

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.
Amen.

I have enjoyed the Christmas carols more this year in worship than any other time. This country has been through a bruising political year with very strong opinions and convictions being voiced everywhere. In some cases, friends have become bitter enemies simply because they take different sides on policies and politicians, and then we have the privilege of singing Christmas carols in church. The carols tell us Jesus is the answer to all the divisiveness that we see and feel. The carols tell us that Jesus is the answer to all of our anxieties, worries, stress, and more. The carols tell us that God has a plan for all of human history and Jesus is at the center of the plan. The carols tell us that Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, is the only way to know God for He is God in human form. The carols give the gospel to us in song, the power of God coming to us through music. Jesus came because He loves us. Jesus is our Savior who came to save us from our sins. The Christmas carols ring the truth, that with Jesus in our lives we are rich beyond measure. Heaven is our true home and one day Jesus will bring all of us together to His home which, of course, is heaven. Those who have died in Christ are alive and waiting for the great family reunion to come. Christmas carols are full of that Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In the midst of this world's badness, we sing songs of God's goodness that nourishes our souls giving us an undying and indestructible hope even on the darkest of days.

Mary had a growing problem. She was only about 12, or, 13, or maybe even as old as 14 or 15. She found herself pregnant, never having been touched by a man in that particular way. The problem kept getting bigger as the baby inside of her womb grew. Yes, we know it was a supernatural miracle. Mary was told by the angel that she was pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Mary knew this to be true but how do you explain that to your mother, your father, your elderly aunts who gossip boisterously, let alone her betrothed, Joseph, the one she was

going to marry. Mary was in trouble, a trouble that came directly from God, and was Himself God in Mary. “O Mary, did you know?”

God gave to Mary a sign that which was spoken of her was true. Luke 1:36(ESV) ³⁶**And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.** After Mary heard this news from the angel she made haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth who had become pregnant at an old age. God used Elizabeth to confirm to Mary that what was inside of Mary’s womb was a total miracle of God. The Bible puts it this way. Luke 1:39-45(ESV) ³⁹**In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”**

When God calls you to do a specific ministry, to do a work for God, God brings people into your life at the right time and place to confirm that what you are doing is of the Lord. When I speak to people who have done great or small things for God, so often they tell me that they sensed inwardly what God wanted them to do and then God brought Christian people to them to affirm that calling. Just this week I sensed God urging me to do something and at just the right time a person called me and said, “Pastor, I think you should do this;” it was exactly what I was thinking about. My point is when you sense God taking you into a new direction or to do a specific action for God, God most often brings a person into your life to affirm outwardly what you sense inwardly. Mary was inwardly pregnant, not yet showing but the Holy Spirit revealed

to Elizabeth that which was in Mary was the Lord. This was a much-needed affirmation. How we all need to be more affirming in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary responds to the Holy Spirit given affirmation in direct praise to God in an absolutely magnificent way that we call the Magnificat. Once Mary is affirmed, she is strengthened to praise God with words that are eternally true. True worship of God has its focus on God. God inhabits the praises of His people. You and I are built up, strengthened as we sing of God's mighty power and works. His eternal truth lifts us up into His presence with singing. True worship bursts forth from a heart that has been moved by God. Mary was able to truly worship God vibrantly because she accepted God's will for her life, the circumstances of being a virgin yet pregnant.

Friends, when we have our own personal struggles, there are times that worshipping God is almost too much to ask. I know of a person who has been going through a terrible time in life and as a result has quit coming to church. I also know that when our circumstances are downright overwhelming, there is often something in the worship service itself that can be very uplifting. Jesus is here and he is moving among us. It is here you put yourself in a position to receive from the Lord God what your soul is crying out for. Jesus is here. He is moving among us. The Lord will touch you with His Word whether in song, the liturgy, in prayer, receiving Holy Communion, in the confession of sin, the confession of faith, and even the sermon. There is something very good and healing at being together with God's people. The truth that God has for you is exactly what will help you, will pick you up, even if you are in a pit. There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.

Mary's burst of worship is filled with words from the Old Testament. Mary had learned the Word of God well and was able to speak back to God in worship the Word that God had given to her, God's Holy Word. When you believe what the Bible says, your soul wants to burst forth in praise to God. Something from heaven has touched your soul and it is just too much to

keep it in. We want to express it and that is what worshipping in spirit and truth is all about. One's soul exults in God who is our Savior.

Luke 1:46-48a(ESV) ⁴⁶**And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”** Mary's words of worship spring forth from her very soul, from her spirit. Spirit and soul mean the same thing. God is looking for those who will worship him in spirit, from the depths of one's soul. This type of true worship involves your entire being, mind, emotions, and will. We put our all into it for God has put so much into us.

You know it is possible to be in a wonderful worship service and not worship God at all.

Isaiah 29:13(NLT) ¹³ **And so the Lord says, “These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.** That type of worship actually displeases God.

Yes true worship begins in one's heart, one's soul, one's spirit and it is also external. Mary says she exalts the Lord. To exalt is to make great, to magnify, to celebrate, to esteem highly, to praise, to glorify. Mary rejoiced in God her Savior. To rejoice is an expression of extreme joy.

Mary continues, **“He has had regard for the humble state of his servant.”** Friends, when we are humble it makes worship of God so easy. We do not have an attitude that goes like this, “God owes me.” A humble attitude is simply thankful and grateful for what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ. As Christians we always have reason to be grateful for Jesus is alive. Alleluia. Mary was a humble servant surprised that God had picked her. Mary was an ordinary girl from a very insignificant place. She knew that she was a sinner in need of a Savior, which is true of all of us, and God used her in the most special way possible, to bring the God-man Jesus into this world.

Mary was motivated to worship because God had done great things for her and the greatest of All was inside of her. No greater honor could be given than to bear the Christ child. God picked the humblest of persons to do such a thing. Mary praised God for what he would do through Jesus in future generations, and she praised God for what He had done for God's people in the past. The covenant given to Abraham that the Messiah would be born through his family line would now be fulfilled with what was inside of Mary's womb and did Mary ever know it.

I close with these three points:

1. You are never too young to be used by God. Mary was a young teenager. I have known of children younger than Mary that said to their parents. I want to go to Sunday school and church. The parents bring them, get involved in worship, meet Jesus and get saved. Why? God used a little child to bring them to a house of Christian faith. God can use young people greatly as they submit their lives to Jesus walking humbly with God.

2. Young people who learn to praise God early in life carry that with them for the rest of their lives. Young people please keep coming to church and Sunday school. Parents, please keep bringing them so they too can have Jesus living inside of them and be saved for all eternity.

3. The time we have with the children in our home goes by so fast, too fast. Bringing the children up in the admonition of the Lord Jesus is every parent's calling. We all want our children to be just like Mary with the Savior living in their lives, inside of them by the power of the Holy Spirit, saving them from their sins for all eternity. May the Lord make this happen in Jesus name. Amen and Amen.