

Mary's Magnificat 95-12-25

experience of music this morning and really songs and music are one of those ways that we express what's in our inmost soul. Sometimes those things that we can't really put into words we can express in a combination of words and music. You may notice in the bulletin this morning I have printed for you actually again the words that Isaac Watts wrote some nearly 300 years ago.

A Christmas song that is not well known and yet it is from the same pen as the man who wrote Joy to the World which we do have in our hymnal. But on the last page of your bulletin you may notice there he says, Shepherds rejoice, lift up your eyes and send your fears away. News from the region of the skies, a Savior's born today.

Jesus the God whom angels fear comes down to dwell with you. Today he makes his entrance here but not as monarchs do. No gold nor purple swaddling bands nor royal shining things.

A manger for his cradle stands and holds the King of Kings. Go shepherds where the infant lies and see his humble throne with tears of joy in all your eyes. Go shepherds, kiss the sun.

Isaac Watts and many of those great hymn writers knew a lot about the Word of God and knew a lot about their Lord and Savior and were able in their particular area of giftedness to express those things in a way that is meaningful long after their parting from this earth. And we are grateful for that heritage that we have in song as well as in scripture of the faith that we enjoy. We're going to look this morning at Luke chapter 1 at another song, the first Christmas song, the song that we had in our scripture reading this morning.

And we're going to learn something about the coming of Jesus Christ. We're going to learn something about the family into which he was born and the reason that he was born in that family in Bethlehem at this time in history. You will recall from our reading this morning that this passage contains what has been called the Magnificat, which is a Latin word that comes from the Vulgate or the Latin translation of the scriptures from Greek.

And the very first word of this song is the word for glorifies. And in Latin that is Magnificat. And so that became the title of this song and they call it Mary's Magnificat, Mary's glory song for the Lord.

This is right after she has met her cousin Elizabeth. She has made a journey in haste after hearing from Gabriel that her elderly cousin is with child and that she herself is with child conceived of the Holy Ghost and that this will be the Savior that Israel has longed and waited for for so many centuries. And you will see in verse 39 of this chapter, after this message from the angel Gabriel, Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste.

She was excited about this. She understood something of the import of this message. Now I don't know about you, but I try to picture this.

It's been centuries since there was any miracle, centuries since there was any prophet in Israel that came in and did mighty deeds. It's been centuries since the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire appeared in Israel, centuries since the lightning came down and struck the top of Mount Carmel. Life in Israel at this time has been very much in the realm of normalcy, just like our lives today.

It's been hundreds of years since there was anything supernatural, anything out of the ordinary. And so here is Mary, a girl who lives in the hill country up in Nazareth probably originally. Joseph and Mary met up there and had become engaged.

Very normal thing to take place. Most of the girls in Israel arrived at this stage in their life anywhere between the age of 14 and perhaps 24 at the latest. So she is somewhere in that range, somewhere probably in her late teen years and is leading a very normal life in a small rural village up in the northern part of Israel.

And seemingly out of nowhere, this flash of light and the appearance of the angel Gabriel. Try to picture this happening today. If you had awakened last night at 2.30 or 3 in the morning to find an angel standing before you communicating to you not only, I mean his very presence would probably shock us out of our minds, but then to communicate that God is going to use you in a monumental way in his plan.

You are going to be the means by which Jesus Christ is going to come to the planet Earth. This is going to be the means that God will provide Messiah, the Savior of Israel. You are intimately involved in this process.

Mary must have absolutely been out of her mind with incomprehensible wonder and awe that this thing had happened. And we sometimes think that this was sort of a lightning bolt out of the blue and that God apparently picked at random a girl in Israel to be the mother of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet when we look at this song this morning, we're going to see some things about Mary that may not have occurred to us before.

We're going to find out some things about her that qualified her and marked her out among the young ladies in Israel as someone that God could use in his plan. And there's a message in this for us because the same things that Mary is characterized by are things that we hope to be characterized by so that God can use us in his plan. We will not be parents of the humanity of Jesus Christ, but God can use us in a mighty way.

God can make a difference in human history through us and the key is the key that Mary found. And we're going to see that in her song this morning. She says, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. Notice that first set of phrases there. She says, my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

These are two lines that are parallel. This reminds us of the structure of the Psalms. Remember

in the Psalms where there will be a line and he will say God has visited his wrath on the arrogant and he has brought low those who are proud of heart.

And it will restate in the second line the thought that is in the first line. There's a technical name for this that I won't bother you with, but it's a common pattern in Hebrew poetry to state something in one line and then restate it in a slightly different way in the next line. And this is a song or a psalm.

She begins with this lyrical type of phrase, but this tells us some things because she says my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. Now there have been great dead seas of theological ink spilled on the difference between the soul and the spirit and so forth, and we won't try to get into that this morning. Most of us recognize that we have two basic areas of our existence, don't we? We have our physical existence, our body, which is subject to the second law of thermodynamics, which is entropy, or in simple terms whatever gets put together falls apart.

It is subject to the laws of the universe and it slowly degenerates over time. We also know that we have an immaterial part, and that's our inner consciousness, and that is eternal. That lasts forever.

It doesn't degenerate. It doesn't fall apart. It doesn't decline and lose its abilities.

I think it may lose its contact with our physical brain sometimes, and the fact that our memory is bad or that we can't always think in a logical way isn't a deterioration of our soul, but it's a gradual separation perhaps of our immaterial part from the mechanical part that it's tied to. And in the same way that you can have a wonderful computer program, you can have a great word processor or a great checkbook program in your computer, but if your computer is broken, that wonderful program can't run and work because the machinery is not functioning. And that's what happens to us as we get older, isn't it? One of our recent presidents has recently announced that he has come down with Alzheimer's disease.

There's nothing wrong with President Reagan's soul or with his recollections, and when we go into the eternal future, all of our memories will be there intact, stored in our soul, but we have difficulty accessing them now, even some of us that aren't so old. Things stored in our soul because we're tied to a machine that has flaws and is corrupt and falling apart. But these are the two parts of our existence that we are conscious of, isn't it? We have a material part and an immaterial part.

Those of us that were saved at a very early age can't really recollect much about our pre-salvation life. Some of you that might have come to Christ at a later stage may remember what it was like before salvation and after salvation. In addition of another immaterial part of us after salvation, we have greater opportunities.

We have a new understanding. We can see things about God that we never understood before,

but do we suddenly have a material part of ourselves? Generally speaking, we don't. We still have our thought processes and so forth.

The thing is that we become spiritually alive. And what that means is that we become, in that immaterial part of ourselves, tuned to God, able to comprehend some things about God, able to appreciate what God has done for us, able to understand the Word of God and be ministered to by God's Spirit. And our immaterial part was dead before salvation and wasn't able to understand or comprehend the things of God.

Remember where it says the fleshly man doesn't understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned? That new capability comes to us. A new regeneration comes to us that gives us a life in our immaterial part that we didn't have before salvation. So in some ways when you see a passage like this you realize that we can use these terms soul and spirit somewhat interchangeably to refer to that immaterial part of our existence.

This is where our life with God is. Thank goodness our relationship with God isn't based on our physical body because as our physical body falls apart our relationship with God might deteriorate. But because it is a part of our immaterial being, it is something permanent.

It's something that can last and something that does not or does not need to degenerate. So this is where Mary expresses her praise and her thanksgiving to God. She says my soul magnifies the Lord, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Did you notice that very last word? Now think about the time that we're living in. We haven't had the cross. Jesus Christ has not yet been born and yet what does Mary say? I rejoice in God my Savior.

Now why does Mary say this? Why does she say God my Savior? Mary knows something about God doesn't she? She knows something about the Old Testament scriptures. She knows the Psalms where David calls God this very same name, God my Savior. She goes back to the song of Hannah that we looked at earlier this year where Hannah after she had prayed and God answered her prayer and she had the promise of a son and that son was born.

She says I rejoice in God the rock of my salvation. Old Testament believers, people before the time of Jesus Christ understood salvation. They knew in advance that God was going to send a Savior and they trusted in God and that faith was saving faith.

So she understands that there is a plan of salvation and that salvation involves a Savior and she rejoices in it. Notice in verse 48 she says he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant for behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed. Now I think Mary might be a little bit uncomfortable with some of the attention that she gets today where her image and her shadow seems to supersede the Lord himself in some circles but it is true that every Christmas all year long when we look at the birth of Jesus Christ we recognize that there is a lady that God chose to be his human mother and this was Mary and there was a reason for this choice and as

we look at this song we begin to see that Mary is very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

We don't have time to look but every single phrase in this song has an antecedent, has a reference in the Old Testament. She knows the book of Micah, she knows the Psalms, she knows Exodus and the song of Moses, she knows first Samuel and the song of Hannah, she knows Isaiah, she knows Ezekiel and when you look at a Greek text of this passage out in the margin the publishers and the editors of that text have put all through the New Testament every place where the New Testament makes a reference to the old and when you get to this song of Mary in the Greek New Testament the margin is full of references Zachariah, Micah, Malachi all the way through and you think my goodness Mary really knew she had some sources to draw on for this song it wasn't just a spontaneous combustion in her soul it was a reflection of things that she had learned. Now what does this mean to us? We have spent quite a bit of time this year looking at various passages in the Bible and we came to the conclusion that the Christian life is fundamentally characterized by three things.

You remember what those are? Mr. and Mrs. Peterson gave me a Japanese wall hanging that opens up it's a cardboard thing and rice paper and so forth and you open it up and it's got these incomprehensible Japanese characters on but there are three big splotches and they said we thought you ought to have this because this is the Japanese for faith and hope and love and so we have that hanging over there where we can see it every day but we saw that those are the fundamental characteristics of our life. Faith is the means it is by faith Hebrews chapter 11 so many places we see that it is us looking at what God has said and looking at what God has done believing it and living accordingly that's faith. Faith is the means by which we accomplish God's purpose.

Hope is our motivation. Why do we bother being obedient to God? Because we know what God says we know what God has promised we know that there is a reckoning day coming the judgment seat of Christ where those efforts that were wasted that were done in a wrong spirit that were done in sin or in ignorance or in false motivation out of self centeredness and so forth will go up in a great big bonfire we also know that those things that are done in the power of God's spirit in faith motivated by hope and characterized by love those things create a sort of gold and silver and precious stones. Did you ever notice the thing about these shiny you know in Christmastime sometimes people get jewelry and so forth and you look at these things what's the characteristic of gold and silver and precious stones that they all have in common? They're shiny like Isaac Watts says in this hymn those precious things are shining things and what is a shining thing do it reflects light it reflects glory it looks glorious because it's reflecting various aspects of the light that strikes it and that's our purpose that's the reason that we are here and those gold and silver and precious stones that are generated in our life through faith through hope and through love will be an eternal reflection of the glory of God.

Mary understands this principle and has done something about it we can look in the scripture and say faith and hope and love are wonderful things and we are often encouraged to yield

ourselves we look at Romans chapter 12 and it says present your body a living sacrifice I saw a man on TV earlier this week preaching very contemporary style hitting home with people that are in our culture the younger generation and so forth connecting in a big way in terms of communication his message was if you boil it all down yield yourself to God and this is a wonderful message and it's a true concept this is a reflection of humility it's an expression of humility and if there was a single word that would summarize this song of Mary it's going to be humility and humility begins by yielding to the will of God by recognizing that it's not our own agenda that counts but God's however and this is a big however you can put it in capital letters it does not end with yielding this was one of the most frustrating things that ever happened to me as a teenage believer coming to church hearing the pastor I find myself on the other side of the fence now thinking well there's probably people out there that felt just like I did the pastors up there he's preaching his heart out I'm sitting there listening I'm yielding myself and yet I don't feel like I'm really in the center of God's will I don't feel like I'm that tree planted by the rivers of water popping out fruit right and left and I don't feel that closeness with God and I would go to God and say God I just yield myself take me you can turn off my brain and just take over use my body operate it through the human race do whatever it is you want to do with me and as I continue to be taught in the Word of God I came to realize what God says and we do not stop with yielding ourselves what would happen if we of course you know my favorite illustration comes all come out of the Marine Corps what would happen if we had boot camp we had all of these high school students we can take girls now also get the girls and the guys take them all to boot camp put them in there and we say now look we want to make Marines out of you we want to put you in uniform and have you accomplish the mission of the Marine Corps which is to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and so forth we get them all there in boot camp and they say you know I believe in that I'm patriotic I know it'll do me good I know to do my country good I will I yield myself to the Marine Corps do with me what you will and these people all stand there and say I am totally at your command do with me what you will if that's all they do is stand there and yield and we start saying okay come on we're going to go over here and learn how to shoot a rifle we're going to learn how to field strip an m16 where let me show you the m18 grenade launcher let me show you the the m1 tank let me show you how to ride in a truck without falling out and breaking your neck let me show you how artillery works they say I'm just yielded I'm totally submissive to the will of the Marine Corps we have to get one step beyond that don't we we've got to say I'm going to express that yieldedness in obedience I if I want God to use me and I want my humility and my yieldedness to result in something I've got to take a step in faith I've got to trust God and understand that what he says is true now this is what Mary has done and it comes out in her song he says she says my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior did you notice that that's a past tense this is not the first time that Mary's soul has rejoiced in the Lord Mary has rejoiced in the Lord as a characteristic there's a kind of a another Greek construction we won't go into but it's called a gnomic heirens tense this is a past tense but it doesn't mean this is something that happened one time in the past I can say I fell down and broke my leg well that's an episode that happened in the past that's just a regular past tense but this special kind of a past tense in Greek means this is something that characterizes me if I say I in English we use a present tense we say I'm

always falling down and breaking my leg or I'm always falling down and skinning my knee when we say that we say this is a characteristic of me all through my life and if you saw the scars on my head and in my eyebrow and so forth you know that it really has been I do fall down a lot and crack my head on things it's a characteristic and this is a characteristic of Mary she says my soul all along has been rejoicing in the Lord that's been the focus of her life she says he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant this isn't something that just happened here this is a culmination a continuation the greatest thing yet that God has done in Mary's life he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant and she says behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed for he who is mighty has done great things for me has done great things for me continues to do great things for me this is the greatest this is the sum total this is the pinnacle of many wonderful things that God has done for me Mary is not just a hapless villager out there in Nazareth she's not someone that paid no attention to the Lord didn't listen in synagogue paid no attention when the scriptures were read she has taken these things to her heart you recall in another gospel when the message of the angel comes and and it talks about Mary storing these things up in her heart and then she sees Jesus Christ at the temple contending with the scribes and the priests at the age of 12 and it says she laid all these things up in her heart this wasn't the first time Mary had laid something up in her heart this is a characteristic of her this is a habit that she has where does that come from why does she do that she understands this principle of humility she understands that not only is it yielding to God's will but doing something about that if we're serious it's so easy to yield when I was a teenager I yielded many times every time we had a camp every time we had a revival every time we had a rededication service I would be renewed in my desire to serve God and I would say you know I just want God to use me I wish he could just turn off my consciousness and take control of me God requires more of us than that he requires us to do more than make a one-shot decision of yielding or a one-shot decision of dedication he requires a daily dedication a daily yieldedness that expresses itself in obedience now we say okay I've got a strong message to obey so we've got these Marines in boot camp and we say all right I want you to go out and take this hill use your rifles use your ammunition go take the hill they want to obey and they go charging bravely forward and get mowed down in practice why because to obey you have to know something you have to know how to obey you have to know what the commands are how to execute the commands in the right way to charge blindly forward and take the hill is to get killed it requires more than yieldedness and it requires more than simple obedience it requires knowledge now you see the requirement in this age for us as believers is getting more and more significant it requires more and more of us requires decisions not just once in a while but every single day do we really care if our lives count for God do we really care that God can use our lives to bear fruit and to create that gold and silver and precious stones that reflects his glory if we do if that is more than just words in our soul God has given us the answer and it's such a blessing to have the answer to know what to do there's nothing scarier than charging up the hill in the machine gun fire not knowing what you're doing or how to stay alive and how best to accomplish your objective God has given us that in his word Mary discovered it in the Old Testament and Mary had put herself in the place of service and had put herself in the place of blessing by obedience by her daily decisions for humility her daily decisions to seek the Lord

those faithful of you that were here on Wednesday night we had a great study in the Old Testament on seeking the Lord we saw that this is not just a nice hobby this is a command of God seek him while he may yet be found you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart God says this is a different kind of a thing to seek and to search you look at Proverbs chapter 2 my son if you will hear my words if you will receive my commandments if you will lay them up in your heart if you will seek as for silver and search as for hidden treasure now that's more than a casual if a prospector only went out once a week and stuck his pick in the dirt looking for gold how much gold would he find you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart if you seek for it as silver and search for it as for hidden treasure then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God we can tell from this song that this is what Mary has done notice what she says in verse 49 he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation how does she know that how does she know his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation because she knows the history of her nation she knows the history recorded in the Old Testament and she believes it and she says if God did that for them he will do it for me if I seek him if I not only yield myself but if I am obedient if I learn to live a life of faith a life of hope that manifests itself in a life of love God can use me and we know that there is a concrete way for this to be accomplished in our life if we want this to happen for us there is a way and there's a sequence of events it begins with the decision to do so begins with the decision to be more than a once-a-week Christian more than a twice-a-week Christian more than a Christian who takes our association with Christ out of a box on certain occasions to be seen by others and then put carefully away and it's only a small part of our life it's a decision to genuinely commit our life to Jesus Christ and having made that decision to know what to do next and that is to learn the Word of God and make it the object of faith not simply learn and be puffed up with wisdom but learn and then in every decision in life in every circumstance in life every test every pressure every joy every blessing every prosperity to apply that word that's in our soul make it the object of faith faith is the engine in our soul it runs on God's Word faith has to have an object we have to believe in something Mary believes what she has seen in the history of Israel his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation he has shown strength of his arm he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts a lot of modern scholars read this and they say this was probably some early Christian hymn that was just ascribed to Mary because look here she's talking about the proud and the humble and so forth that doesn't have anything to do with the birth of Christ or seeing Elizabeth or John the Baptist or anything so this is just a hymn somebody stuck in there and said Mary saying this what they fail to realize is Mary knows a whole lot more about the plan of God than they do because this is the culminating expression of God's plan the pattern that he established in the Old Testament there are so many scriptures we could go to but let me just remind you of a few remember in Exodus chapter 34 when God is about to reveal his glory to Moses and he proclaims his name and he says the Lord the Lord expressing mercy to thousands and his loving-kindness to all generations and then he goes on to give the three-generation curse this is in Exodus chapter 34 and the Lord descends and he pronounces his name as he passes before Moses and he says the Lord the Lord God merciful and gracious

long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth this is the characteristic of God abounding in goodness and truth merciful and gracious keeping mercy for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin by no means clearing the guilty and in our study earlier this week we saw that God's mercy and grace are available to all on a condition God's mercy and God's grace are conditioned on humbling ourselves we see this in Deuteronomy chapter 4 we see it in 2nd Chronicles chapter 7 all through the Old Testament God says if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray confess their iniquities I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land God's mercy and grace are conditioned on that humility so as we see the song of Mary we see the fact that God chose her out of all of the ladies in Israel to be the mother of the humanity of Jesus Christ we see that this wasn't a random choice her prominent characteristic was humility and she recognizes this she says that it is the proud who have been scattered in the imagination of their hearts he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly exalted the humble he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty we saw this last Sunday in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus says the well have no need of a physician but those who are sick we saw also that he talks to the Pharisees and says you all are still in your sin because you say we see he said if you were blind secondly humility is teachability if we want to put the things of God first we have to know what they are and that's why we study God's Word that's why we look so closely into that truth and try to make it a resource in our soul that God the Holy Spirit can use finally humility is recognition of need it recognizes that we are hopeless and helpless without what God provides that it's him working in us that makes us what we are in the eternal future that gold and silver and precious stones as a result of God working within us to will and to do his good purpose if we can do like Mary did and place ourselves in the position of service place ourselves in the position of blessing not simply by yielding but also by obeying by recognizing the critical importance of faith and if we recognize the importance of faith we automatically recognize the importance of meditating on God's Word every day how can we have faith in what we do not know or what we do not remember what we do not hear what we don't have cycling through our soul every day faith has to have an object and it draws its strength from that object which is the Word of God that's how God's power enters our life this is what Mary did and she closes by saying he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and his seed forever Mary knew the promises of God to the nation of Israel she knew the Abrahamic Covenant she knew the Davidic Covenant and she saw she recognized in this event not a disruption of her life she didn't when when Gabriel came she didn't say what about my engagement to Joseph what are people going to think I'm gonna be pregnant and I'm not even married how am I going to care for this child what what will happen if my family kicks me out this is going to be a terrible disruption in my life I had plans I had a big wedding going on up there in Nazareth and now I'm gonna have this baby I how do I know that you're really from God Gabriel maybe you're someone sent from the from the tempter how did Mary handle this momentous event she had a structure in her soul she knew the plan of God she knew the book of Daniel she knew the timing was right she knew that Messiah the Prince was due to come every single phrase in this song reflects an Old Testament passage and tells us the importance of knowing and believing God's Word that prepares us for service it keeps us oriented it keeps

us stable puts us in a wonderful place of blessing and of usefulness to God our Father let's close now in a word of prayer father we thank you on this Christmas morning once again for the relationship that we have with you through Jesus Christ we know that his purpose his reason for coming to earth was to bring us to you he said I am the way the truth and the life no man comes to the father but by me and by coming to this earth and being born in humble circumstances himself in the humblest town in Judea to a family that was not noted was not well known was not noble he gave us that example of humility and that fulfilled the pattern that the weak things of this world have been chosen to contrast with the strong and the foolish things with those that consider themselves wise we see that you work in those situations where it looks hopeless and it looks weak and it looks foolish and yet in those humble circumstances those people who look to you and respond to your compassion and your grace in faith are those that you use to accomplish your purpose and father we pray this morning that we can follow that example of Jesus Christ we can follow the example of Mary not only decide that we wish to be used by you but follow those steps on a daily basis of learning your word of making it the object of our faith and placing ourself in that position of service that pleases you and glorifies Christ we ask it in his name amen