

Mary's Song

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. It's wonderful to see you. If you have your Bibles in, please grab them and turn back to Luke chapter 1. And this is where we're going to be this morning, looking at Mary's song. So as you turn there, let's pray.

I'll stay very still. So, Father, we ask that you would help us by your Spirit this morning, as we turn to your Word.

And as we take in these quite familiar words that we think about this time of year, about what you've done in our lives, and we pray, Father, that your Spirit would take those familiar words and that he would bring them to our hearts with a real freshness this morning.

Father, thank you that you hear us because we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Well, as we build up to Christmas as a church over the next few weeks, we're going to be thinking about some songs that we find in the Bible from the very first Christmas.

Because, and let's be honest, we're all friends here, okay? Everybody loves a Christmas song, don't we? We love a Christmas song. So, to kick us off this morning to get us thinking, I want you to turn to your neighbour for 30 seconds, and I want you to ask them what is their favourite Christmas song, okay?

[1 : 18] What is their favourite Christmas song? And you've got the time, you can ask them why as well. Go for it. Okay, let's bring it to a close there. Oh, you're good fun with that.

I wonder if anybody said the following. Who said Bing Crosby? Anybody? Classic. We love Bing, do we not? Dreaming of a white Christmas, somebody? There we go.

How about, and maybe this is a bit more modern, what about Michael Bublé? Let's not act like we've not had that album on on Spotify, his Christmas album. There's Michael Bublé. What about the Jackson 5?

Yeah, Santa Claus is coming to town. Classic there. Well, I'm getting lots of shakes. Nobody actually listened to these things, no? You can go home and check them out. Here is my favourite, and I'll admit to having a blast of it in the office this week when no one was around.

My favourite is Last Christmas by Wham. Anyone else say that one? Yeah? A few of us said Last Christmas by Wham. Last Christmas, here's the lyrics. Last Christmas, I gave you my heart.

[2 : 20] But the very next day, you gave it away. This year, to save me from tears, I'll give it to somebody special. Now, it's very funny when you think about it, because apart from that one line in the song, that one word, that song has got nothing to do with Christmas.

If you think about it, because, and it's consistently voted in the top ten Christmas songs of all time, but if you think about it, nothing to do with Christmas. And the reason George Michael wrote the song was nothing to do with Christmas.

It was to do with the fact that somebody came into his life who broke their promises to him. That's why he wrote the song. Somebody came into his life who broke their promises to him.

And to some extent, we can identify, can't we, with George Michael at that point, because we hate it in life when people break their promises to us. Think about it. The politician who promised you the world, who got your vote, and didn't deliver on what he or she said.

The car mechanic who promised you a price, only for it to rise, and to rise, and to rise. The friend who you arranged to meet at that time on that day, who pulled out with one minute to go.

[3 : 30] We hate it, don't we, in life, when people break their promises to us. It's the little promises of life, but it's also true, isn't it, of the big promises of life. And I think that's why this message this morning from Mary's song is such good news for all of us this morning.

For let me take you from a man singing a Christmas song about a person who broke their promises to a young woman singing a Christmas song about the God who's kept his promises.

Here is Mary in chapter one of Luke's gospel singing about and celebrating the God who keeps his promises. If you get one thing from this morning, and encourage me by taking more than one thing from this morning, but take that from this morning.

This God keeps his promises. If you've got your Bibles there, look at verse 55 of chapter one. Mary declares, the end of her song, He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.

You see, right at the heart of Mary's song, right at the heart of what Luke wants us to know, is that this God keeps his promises. Now, with any good song, before we go inside the song, let's go outside the song.

[4 : 56] Let's get under the skin of what's going on here behind Mary's song. So we pick up the story at verse 26 of chapter one, with the angel Gabriel sent by God to go and deliver a message to Mary.

Now, notice where she is. Where is she? She's in this little backwater town of Nazareth. Nazareth. Now, what do you need to know about Nazareth?

What you need to know about Nazareth is not a lot goes on in Nazareth. Okay? Nobody's booking their summer holiday to Nazareth. Hashtag Nazareth is not trending on Twitter.

In fact, the opposite is true. Sometimes as you read people in the Gospels, they're making jokes about Nazareth. Who would come from Nazareth? What good could come out of that place?

This is Nazareth. But it's to this place that God sends Gabriel to announce the dawning of the greatest promise that the world will ever know.

[5 : 57] Not to a palace and a princess, but to a young teenage girl who's living in a backwater town. That's where she is. And notice who she is.

Mary's a young woman. Do you see it in the text? She's pledged to be married. Not to the village celebrity, but to the village carpenter. To Nazareth, to Mary, and to Joseph.

Now let's be honest. If we were God, and we had a message as big as this to deliver to the world, we would have aimed a little bit higher than Nazareth and Mary, would we not?

I mean, no PR expert is signing off on this plan. This is not how you deliver a message of cosmic proportions to the world. Surely, you can see that God.

But, God chose Nazareth, and God chose Mary. And friends, even with that, I hope you're seeing today, whoever you are here this morning, what kind of God that we're dealing with here.

[7 : 03] This is the God of the Bible. The God not of pomp and pride, but the God who looks upon and remembers the unimportant and the seemingly insignificant. Do you not praise him this morning, that he does not operate on our wavelength?

He does not think like we think. This is our God this morning, as we meet him in Luke 1. That's the kind of God that we're dealing with here, the God of the Bible. And so, verse 28, Gabriel delivers God's message to Mary, to see it, that she is greatly favoured.

And notice how she is. How is she? She's greatly troubled. Interesting, isn't it, that our society thinks of angels as being all cute and cuddly?

Personally, I blame Casper the ghost for that. But that is never the reaction of people in the Bible when they encounter angels. Mary's petrified. But, interestingly, if you look closely at the text, not so much at the messenger, she's petrified at the message.

And so Gabriel says to her, to quote Band-Aid, it's Christmas time and there's no need to be afraid. Why? Because God has looked upon Mary in his grace. In his grace, which means it's not because of who she is or what she's done that God is being kind to her.

[8 : 20] She's not come top in the Galilean X factor here. This is not what we're dealing with. God has looked on her, the text suggests, for no other reason than he is gracious and he is kind.

This is the God of the Bible. Right off the bat, you see it, Luke wants us to know this, this doctor turned historian, research this carefully. He wants us to know straight off the bat that this is the kind of God that we're dealing with here.

Looking on the lowly, the God who reaches down to the humble. Mary is favoured. And Gabriel says, Mary, you will be with child.

And she's not going to have to wait for the 20 week scan to learn the gender. Do you see? It's a boy. And she's not going to have to go through that painstaking process of trying to pick a name and hedge your bets. He will be called, verse 31, Jesus.

And instantly do you see that there's a purpose and there's a plan for this boy and the clues in his name, Jesus. Meaning the Lord is salvation.

[9 : 21] That's what his name means. God saves. Named not in hopeful expectation about what he might become. Named precisely in keeping in all, after all that he has come to do and accomplish.

This is Jesus. And Gabriel declares, he will be great. Do you see it there? He will be the son of the Most High who will have the throne of his father, David.

In other words, God is saying, this is my king, my king who I promised that I would send, my king who you've been waiting for and the king who you desperately, desperately need.

And look at the length of his tenure, verse 33. It will have no end. No end. Get your head around that. No end.

Remember I used to love playing when I was young. I still do. I don't really play it that often. The board game Risk. One of you have ever played Risk before? That the, it's a game that's great for your ego, okay, because the strapline of that game is all about build your empire, conquer the world.

[10 : 27] The strapline is world domination. That's what Risk is all about. Played with my friends when I was young. I even managed to win on a few occasions, conquer the world. And every time I conquered the world, I had about one minute to look at the boards and to bask in the fact that my pieces were all over that board.

And this was before camera phones, so I had to mentally store it. Couldn't store it anywhere else. Mentally store it. And I had one minute to bask in that victory until somebody flipped the pieces over and they went back in the box.

And it's time for bed because it's five in the morning. Friends, down the ages, many people have had their goal at building their own little empires, haven't they? Think about it.

The Babylonians had theirs and it ended. The Persians had theirs and it ended. The Egyptians had theirs and it ended. And as someone pointed out to me recently, who would have thought in Mary's day that 2,000 years later we would be sitting here today and the first thing that you and I would think of when we hear the name Caesar is dog food.

And who would have thought that 2,000 years later after this event that literally billions of people around this planet today and down the ages have had their lives transformed by the baby boy who was born to this girl in this backwater town.

[11 : 54] See, the proof's in the pudding, isn't it? His kingdom will have no end. The event which the whole of redemption history has been moving forward to is about to kick off and it's about to kick off in this teenager's womb.

The virgin will give birth to a son. Do you see, it's not man's doing this birth, it's going to be God's doing. Something spoken about long before this moment by the prophet Isaiah.

Speaking about a future time to his generation when God would come to deliver his people. And what will be the sign of that happening? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel. But maybe you hear this morning, you're thinking, virgin birth, seriously?

Sounds a bit like Loch Ness Monster and the Leprechauns if you ask me. I mean, is this Christianity's fairy tale feature? Does it matter? Does it matter?

[12 : 59] Well, let me just say to you today that the virgin birth really matters. It really matters. For the saviour that you and I need needs to be one of us so that he can stand as our representative.

And the saviour that we need needs to be above us so that he is unstained by the sin that plagues each one of us, meaning that he can live the perfect and sinless life before God, the one that he gives to his people and makes them right with God.

Friends, the virgin birth really matters. And if it really matters, let me tell you what it means. Firstly, it means that you and I are lost. We are lost.

This is one almighty custard pie in the face to mankind's thinking that you and I can save ourselves. the human gene pool is no place to go fishing for a saviour.

And the answer to the problem of the brokenness and rebellion needs to come from outside of us, not inside of us. It means that we are lost without God's intervention in our lives.

[14 : 17] It means we are lost outside of Jesus Christ. And secondly, it means that we are loved. Because God could quite justifiably have passed over us and left us to our own devices.

Passed over us and had nothing to do with us. But he acted. This is what we celebrate, isn't it, at Christmas time, that love came down. I remember growing up at school and there was a song that was popular written by, I think it was Joan Osborne, I googled it this morning that we used to sing in the playground.

And the chorus went, what if God was one of us? Do you remember that song? What if God was one of us? Just a slob like one of us? Just a stranger on the bus trying to make his way home? Now whatever Joan Osborne was trying to say in that song, let me tell you that what we celebrate at Christmas is God coming down. The truth of Christmas is that God in the person of his son came down into humanity's broken, complicated and messy equation.

that God in the form of Jesus Christ took on flesh. He came to live where we live and the words of John chapter 1 and if you want your minds blown hang out in John chapter 1 this week, he tabernacled, he came to be with us in order that reconciliation to the God who made us would become a distinct possibility.

[15 : 46] Do you see how the virgin birth tells his friends that when we weren't looking for God, God came looking for us. He came looking for us. He came down to find us, to lead us out of death.

This is the extent that God went to to rescue us. And maybe you're here today and you're asking yourself, does God really care about my life?

If that's you, then I would invite you to see the baby in the manger that's promised about here, Emmanuel, God with us, as a resounding yes.

Does God care? Yes, he does. He cares enough that he sent his son to come and seek and to save the lost. He cares, friends, he cares.

Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord, late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb, veiled in flesh, the Godhead seen, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.

[16 : 56] I'd encourage you to stop and to think about the lyrics of some of the Christmas songs that we sing because they are packed full of tremendous theology, friends. And if that's hard for you and I to get our heads around, and it is at times, isn't it?

Just think how Mary's feeling at this point in the story. Gabriel's just dropped that one on her. How is she feeling? Well lastly, notice what she is. What does she say?

I'm sorry Gabriel, you've got the wrong girl. If you head on down the road, I'm sure you'll find somebody else who's better equipped for the job. She doesn't say that. Do you see how what began with fear in her mind ends in faith?

Mary responds by declaring and let's have another song cue the Beatles, let it be, may it be, is this what she says? And so having visited and being affirmed by Elizabeth, who the boy in her womb jumps for joy at the very presence of his Lord, do you see how Mary can't contain her praise about the truth of everything that the Lord is doing?

Verse 46, and here we hit the song, Mary exclaims, God, my soul, what glorifies you? God, my heart, what does it do? It magnifies you. Notice all the personal pronouns in this section.

[18 : 12] Do you see it? My spirit, the mighty one has done great things for me. She is no passive actor in this drama. She is in this heart and soul and her whole being rejoices at this news.

Fascinating again that this song says nothing about a baby. This song says everything about the significance of the baby boy who's in her womb because she knows what it means.

And so having seen what's going on outside the song, let's quickly have a look at what's going on inside the song because as we think about what Mary's singing here, declaring, it tells us two great things about the things that Mary knows in her life.

And it encourages us this morning to think about these things in our own lives as well. They reveal to us two great things. Firstly, who she knows her God to be. He is the promise-keeping God.

This is who he is. Mary looks down the corridors of time and she recalls the promises that God made to Abraham, the promises that she's grown up on, the promises that she's heard, no doubt from her family.

[19 : 23] And she recalls God's promise to rescue and to bless. And all the times that God delivered his people in the past with his mighty arm. And Mary's declaring, world, my God's at it again.

My God is at it again and this time he's at it again in the greatest way possible. And so she says, doesn't she, my God is what? Mighty? She's reveling in the truth that her God, do you see, doesn't

work on the basis of human limitations.

Her God is the one who defines the realm of possibility. He is the God who formed the world out of nothing. He is the God who parted the Red Sea. He is the God of angel armies and for him, nothing is impossible.

And maybe some of us here today, we need to recapture the wonderful truth about this God, that nothing is too great for him. He doesn't work according to our agenda. He doesn't work according to our plans.

He isn't limited to working within our contours or being able to fathom things. Our God makes the impossible possible. He is the mighty one and He is the merciful one.

[20 : 37] Verse 50, His mercy extends to those who fear Him. Feel the invitation in those words. Verse 54, He is remembered to be merciful to Israel. Our God doesn't treat us as we deserve.

That's what she's saying. He doesn't treat us as we deserve. He treats us so much better than we deserve. And our God, He's got a track record of overthrowing the proud and lifting up the humble. That's the shape of His kingdom. Overthrown the proud, lifting up this humble. Said in the present tense as if to say this is already a done deal. This is what He's done. She knows who her God is and secondly she knows who herself is.

She knows herself to be rather. Do you see how she's not simply a conduit of God's blessing and favour? She's a recipient of it. For this great news of rescue for the world is great news of rescue for the world, but it's great use of rescue for her.

She knows she needs a saviour, one that she's not worthy of, and she knows she's part of a people who need a saviour that they're not worthy of. It's the only requirement, isn't it, of grace, that we realise we are unworthy of it.

[21 : 50] You see how Mary uses two words to describe herself at verse 48, which gives us just a little window into her heart here. Do you see her talking about firstly her humble estate? In other words, she's bowed the knee to this God, that's the stance of her heart, her humble estate, and as well secondly the humble estate of his servant.

God, I'm yours, says Mary, I am yours. And so she joins in the line of Christian men and women down the ages who would offer their lives in service of this God.

The words of Jim Elliot, the American missionary who took the gospel to an unreached tribe in Ecuador before being tragically martyred. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.

I'm yours, says Mary, I'm yours. And you've got to admire Mary for her bravery here, don't you? For her to walk by faith here is a very costly thing in her life.

Think about it. Put it yourself in her shoes. She, at this point, has got to go and tell Joseph that she's pregnant and he's not the father. May well cost her her marriage, all of those dreams of children and of a family home and of grandchildren may well disappear in an instant.

[23 : 16] And not just with Joseph, is Mary going to take a massive risk here? She's jeopardizing her standing in society, Nazareth, as we said at the beginning, not a big place, not an awful lot going on, desperate, I'm sure, for some gossip.

And people being people being people, as soon as one person finds out that Mary's pregnant, it won't be long before the whole time finds out, and Mary's reputation would be in tatters, probably along with her parents.

Mary's got a lot to lose here in trusting God, but she declares, let it be. despite it all, she's willing to surrender her life to God's will.

What an example that is of faith, of fearless faith. You know, as soon as we enter the season of work Christmas parties, of school nativity plays, of time with friends and family, let me challenge us at the outset of Advent.

Are we willing to be brave for our association with this child? Are we willing to lay our reputations on the line for the sake of being obedient to God?

[24 : 20] And are we willing to make Mary's declaration, the one from her heart, our declaration, and say today that God, I am your humble servant.

Let it be. Let it be. Interesting, if you've got a KJV there, some of the older translations of the Bible, Mary's words are recorded as, be it unto me according to thy words.

That's what it says. And those words are extremely close, if you think about it, to the words that her boy in her womb would utter years later as he found himself on the eve of his death in the garden of

Gethsemane.

For Jesus, with the fear of the cross pressing in on his soul, would say, not as I will, Father, not as I will, but as your will be done.

You see, Mary made great sacrifices for the baby in her womb, but he would make an infinitely greater one for her. Mary willingly accepted the shame that would come on her for bearing this child, but Jesus would bear the shame for the sin of the world on himself as he made the greatest ever sacrifice, surrendering his life on the cross for the sin of his people.

[25 : 44] The sacrifice we'll be remembering in just a few moments' time when we take communion together. And the words of that old hymn, bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

Hallelujah, what a savior. here. Friends, just as we close, I wonder if you've had fun maybe yesterday opening the first day of your advent calendar.

Did we have fun with that yesterday? Yeah? Love a bit of chocolate, any excuse will do. I find it fascinating that everyone in our society does advent. Do you know what I find that fascinating? Find that really interesting. Do you know what advent means? It just means coming. It just means coming. We're counting down the days to Jesus' first coming into the world.

That's what we're doing as we're opening those little windows, isn't it? We're counting down the days to his first coming into the world. Friends, if you're looking for a wonderful way into an evangelistic conversation this week, go with advent.

[26 : 46] Do you know what advent really means? Do you know what advent really means? But as we celebrate his first coming, let's remember, like Mary here, that we are waiting on a coming.

Now, we're not waiting on his first coming. We, on the other side, awaiting on his second coming. When he won't come as meek and mild Jesus, he will come as judging and victorious Jesus, and he will make right all that is wrong with the world.

Now, as we think about the promise, not of his first coming, we think about the fulfillment of the promise of his first coming, we think about the promise of his second coming. What have we got to go on? What have we got to go on?

What we've got to go on is exactly what Mary had to go on here. She's staking it all on the promise of God. She's staking it all on the truth that she knows in her life, that this God keeps his promises. She's staking it all on the word of the Lord. And that's where we find ourselves in the story. So as we open our Advent calendars, friends, let's remember we are celebrating the first coming, but we are awaiting the second coming.

[27 : 58] George Michael wrote a song about the person in his life who broke their promises. Mary says, come and have a listen to my song. I think that's why Luke wrote it, wasn't it? Come and have a listen to her song. And let her tell you just how good her God is.

And let her tell you about the God who keeps his promises. And don't just admire the song. Don't just admire the song. Come and be part of the song. And make this song your song.

For this God, he has done great things for me, says Mary. And his mercy, and here's the invitation to come to know this God this morning, his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation.

This is the God who keeps his promises. Let's pray. And so Father, in the silence now we would just offer to you our own prayers.

As we begin to think about Christmas, as we begin to think about Advent and everything that comes with that. And Lord, in the silence now we would want to make Mary's prayer our prayer and say let it be.

[29 : 09] Let it be. And so thank you for the wonderful truth that you are the God who makes all things possible.

That you are the God who loves us so much that you would send your Son to find us and to seek us and to save us. And Lord, I pray that as we journey through Advent, as we journey through this little series as a church, that you would help us to savor your greatness more.

And so it's in Jesus' precious and worthy name that we pray. Amen.