

Can They Hear Us Singing?

PEACE

December 23, 2018

Luke 1: 39-55

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



A pastor's family had started putting up a nativity scene in their front yard. All of them were carrying out the little statues to put in the nativity scene. Finally, everything was in place - Mary and Joseph and the manger and the baby, and angels and shepherds and all the barnyard animals.

Then little Scott came out carrying one of his favorite toys, the figure of the fierce Tyrannosaurus Rex, king of the dinosaurs. It was one of those plastic figures that you inflate, and, in comparison to the other figures it was an enormous thing, towering over them all, and certainly not something to have in a nativity scene.

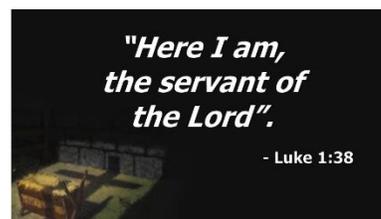
The Dad said, "I tried to tell him, 'Scott, you have to take that back because it doesn't belong there. Dinosaurs existed thousands of years before the baby Jesus, and it just doesn't belong in a nativity scene.'"

But little Scott insisted, so they finally put it there behind all the other figures - a fierce dinosaur hovering over the manger and everything else.

Then he said, "As we stood back and looked at it, we realized that maybe that dinosaur says more than we realized. For over each of us there is this menacing character that threatens to rob us of all our joy and peace and cheer. But Christmas reminds us that the baby in the manger is stronger than all the dinosaurs in your life or mine. And God has given us the victory through the gift of His Son."

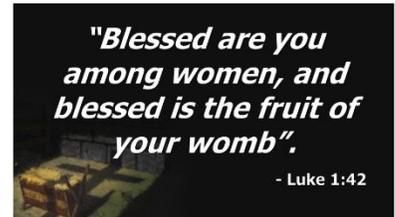
Our passage begins today with Mary visiting the house of Zechariah to spend some time with her cousin Elizabeth. There is a reason that Mary chooses to make the trek to visit Elizabeth. Earlier in Luke 1, the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus are foretold as angels visit Zechariah and then Mary. Zechariah receives word that his wife Elizabeth, now advanced in years and barren, will have a child and that the child will be named John. The angel tells Zechariah that John will be the one who prepares the way for the coming Messiah.

Next an angel visits Mary and proclaims that she is the *"favored one"* and that she will bear the *"Son of the Most High"*. If I were Mary, at this point, I would have been very scared. The news that the Holy Spirit will create a child in her womb could have maybe felt like a dinosaur to Mary. It would have felt that way to me. But it was not a dinosaur to Mary. God had indeed chosen well. During this visit, the angel also tells Mary of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The angel closes his visit by reminding Mary, *"Nothing will be impossible with God"*. In a wonderful demonstration of her faith, Mary replies, *"Here I am, the servant of the Lord"*. Mary clearly says "yes" to God's plan. Mary's faith and trust are both very strong.



Rather than sit and ponder what has happened alone, Mary journeys to see Elizabeth. Perhaps she is wanting validation for what she has experienced. Perhaps she sees in Elizabeth someone else in an equally unlikely and unbelievable situation – both pregnant through the work of God. Perhaps she

simply wants to go and celebrate their pregnancies together. When Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumps with joy. A yet unborn John the Baptist recognizes who is there in Mary's womb. Elizabeth is then filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaims, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb*". It is a greeting of favor, of worthiness, of recognition of God's hand at work. Elizabeth also speaks of the baby that Mary is carrying – "*blessed is the fruit of your womb*". Jesus will be full of divine love, life, and action. His life will bear fruit as many come to God through Him.



After Elizabeth speaks, we hear Mary's response. Verses 46 through 55 have several names: "The Song of Mary", "The Canticle of Mary", and the "Magnificat". Even though very beautiful, this song was once a song that made certain people uncomfortable. When Luther first translated the Bible into German, he left this section in Latin because the princes who ruled Germany took a dim view of the mighty being made low. When Englishman Thomas Cranmer translated sacred songs of the Bible to English, he too left these sections in Latin. It was for the same reason – the royal family did not like the imagery of the powerful being brought down from their thrones. I think Jesus and His upside-down kingdom still makes some people uncomfortable today. The idea of being lowly and meek plays well around the manger and the babe – not so much in places of power.

This song that Mary sings to God has three sections. In verses 46 through 49, Mary acknowledges her role in this whole thing. She sings, *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name"*. Mary is cognizant of the role that God has chosen for her. She rejoices in this role and in her relationship with God. Mary knows that God has poured out favor upon her and she is humbled by this. She is aware of the magnitude of being chosen by holiness, by God Almighty.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant..."

- Luke 1:46-50

"...Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name".

- Luke 1:46-50

Mary goes on to sing, *"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 thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly"*. For

"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 thoughts of their hearts..."

- Luke 1:51-52

"...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly".

- Luke 1:46-50

those who are faithful, for those who fear the Lord, God shows mercy and gives strength. Mary has been shown God's mercy and she will also call upon God for strength in the years to come. By contrast, the proud are scattered by God and the powerful are brought down from their thrones. God's kingdom is about service and doing for others. The proud and powerful so often only see themselves and their own needs and wants. The lowly – God will lift them up as he fills *"the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty"*. Again, the imagery of God favoring the poor and the outcast, the meek and the humble.

Mary closes her song by connecting back to the covenant. Down through the ages, God has been faithful to His covenant promise to always be Israel's God and to watch over them. God promised Abraham the land filled with many descendants and God came through. God promised David that a descendant would sit on the throne of Israel forever. As Mary carries Jesus in her womb, God is in the process of fulfilling that covenant promise as well. Mary sings, *"He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

"He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, according to the promise He made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever".
- Luke 1:54-55

Over and over God has helped the people. Over and over God has shown them mercy. God is faithful. God keeps His promises.



Can They Hear Us Singing?

This truth that Mary proclaimed has remained true down through the ages. At times, this truth has been tested. At times it has been hard to be true. During the Nazi occupation of Austria during the great World War, the wife of a Lutheran pastor found herself at home on Christmas Eve with their eight children. The father was away fighting in the war. She gathered her children around her to read them the traditional Christmas story from the book of Luke. As she read, she could hear the soldiers marching outside the window, enforcing the curfew, making sure there were no religious celebrations occurring. When she finished reading, the youngest asked, "Mama, aren't we going to sing now"? After a slight hesitation, the mother replied, "Of course we are going to sing". She gathered the children around the piano and began to play "Joy to the World". Hearing footsteps on the front steps, she did not stop but launched right into

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”. To the family’s great surprise, the soldiers began to sing along with them.

What do we do in a similar situation? When we find ourselves in an uncomfortable situation, are we willing to risk for our faith? Do we allow our faith to sing out into the darkness all around us? Do we speak up and confront the evil that we encounter out in the world? Do we respond right away when we see someone in need and serve both them and God? For the lost and the least, do they hear us singing? For all who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, can they hear us singing? Friends, may they hear us. May they hear us.

We are the source of hope for world. May we each be bold for our faith - sharing God's love with the outsiders, with the lost, with the broken, with all who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. May they hear us singing this week. May they hear us sing. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What is your vision for sharing God’s story? What is our church’s vision for sharing God’s story? How do the two visions meet in your faith life?
- 2) How are we ‘singing God’s story’ in our church? Pray that others can come to hear the song.
- 3) Serving shares Jesus. How can your words and actions this week “sing” God’s song of love and hope?