



MARY'S SONG

As part of our Advent celebrations this year, we're going to be looking at the first ever Christmas songs, recorded for us in Luke's Gospel. We begin with Mary's song ...

Luke 1:26-56

If you've come from a Catholic background, you'll know that Mary's song is commonly called the *Magnificat*, or 'magnify' in Latin: *magnificat anima mea dominum*. Thing is: the NT wasn't written in Latin, it was written in Greek – so it should actually sound like this: *megalunei hei psuche mou ton kurion*. However, when Mary (or better, Miriam) *originally* sang this song, she would have sung it in Hebrew: so *romemah naphshi et ha'adonai* (roughly translated: "I want to big-up God with all that I am!").

As we'll see, that's an important key to understanding these songs: to read them within their Hebrew context.

So what kind of song is Mary's (vs47)? It's a song of joy – an emotion we commonly associate with Christmas. And where do people look for joy? It could be:

- Pleasures? Food, drink, parties, holidays?
- Possessions? Toys, gadgets, perfume, bling?
- People? Family, friends, loved ones – pack 'em in?!

Problem is: pleasures get boring; possessions get broken; and people get too much! And when we place our expectations on these aspects of Christmas and they fail to deliver, that can make us even less joyful!

So where can we find the joy that Mary expresses here? Where does Mary find it? In 3 places:

1) In God's Strength (vs46-49). I want you to try to grasp Mary's situation here. She's probably around 15 years of age, she's engaged to Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth, and she's been told by an angel that she's pregnant; God is the Dad; and the baby is the Messiah! Now when you're expecting a baby you want to tell everyone about it, right? Imagine that baby's the Saviour of the World! But Mary's not stupid: she knows she could lose everything:

- Her marriage: what would her fiancé Joseph say?
- Her reputation: what would the community say?
- Her life: what would the Law say (Deuteronomy 22)?

What would you do in Mary's situation? What does Mary do? She does a runner - to her cousin Elizabeth, down in Judah! So where was the joy in this, you might be thinking? Look at Mary's words in these verses: she recognises that God knows everything, that He's planned everything, and that He's in charge of everything. And she says 'yes' to it (i.e. not 'my will be done' but 'Thy will be done'). The Christian life can be tough, sometimes: saying, doing, being the right thing. On those occasions we need to remember who's in charge of it all, and say 'yes' – even when it would be easier to say 'no.'

2) In God's Love (vs50). The Greek word for "mercy" here is *eleos*, which means 'to withhold a punishment from someone who deserves it.' But in Hebrew you've got 2 words for mercy, and they mean something a little different. And I actually think that both are used here in Mary's song:

- *Chesed* (vs50). This is one of the Hebrew words for God's love. It means a never-ending love (which is why Mary says it keeps on going from generation to generation); and a love that never gives up.
- *Racham* (vs54). This word literally means 'to put your arms around', and it's related to the word for womb. That's how God feels about us – the same way a mother feels about the baby she's expecting.

So Mary realises that she is as precious to God as her child is to her. I remember holding Josh just a minute after he'd been born - one of those real 'wow' moments. And as I held him, this thought just came out of nowhere: "This is how God sees you." Up until that point I had only ever seen my relationship with God from my point of view, as His child. But now I was seeing it from God's point of view, as a dad - an unforgettable experience.

3) In God's Promises (vs51-55). Now it may just be me, but God's memory seems to operate in a strange way. He appears to have a bad memory when it comes to our sins, but a good memory when it comes to His

promises! What do I mean by that? When we say to God “Lord, please forgive me for the bad things I do,” God’s response is: “Bad things? What bad things?” But when we’re talking about God’s promises, it’s a different matter. He intends to keep every single one.

The greatest proof of this is Jesus. All the way through the OT, from Genesis 3 to Malachi 4, God had promised to send the Messiah – and if God kept *those* promises, we can be pretty sure He’ll keep the rest, too. That means eventually we’ll live in the kind of world described here:

- No more sorrow.
- No more oppression.
- No more poverty.
- No more injustice.
- No more inequality.
- No more disease.
- No more death. (And all God’s people said? Amen!)

And what’s true on a global level is true on an individual level, too – God will keep His promises, to us. To shape us into the people He knows we can be; to never let us go; to prepare a place in His Kingdom, for us. *That’s* what Mary was celebrating here!

What Would You Sing?

So Mary’s song is a song of celebration – a celebration of God’s strength, God’s love, and God’s promises. *That’s* where she finds her joy – and so can we.

Now it may just be me, but it seems as though Mary’s song ends quite abruptly. In fact, all of these ancient ‘lullabies’ do. Which got me thinking: maybe we’re not talking 4 songs – maybe we’re talking one BIG song. It’s obvious that Mary’s song is similar to songs in the OT, like Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2). Perhaps Luke is saying, “These are all parts of the same song, a song of joy that keeps on going. A song that we can all become part of.”

So to end on, if you had the chance to add a stanza to this song, what would *you* sing? What have *you* got to celebrate today? What has God done to bring *you* joy?