

Scripture:

Isaiah 35:1-10

Luke 1:46-55

“A spirit of Joy.”

“Mary, Nazareth Girl” ---- by Ann Weems.

“Mary,

Nazareth girl:

What did you know of ethereal beings
with messages from God?

What did you know of men
when you found yourself with child?

What did you know of babies,
you, barely out of childhood yourself?

God-chosen girl:

What did you know of God
that brought you to this stable
blessed among women?

Could it be that you had been ready
waiting

 listening

 for the footsteps

 of an angel?

Could it be there are messages for us
if we have the faith to listen?”

Anyway you look at it ----- Mary was a remarkable person --- someone we
can learn from.

God didn't just choose her by mistake or hap hazardly ----- God knew that
she was remarkable --- and so He chose her specifically --- but why? -----
why her? --- what was it about her that God so liked?

This week as I thought about Joy --- the candle of joy – the week of joy.

As I thought about Mary and her beautiful response to God working a miracle through her ----- words like ---

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.”

--- and ---

“My soul magnifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.”

As I thought about her --- I also thought she could have responded otherwise
--- she could have pushed back and away from God.

God was about to take her life and turn it completely upside down.

She was on the brink of pretty good things --- betrothed to be married to a solid reputable young man ----- good family ----- respectable --- stable --- she was young and in love ----- things were pretty good.

And God comes along and puts her --- and her husband to be --- in a very difficult situation.

Unmarried and pregnant ---- bad news at that time --- enough to have you pushed aside and forgotten --- ostracized.

From a strictly worldly perspective God basically gave Mary a life of challenges and misery --- she would watch her first born Son --- a very big deal at that time ---- be rejected and humiliated and killed like a common criminal.

And yet Mary saw something else --- as God led her.

It's astounding really that Mary responded so joyfully and with such praise at being chosen by God for this miracle?

She could have rejected God's plan ---- or complied begrudgingly ---- and been bitter and miserable instead of joyful and obedient.

But she wasn't.

The poem by Ann Weems ends with --- "Could it be there are messages for us if we have the faith to listen?"

And of course the answer is yes --- there are messages for us if we have the faith to listen.

First of all joy is a disposition we choose.

And even more to the point joy is a disposition we can chose even when the circumstances are not very joyous.

Joy is a disposition we can choose amidst circumstances that are far than joyous.

Mary's response to God choosing her for a miraculous thing ---- is a miracle itself.

If we think about it --- there are 2 miracles --- acts of God --- with Jesus' birth.

First there is the virgin birth ---- miracle one.

And then second there is the response of the pregnant virgin --- joy and faithful obedience --- miracle two.

There was nothing glamorous about being the mother of the Saviour of the world ---- Mary's firstborn son would be despised and murdered right before her very eyes.

That's tough to watch and witness --- Mary could have been bitter ---- but she wasn't.

There is much we can learn from her.

In her 10 line Psalm --- or song of praise --- Mary outlines some powerful truths about how we can relate to God.

1st --- she reminds us that God is in charge.

God is in charge and we are under God --- below God --- not on equal footing with Him --- not even close to equal footing with Him.

He is God and we are not --- and there is a huge difference.

Indeed everyone --- even the rich of this world --- even the ruler's of this world are powerless in relation to God.

And they are powerless in a very real sense because all of their influence and authority is subject to God's providence --- God's will.

They can be over ruled ---- they can be stripped and laid bare of all they have in a second if God so desires it.

God is in charge --- and Mary knows this completely.

Mary knows that she herself is completely subject to God ---- unworthy in the sense that all the good that happens to her and because of her --- is not of her doing.

It is God's mercy and grace --- His desire and will ----- that brings Mary into the great rescue plan in Christ --- there is nothing she has done to earn it.

God chooses Mary and binds her in intimate relationship --- covenantal relationship.

The same kind of covenantal relationship we see with Noah --- Abraham --- and Moses --- and of course others as well.

God choose Mary --- and God is the key actor --- and Mary not only knows this but she celebrates it.

And although Mary's humility is remarkable ----- she is not really being praised for her humility ---- instead it is truly all about her ability to reveal something about God and not herself ---- that is so remarkable.

If we experience Mary for all she is ---- we soon see that she was all about God's grace and not bringing any attention to herself.

All she really wants to do is sing praises to god and shine the light on Him.

She very quickly points to God.

We know so very little about Mary --- because all she ever really did was point to God and praise Him --- doing whatever was asked of her.

In many ways this is the greatest compliment we can ever give someone ----- that they point and lead us to God.

We will always truly miss the point of the virgin birth if we get stuck on Mary ---- as joyful and beautiful as her response is --- it is truly secondary to the grace of God that comes to life through her.

This is not a story about Mary it is a story about what God is doing with Mary.

God puts a spirit of joy into Mary --- and Mary chooses to let God in and out.

Mary could have been bitter about what she was chosen for --- have a baby out of wedlock --- and then watch this baby grow up and be despised by many --- and then watch as her son is beaten and humiliated and killed like a criminal with other criminals.

Mary could have been bitter and it would have all been understandable.

“My soul magnifies the Lord” ----- could just as easily have been --- “My soul is miserable Lord.” --- “My life is over --- and my son is dead!” --- “Why Lord why?” --- “And why me Lord?”

But it isn't because Mary gives her life over to God.

She empties herself and let's God in ----- she let's God work a miracle with her.

Mary could have gotten bitter ----- instead she chose to get better and give way to God.

And because of this ---- she enables us to experience God's profound goodness.

It isn't about Mary --- it's about what God is doing with Mary --- and through Mary.

It isn't about us --- it's about what God is doing --- or planning on doing with us --- through us.

Mary's joy isn't ----- "Look at me --- aren't I wonderful --- I'm going to have a son and He will be the chosen one --- the Messiah ---God's son." --- "Things are turning out pretty good for me."

No --- Mary knows this whole turn of events is far greater than just Mary in the outback having a baby.

"Praise the Lord oh my soul" ----- is a whole lot more powerful than just "Praise the Lord."

"Praise the Lord oh my soul" ----- means everything within me --- my entire being praises Him.

Only when we have given over your whole being to God --- like Mary --- can we say ----- "Praise the Lord oh my soul" --- or ---- "My soul magnifies the Lord."

"I magnify the Lord" ---- is beautiful ----- but ---- "My soul magnifies the Lord." --- is sublime.

"My soul magnifies the Lord." --- and ---- "I magnify the Lord." --- are two completely different things ---- one is more like ---- "Look what I'm doing." --- the other is more like --- "Look at what God is doing."

This isn't about Mary ---- it's about God.

God's grace --- God's love --- God's rescue plan ----- the miraculous movement of God --- closer and closer to us.

Mary gets it --- and so the joy just gushes out of her.

Eugene Peterson translates the first few verses from our reading in Luke this way --- in The Message -----

“I’m bursting with God-news;
I’m dancing the song of my Saviour God.

God took one look at me, and
Look what happened ---
I’m the most fortunate woman on earth...”

“I’m bursting with God-news --- God took one look at me and look what happened.”

God changed her life and turned her life upside down in an instant --- and she just loves it.

Mary is like a 20 gallon sprinkler going off in a pool that can only ever hold a half a gallon of water ----- she’s gushing --- her joy and admiration ---- are gushing out all over the place --- she is just overflowing with praise and adoration for God.

Her soul magnifies the Lord.

It could have been miserable --- she could have buckled and turned inward --
--- “Why me Lord” ---- or ---- “This is terrifying news --- pick someone else.” ----- “This is too much for me --- I can’t take it.”

She could have seen her life as ruined.

But instead she sees it as glorious because God is orchestrating it all and she knows it.

Deep down inside she knows that all is well.

The answer to the question Mary did you know --- from the song --- we heard it a few minutes ago --- thanks Jessica that was beautiful and Brian ---- it's easy to take Brian for granted isn't it ----- thanks to you as well Brian.

The answer to the question Mary did you know is ----- yes she did.

Yes she did know.

And yes she did know not because she is wonderful and wise --- but yes she did know --- because she was aware that a miracle was happening and that God was the cause ---- so ---- yes she did know ---- and that's part of what makes it all the more powerful.

In her own words ---- picking it up at verse 50 --- in her own words she knows that

“His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.”

In her own words she knows that ----

“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;” ---- and that ---- “he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.”

In her own words she knows that -----

“He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.”

She knows that ----- “He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.”

She knows that ----- “He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

In short --- she knows that it is all because of God.

She knows that what is about to happen is a miracle.

And so the joy of this --- God at work in and through her --- pours out of her.

This isn't --- "I'm going to have a bay."

This isn't about --- "Things are going to work out okay for me --- I won't be despised and ashamed and looked down upon."

This isn't about --- "My future is going to be just fine after all."

This isn't about her life at all.

This is all about God's wonderful ---- beautiful ----- saving --- rescue plan --
---- it's about His providential plan of love.

This isn't just about the cradle or the crèche the beginning of the story of Jesus Christ --- it's also all about the cross --- the grave ----- Easter --- salvation --- the end of time --- eternity --- it's about the whole shebang.

Mary's song of praise is all about the whole shebang.

If it was just about her it would be still be rather beautiful ---- but because it's about the whole of creation and because it's about all principalities and powers it's sublime ---- it's divine ---- and glorious.

In terms of Advent ----- Mary's great song of joy ----- is a timely and much needed in breaking.

In Advent --- in life ----- we wait --- and anticipate.

We celebrate.

We sometimes mourn and we sometimes grieve.

We pray ---- we eat ---- and we rest.

In Advent --- in life ----- we wait.

We anticipate.

We celebrate.

We sometimes mourn and grieve.

We long for --- we yearn.

And thanks to Mary --- thanks to God working in and through Mary ----- we also have this great opportunity to jump for joy in the middle of all this.

Mary reminds us --- Ah yes --- God still does miraculous things – God still performs miracles.

One day we will say --- or at least those who are walking the earth if we're all long gone ----- one day people will say --- "He is here!" --- when Jesus comes again.

And Mary's song of praise is a poignant reminder that He is coming ----- just as Mary was pregnant ----- so the moment was pregnant with anticipation ---- He's coming --- she's growing --- and He's growing in her little tummy.

The moment is still pregnant today ---- Jesus is coming --- His influence is growing ---- as hard as it can be to see sometimes ----- His influence is growing ---- and the world is moving towards that time.

Anticipation --- expectation --- excitement --- yearning ----- longing fill the air.

When --- when ---- when.

And in steps Mary --- down steps God.

And the miraculous rescue plan that is Jesus Christ begins.

The seed of salvation is planted deep within this little Jewish girl --- God is acting --- things are changing --- the rescue plan has been set in motion irrevocably --- there is no turning back.

And somehow this girl gets it.

She sees the cosmic reality of this act of God in her tummy.

Mary for sure has something to teach us ---- holding before us what true and faithful relationship with God looks like.

“Take me God” ----- “I’m here.”

“You are great and mighty God ---- and here I am ---- tucked away over here ready to do your will.”

It’s all about God in me for Mary’s.

Mary is all about God setting up shop in her very soul and doing all that He wants to do.

Let’s hear it all again -----

“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.

His 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.

He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

I Mary --- glorify God ----- because he has taken me --- little ol' me ----- and employed me for one of His mighty acts of love.

Because of Him people will think of me ---- and they'll think of me precisely because of what He has done --- isn't He amazing.

His mercy extends ---- He has performed mighty things ----- and she goes on to list all these great things God has done and will do.

She reminds us that God is still acting --- and that He is still choosing some of the most unlikely of people and the most unlikely of circumstances and causing beautiful --- sublime --- cosmic --- things to happen.

And so as we wait --- and anticipate.

As we celebrate.

As we sometimes mourn and sometimes grieve.

As we gather and praise --- and pray --- and sing --- and hope --- and long and yearn.

As we do all of these things.

We also have this great song of joy ----- this great spirit of joy.

We have God breaking forth into the silence and changing lives.

Acting decisively ----- changing the course of history ----- fulfillment ----- redemption ----- reconciliation ----- restoration ----- the whole shebang.

May our souls magnify the Lord.

May our souls glorify the Lord ----- rejoicing in His love.

Where there is God there is also always Joy.

Today Mary leads the way as we celebrate God's joy.

Hallelujah ---- Amen.