people from slavery to sin, which only harms us and not brings us joy.

And just as a side note, notice that the way Mary is described here means that we cannot elevate her to a position equal to Jesus. Sometime in history, a belief developed that Mary was conceived without original sin.

This doctrine is sometimes known as the Immaculate Conception of Mary and is believed by millions of people. people. But notice that Mary is well aware of her need for a saviour, even while pregnant.

And notice back in verse 42, she is described as being blessed among women, not blessed above women. She too is like one of us, not someone separate from us, although of course she alone is unique as the earthly mother of Jesus.

[ 27 : 48 ] And so this also rules out any ideas of Jesus as co-mediator or co-redeemer. There's simply no hint of such ideas from this passage or other Bible passages.

So we honour her and we call her blessed, not because she is in a position similar to God, the saviour, but because a saviour has come through her and for her.

But let's move on to explore the remainder of this song. Thirdly, joy comes from knowing our deep need of God.

Our deep need of God. That's verses 50 to 55. Mary's song is intensely personal, but it is not exclusively personal.

Because Mary knows it's not about her alone. Instead, verse 50, God's mercy extends to all those who fear him from generation to generation.

[ 29 : 00 ] All of history is in view here, not just Mary's immediate family. The joy of God keeping his promises, bringing about the birth of the saviour, is not for her alone.

It is for all who fear him. It's for all God's people. And that brings Mary delight to see the full extent of God's plan.

That's what she's getting at in verses 54 and 55. And then Mary gives us three vivid images in verses 51 to 53.

And they all show what this plan involves. Here's the first one, verse 51. He has performed mighty deeds with his arms. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

You see from the Tower of Babel onwards, back in Genesis chapter 11, human beings have always wanted to make their way up. We want to make our way up materially.

[ 30 : 03 ] We want to make our way up socially. We want to make our way up politically and perhaps even spiritually. And as we make our way up in life, we begin to believe that this is due to our own strength, our own skill, our own gifts or talents, or intelligence.

We start to take pride in some aspect of ourselves. This might be visible to others, it might not. But even if our pride is invisible to others, it isn't to God.

And that's why Mary says, He will scatter those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He brings them down. Pride, of course, can come in many species.

We think of pride as the person who looks down on others, who sticks his nose up at others. But pride at his heart is simply self-sufficiency.

It's simply saying, I'm okay on my own, I don't need others. And it's especially saying to God, I'm okay without you. I can cope.

[ 31 : 25 ] Please, by all means, God, advise me from time to time, but I decide. But Mary's song tells us doing that is foolish. You have the same result as the Tower of Babel.

You'll be scattered. You will fail. And Mary expands on this in verse 52, our second image. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble.

Again, we see that this is related to pride. We can choose to sit on thrones that we've made for ourselves, whether literal or not, but if we're going to put ourselves in the centre, well, God will eventually burn us off.

By contrast, God looks at those who can't cope, who know they have nothing to offer, who know that they are helpless and have no way of moving up in their lives, who know they need God desperately, and he lifts them up.

God always moves in the lives of those who know they need him and cannot depend on their own resources or cleverness or even their own virtue.

[ 32 : 47 ] God only rescues those who acknowledge they need rescue. And when we give up trying to find salvation and joy in other things, well, that's when we actually get salvation and joy because we get God the Saviour himself.

we get the giver who is always greater than his gifts and who gives lasting joy. That's really what the last image of verse 53 is getting at.

He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. when we realise that the world cannot satisfy us in the end, when we are hungry for the right things, God fills us up.

But when we chase after and feel content with small things like straight A's and a good career and moving in the right social circles, God sends us away empty.

For we have no sense that we need God, we only need those things. We depend on those things to fill us up and give us joy.

[ 34 : 06 ] The problem is they can't. Not forever, not permanently, not for all generations, maybe not even for one generation.

And so Mary is really sounding one key note again and again, how helpless we are in ourselves and how deeply we need God. Now, did you notice that God is the one doing all the action?

Verse 51, he has performed mighty deeds. Verse 52, he has brought down rulers. Verse 53, he has filled the hungry.

Verse 54, he has helped his servant Israel. We do nothing. We can only come to him desperate for him.

And if you know you desperately need God, you will get God. He will answer the cry of the humble. He keeps his promises, remember?

[ 35 : 13 ] We know that in Christ, he certainly kept the promise that Abraham's descendants will bring about the blessing of gospel to Israel and to all nations.

But if you think you can do okay without him, then the result will be you will be scattered, you will be brought down, you will be sent away empty, and you will be robbed of joy.

So here's the take home message of Mary's song. Joy is available to us, even in the dark times.

But it comes only when we are humble, when we say we need God, when we personally know Jesus, when we trust God keeps his promises.

So my friends, today, if you're coming to God full of yourselves, well, there's nothing for you to receive.

[ 36 : 19 ] Your cup is full. God can't fill you up. But if we come hungry for God, he will fill us up and satisfy us with himself.

So today, are you hungering after God? Come hungry. For hear what Jesus himself later says in Luke 11 verses 27 to 28.

As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you. Jesus replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

Amen.