

Mother Christmas: Mary

Jason Abbott

This evening we're going to read a poem composed by a girl in her early teens. That's how old Mary would have likely been when, through an angel, she was told she would bear the Christ child. So, we need to read these poetic words thru the eyes of a teenage girl if we're going to really appreciate and understand them.

The gospel account of Luke, however, was most likely written around AD 60. It was written as a history after many investigative interviews and much research. And, friends, for Luke to have this poem and all the events surrounding Jesus' birth in his account means he'd have almost certainly needed to talk to a much older Mary, a Mary who'd have been in her mid-70s. So, we also need to read Luke's recounting of these poetic words thru the eyes of an elderly mother if we're going to appreciate and understand them.

We need to read it keeping in mind what's ahead for this pregnant teenager and, also, read it keeping in mind what's behind (what's past) for this elderly mother. So, we're going to study this poem from two directions. We'll study it as a prophecy and as a personal-history in order to rightly meet the baby in Mary's womb.

Luke 1:46-55

“My soul glorifies the Lord / ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, / ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful / of the humble state of his servant. / From now on all generations will call me blessed, / ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— / holy is his name. / ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, / from generation to generation. / ⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; / he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. / ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones / but has lifted up the humble. / ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things / but has sent the rich away empty. / ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, / remembering to be merciful / ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, / just as he promised our ancestors.”

Some of you are teenagers but most of you aren't. If you're on the northside of your teenage-years, I want you to try and remember what they were like for you.

Try and recall your teenage hopes and desires. Try and remember your insecurities back then. Try and recall what you were like.

Friends, in many ways, Mary was no different. She, no doubt, dreamed about and hoped for romance. She, like all teenagers (and adults for that matter), struggled with insecurities—*Am I pretty? Do people like me? Will I be accepted by my peers?* Contrary to what some Christian traditions say of Mary, she was just a human being like you and me. She was doubtlessly a very normal teenage girl.

Yet, of course, some very extraordinary things happened to her. The Lord God chose her to bear the Messiah. All that that entailed was uncommon and exceptional. Virgin births are uncommon. Visits from angels are uncommon. Being the mother of God in human flesh is uncommon.

So, think normal teenager in the midst of extremely abnormal circumstances. That's the biblical picture of Mary; that's where we meet her as she recites her poem of praise to God.

In it, she speaks of him as the table-turning God.

- She's just a humble young woman, but the Lord God has done great things for her—future generations will call her blessed (vv. 48-49). *Tables turned.*
- The Lord scatters the proud and dethrones rulers, but he lifts up the humble and needy (vv. 51-52). *Tables turned.*
- He's fed and cared for the hungry but has sent the rich away empty (v. 53). *The tables have turned, she sings.*

Yet, there's something very strange about all this table-turning. Did you notice that Mary sings of what this unborn baby means almost exclusively in the past-tense? Listen to the verbs she uses.

- Through the birth of this child, the Lord “has performed mighty deeds” and “has scattered the proud” (v. 51). *It's finished.*
- Through this unborn baby, God “has brought down rulers from the throne” and, simultaneously, “has lifted up the humble” (v. 52). *It's finished.*

I could go on, but you get the point. Mary speaks about what the Lord is doing as if it's already done. She speaks in a prophetic past-tense. What the Lord has willed shall be accomplished. It's as good as done; nothing could be more certain.

What deep, poetic theology from this teenage girl! What a statement of praise and thanksgiving for the Lord's salvation in this baby! Indeed, God turned the tables when he gave us Christ Jesus, but I wonder if Mary knew—as she sang this song—what turning the tables on sin and death would look like for her.

- Mary would be suspected of adultery and then almost sent away by Joseph. Do you think those suspicions ever ceased to haunt her around Nazareth? She saw the glances and heard the whispers all her life. *This was one cost for Mary—false accusations and suspicions.*
- She would love her boy, as only a mother can, yet slowly come to realize that, above being her son, he must be her Lord and God. *Just another cost of God's great reversal for young Mary.*
- Ultimately, however, Mary would progressively learn that, for her to live, her firstborn child must die. *Oh, friends, how Mary experienced the costs of God's saving mission in Christ!*

I doubt she could've fully understood what it would mean to be called blessed. I wonder, *if she had understood*, whether or not she would have sung this little song. It would be difficult to sing so joyously seeing the approach of that kind of future—that kind of life. Wouldn't it? ...I think so.

But, again, the gospel of Luke offers us two angles on her. And, it has answers for us when we keep the teenage Mary together with the elderly Mary. In doing that, we begin to understand God's table-turning, redemptive work more fully.

Friends, as we close, picture Luke—the doctor, the historian, the evangelist—sitting beside the aged and wizened Mary. She describes the visit of the angel Gabriel and her trip to see Elizabeth and her three months stay there. She is describing these with everything in view: *all the gossip and false accusations surrounding the birth; all the labor of love that goes into mothering a baby—the sowing of clothing, making of meals, learning of words; all the sadness of coming to terms with his true identity*

and mission—his betrayal, his condemnation, and his execution. All of these things in mind! All of these things in view!

If Mary had wanted, she could have kept the poem to herself. She could have withheld her worship. She could've been silent, but Mary *wasn't*.

Why is that? Through all the pain, through all the loss, through all the tragedy, what made this poem of praise still ring true for Mary? Why would Mary recite it for Luke to record?

I imagine that it's because one memory triumphed over all the rest for Mary: The memory of her boy—"who through the Spirit [had now been] appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). For this mother, and for you and me, only this can eclipse our tragedies in triumph.

Friends, this is what the celebration at Christmas is really about—not a baby in a manger but a God on a cross.

God in flesh come as our Savior Sacrifice! All so that you and I might sing along with Mary...

*My soul glorifies the Lord / and my spirit rejoices in God [who is] my Savior,
/ for he has been mindful / of the humble state of his servant (vv. 47-48).*

Amen! Pray with me.