

Have Yourself a “Mary” Little Christmas!

Luke 1:39-56 - December 23, 2018 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Recipients of God’s Amazing Grace,

There is an expectation out there that Christmas should be the happiest time of the year; you know, Ho! Ho! Ho!, Fa la la, la, la, and Merry Christmas! And for some people, it is a very exciting, fun filled time.

But for other people, the Christmas season can also be a very difficult time, perhaps the most stressful time of the year. For one thing, it’s a very busy, hectic time, and some people struggle with all the deadlines and responsibilities they have to deal with in such a short period of time. While some people enjoy Christmas shopping, others struggle trying to find the right gift for the right person, and then worry if it is the right size or the right color, or if they will even like it at all. Counselors tell us that the Christmas season can be very stressful for people going through hard times as well. If you have lost a loved one recently, you are dealing with a pretty big empty space at your house and in your heart. If you are struggling with relationship problems or are dealing with health or financial concerns, the holidays can often magnify your anxiety or your loneliness. Just the very thought that everyone around you seems to be so happy and cheerful this time of year can bring you down even further when you realize you are not so happy or cheerful at the moment.

It’s also nearing the end of the year, and as people look back, they find they didn’t accomplish everything they hoped to accomplish this year, and time is fleeting. Add to that, the anxiety of what the new year might bring, and you can understand why some people feel like crying out, “Bah humbug” to it all!

Is there any remedy to the Christmas blues? Is there any answer to our stress and anxiety? Is there any hope for peace, hope and joy this holiday season? There is, if we focus our celebration on the right thing; not the outward trappings of the holiday season, but rather the rich blessings which our God of free and faithful love lavishes upon us by his grace. To help us achieve this goal, let’s focus on Mary’s joy filled response to the

blessings she found in Christ, her Savior. Through these words then the Holy Spirit leads us to **enjoy a “Mary” little Christmas!** *

First, let's set the scene for Mary's joyful song of praise. The angel Gabriel had just visited Mary to reveal that she was going to have a very special Son, the promised Messiah. Among all women, of all times, should would be greatly blessed to be the mother of the Christ child. She would be privileged to see God's plan of salvation unfold right before her very eyes.

Even though this news defied human reason, Mary accepted it with humble childlike faith. How could she, a virgin, possibly become pregnant? How could the Son of God be born of the Virgin Mary? How could the Word become flesh and make his dwelling among us? Although she didn't understand how this could be, yet she did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise, but gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

Then Mary set out to Judea to visit her aged relative Elizabeth, who was also expecting a miraculous child, John the Baptist. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, **“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”**

The Holy Spirit led Elizabeth to recognize Mary as the mother of her Savior and to express some beautiful Biblical truths. The Lord would soon bring great blessings to Mary, and to all of us, through the gift of the Christ child. God was about to act in a mighty way on behalf of his people. She was sure of it! Unlike her doubting husband Zechariah, Elizabeth was certain God's promise would be fulfilled, and this knowledge filled her heart with great joy.

And the baby in her womb, John the Baptist, just six months along, leapt for joy along with her. Note that this was baby, a tiny human being in his mother's womb, who leapt for joy. He was not merely a blob of tissue, or a collection of cells, but a precious unborn person, being knit together in his mother's womb. Was it a miracle that John could react with joy to the sound of Mary's voice? Certainly, but it was a miracle granted to a

precious soul, and we wish to demonstrate the same care and respect and protection to all such precious souls who are still in the womb.

And then Mary herself broke forth with a beautiful song of praise which we call “the Magnificat.” Mary said, “**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. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.**”

Notice that Mary doesn’t call attention to herself, but gives all glory and praise to God for all that he had graciously done for her. There is no Biblical support for the false teaching that Mary was without sin, or that we should pray to Mary, or expect her to bring us blessings from heaven.. No, Mary humbly recognized that she too was a sinner who needed cleansing and healing and forgiveness just like everyone else. That’s why she so greatly rejoiced in God as her **Savior** also. I love the way one popular Christmas song puts it, “Mary, did you know that the baby you would deliver, would one day deliver you?” She did know, and that saving knowledge filled her heart with great joy!

Yes, Mary experienced personal joy in knowing she was privileged to deliver the promised Messiah into this world and would care for him as his mother. But her greatest cause for joy was the understanding that God is faithful to his promises. She said, “God has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

Think of it. 4000 years earlier God had made a promise to Adam and Eve that one of their descendants would enter this world to crush the serpent’s head and destroy the devil’s power. For centuries, God’s people waited and watched patiently for God to keep his Word and come to our rescue. Mary rejoiced to know that this time had now come. What Abraham and Sarah and Moses and Ruth and David could only see with the eyes of faith she would now witness personally as she held the baby Jesus, the Savior of the world, in her very own arms.

Mary’s song reads much like one of the Old Testament psalms praising God for his mighty deliverance. She said, “**God’s mercy extends to those who fear him, from**

generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”

Mary alluded here to key events in salvation history where God came to the aid of his people in a powerful way. Haughty Pharaoh once defied God’s command and refused to let God’s people go. Proud Pharaoh pursued God’s people at the Red Sea in order to destroy them, but God crushed Pharaoh’s power, brought him to his knees and delivered the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan.

Then the mighty people of Jericho threatened to thwart God’s plan to take possession of the Land of Canaan. With Jericho’s mighty army and walled city, the lowly Israelites appeared to have no hope against them. But God was on their side and God granted them the victory, causing the mighty walls of Jericho to come tumbling down. Once again, God humbled the proud and lifted up the humble.

When mighty Goliath oppressed God’s people and insulted the name of the one true God, the Lord brought him down too with one small stone from the sling of a young shepherd boy named David.

Christian friends, these are not just isolated incidents. They are salvation history. They are evidence of God keeping his promise and acting on behalf of his people to bring his plan of salvation to fulfillment. Mary rejoiced in God’s past deliverance, his present blessings, and his future promises. All were valid and certain, all were tied together and fulfilled in the gift of the Christ child she was now privileged to deliver into the world. The Apostle Paul put it this way, **“No matter how many promises God has made, they are all “yes” in Christ, and so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.”** 2 Corinthians 1:20

Yes, the good news of Christmas filled Mary’s heart with such peace and hope and joy that she simply couldn’t keep this good news to herself, but felt compelled to burst forth with a glorious song of praise.

2) Now I have a question for all of you to consider. Can you sing your own Magnificat today? Do you have reason to join with Mary and praise God for his goodness to you in your past, in your present blessings and protection, and for the assurance of his faithful love to you in your future? Yes, most certainly yes indeed! You see, the blessings Mary recalled in the Magnificat were not offered only to her personally or only to the Children of Israel, but to all people. Remember when God promised Abraham that the Messiah would come from his family line? At that time, already God made it clear that all nations and all people would be blessed through the coming Savior. That includes you and me today also! And when the angel announced the good news of Jesus' birth to the Bethlehem shepherds, once again he expressed the universal nature of God's gift to the world for he proclaimed, **"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the city of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!"** Luke 2:11

Only Mary was privileged to actually deliver the promised Savior into this world, and to care for him as her own dear son, and yet, each one of us here can also rightly call Jesus, our own baby brother, for Isaiah assures us, **"To us a child is born; to us a Son is given!"** Isaiah 9:6

Yes, we have as much reason to rejoice in the birth of the Savior today as Mary did back then as she cradled the baby Jesus in her arms. All the blessings Jesus brought to Mary, he brings to us. Mary considered herself to be richly blessed because God chose her to be the mother of the Christ child. But you and I can also consider ourselves to be richly blessed because God chose us to be his child. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, he adopted us into his own dear family of believers and made us heirs of all his blessings, including the forgiveness of sins, peace with God and new life in Christ. Yes, the mighty victory Jesus won for Mary on the cross, he won for each one of us also. The bright future and eternal glory that awaited Mary in heaven, awaits us as God's dearly loved children today as well. It is all guaranteed to us in the gift of the Christ child, and this good news fills our hearts with great joy!

Yes, let's make Mary's Song very personal. Let's make it our own joyful profession of faith and expression of our own gratitude for the blessings we enjoy as God's redeemed children. Would you say it aloud with me right now, **"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. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name!"**

I can't promise you that your outward circumstances will all be grand and glorious this holiday season. Being a child of God does not make us immune from the hardships and headaches of living in this sinful world. We may have to struggle with serious health problems, with weighty financial concerns, or with deeply troubled relationships. We may have to wrestle with the stresses and strains of day to day living even during the Christmas season. But in the midst of our earthly struggles we can still find peace and joy and contentment if only we look for it in the right place, the very same place where Mary found it, in the faithful love of our God, in the sure promises he makes to us in his Word, and in the priceless blessings he offers to us in Christ our Savior. Christian friends, treasure these rich blessings, cherish God's promises, and he will grant you a "Mary" little Christmas! Amen.