**Mary, Why this Jubilee?**

**12-6-20**

In recent months, we have spoken quite a bit about experiencing Jubilee in every corner of our *lives* so that we can *spread* Jubilee to every corner of our *influence*.

* But it turns out that we are not the first ones to be called to do this.
* On the contrary, the Christmas story is filled with individuals both experiencing and spreading the Jubilee of God.

This was recognized by the lyricist and translator, James Chadwick, who loosely translated a French Christmas carol, *Angels in our Countryside,* into English 1862 and renamed it, *Angels We have Heard on High*.

* In the first line of the second verse, Chadwick penned this question.
  + *Shepherds why this Jubilee?*
    - Why are you rejoicing? Why are you optimistic? Why do you have a new lease on life?
    - After all, their circumstances hardly warranted Jubilee.
      * They were poor, disenfranchised loners and drifters.
      * So why this Jubilee?
* We’re actually going to ask that of the shepherd’s next week.

But it got me to wondering: are there any in the Christmas story that also unexpectedly experienced the Jubilee of God? And the answer is, yes!

* So we are going to ask the same question of them.
  + In a couple of weeks we will consider the Magi and ask: “Magi, Why this Jubilee?”
  + And as I said, next Sunday we will ask the same question of the Shepherds.
  + But today, I want to focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and ask her: “Mary, Why this Jubilee?”

It’s a reasonable question, because Mary has all kinds of reasons not to see her life through the lens of Jubilee.

* First off, she’s dirt poor – the young fiancé of a carpenter from Nazareth.
* Second, she’s a dirt poor woman.
  + That may sound like a terrible thing to say, but in her culture her gender was a clear disadvantage.
  + So much so that just a few decades later one of the most popular Rabbis of the second century, Yehuda bar Ilai, would teach his disciples to praise God every day for what he called the three blessings:
    - *“Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe who has not created me a woman, a gentile, or a slave.”*
      * It was considered a blessing to be a man because only free Jewish men could participate fully in the community of faith.
      * Only men could study Torah, become Rabbis or even a disciple of a Rabbi.
      * In fact, even the Temple of God was broken up into a series of courtyards.
        + The one farthest from the Most Holy Place was the Court of the Gentiles, while the court followed by the Court of the Women – which was for Jewish women like Mary.
        + Only free Jewish men were allowed in the court closest to the Most Holy Place.
      * In first century Israel, women, gentiles and slaves were literally further from God than the free Jewish man.
* Oh, and third, Mary wasn’t just a dirt poor woman. She was a dirt poor woman who had come up pregnant outside of marriage.
  + And while she claimed that God was responsible, only Joseph and apparently her aunt Elizabeth believed that.
    - So, her reputation was undoubtedly in shambles, even though by all other accounts she was an exemplary young woman.
      * In fact, it may well be that it was the ridicule and condemnation experienced in her home town that caused Mary, as we saw in our text, to spend three months of her pregnancy with her older cousin Elizabeth in a town way down south in Judah.

So all of this brings us back to the question of the hour: Mary, why this Jubilee?

* You’re a first century, dirt poor, Jewish woman who has to live with a sullied reputation in a culture where your reputation is everything.
* And yet, in Luke 1:46-56 you give one of the most beautiful and jubilant declarations in all of scripture.
  + So amazing a statement, that over the centuries the church has given it it’s own name: *The* *Magnificat.* 
    - Some think it’s called that because it is such a “magnificent” expression of Mary’s heart.
    - But that’s not the case.
      * It’s actually called the *Magnificat* because that is the first word Mary uses to declare what is welling up within her: *My soul magnifies the Lord.*
      * And in good Hebrew poetic form, the second line restates and reinforces the first: *And my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior!*
* And again I ask, why? Why this Jubilee?

Well part of the beauty of Mary’s song, is that she tells us why.

* First, Mary’s Jubilee arises out of her knowledge that she is, in fact, a poor Jewish woman whose reputation lay in tatters.
  + You cannot read the Magnificat and not recognize the depth of her personal humility.
    - But what we may not recognize is that this humble acknowledgment of what she calls her “lowly estate” is truly a pre-requisite to her Jubilee.
  + Mary doesn’t come to God complaining or with any sense of entitlement – she doesn’t feel God owes her.
    - But neither is she Pollyannish about things.
      * It’s not like she doesn’t see the injustices in her life and society.
      * Just look later in this grand poem and you’ll see that she longingly speaks of a day when God would vindicate the poor and lift up the disenfranchised.
    - The truth is, Mary recognizes and lives with greater oppression and injustice than we as modern Americans could even imagine, much less have experienced.
      * For she has lived with the barbaric injustices and oppression of a Roman occupation her entire life.
      * And she has watched as everyone she has ever loved has suffered under their boot (or sandal, as the case may be).
    - But Mary did not blame God for this – not even for the shredding of her reputation by the Holy Spirit’s direct intervention in her life.
  + Instead, in the face of all of these injustices, Mary “magnifies the Lord”.
* Now I want you to take a moment and think about the word, “magnify”, as you normally would in our modern context.
  + Remove all religious meaning from it for a moment and what does it mean? It means, literally, in both ancient Greek and English, “to make large”.
    - And in our modern context, there are essentially two ways in which we do that.
      * We either make large something that is very small with a microscope.
      * Or we make large something that is actually much larger, but is very far away with a telescope.
    - Well, in our lives we are always magnifying something.
      * We are either making it large so we can focus on it, or we are making it large so others can see it too.
  + And Mary had that same choice to make in her life.
    - She could point her microscope on the challenges and injustices of her life, focusing all of her attention on them.
      * In doing so, she could seek to draw everyone’s attention to them, making them bigger so everyone notices them.
      * Hoping against hope that someone would care about this unacceptable and undeserving position in which she finds herself.
      * But if Mary has a microscope, she chooses not to use it.
    - Instead, Mary pulls our her telescope and points it at God.
      * Before Elizabeth and Joseph and anyone else that will listen, Mary “makes large” the God who is greater than all her challenges, all the injustices, all the nay-sayers and even the entire Roman army.
        + Read the rest of the Magnificat and you’ll see that she “makes large” His mercy, His faithfulness, His strength, His plan, and His attentiveness to all who have suffered injustice at the hands of the rich and powerful.
      * And what we learn from Mary is that when we Magnify God, we suddenly lose focus on all those things that seemed so great under the microscope just a short time ago.
        + And instead, with Mary, we are able to rejoice in spite of it all.

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,*

*and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

* + Mary is well aware of her condition, but she doesn’t magnify it.
    - Rather, she magnifies God and in the light of His glory, she can rejoice in the midst of it.
  + But I can hear it now. The wisdom of the world says that if you don’t magnify your own injustice you will be run over by the powerful.
    - You have to magnify it in order for people to pay attention…in order for change to happen…in order to defend ourselves and our rights.
      * We have seen protests in the streets and lawsuits in the courtroom this year as people have sought to magnify the injustices against them.
      * And as Americans, that resonates with us.
        + We like to see ourselves as a can-do, justice-seeking, rights-defending activist people.
    - How could Mary just sit back passively and accept things as they were?
      * How could she rejoice in God’s Jubilee in the face of such oppression and injustice?

I believe the reason Mary was able to do this was actually revealed by her cousin, Elizabeth, back in vs. 45

* Mary had just entered her home and had called out to her a greeting – most likely *Shalom, cousin Elizabeth*.
  + And the text tell us that at the sound of Mary’s voice, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb (he who would be John the Baptist) leaped!
    - And Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit exclaimed loudly a blessing upon Mary.
    - And it was in this blessing that we discover the key to why Mary was able to point her telescope toward God rather than focus her microscope on her problems.
  + In vs. 45, Elizabeth declares:

*45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”*

* + - Mary could magnify God and not her challenges because Mary believed God.
      * Even when she didn’t understand, she believed.
        + She believed she would be with child though a virgin
        + She believed her son would be *the son of the most High – the Son of God*
        + She believed God would give him the throne of David
        + And she believed His Kingdom would have no end.
        + She believed that her cousin Elizabeth, in her old age, also had conceived a son.
        + For she believed what Gabriel had told her that NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.
      * Mary took God at His word and staked her life on it.
        + And not just the word of the angel Gabriel, but of the Scriptures themselves.

Mary was able to magnify God and not her challenges because she knew by personal experience and by the word of God that God saw all the injustices and oppression in her life and in the world and WAS IN THE PROCESS OF DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT. Look at vss. 48-49

*48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

*49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,*

*and holy is his name.*

* Vs 48 literally means *for He has noticed and paid attention to his lowly, insignificant, bondservant.*
  + Mary’s personal experience is that the Creator of the Universe took notice of her – not because of anything she possessed or did – but in His grace.
    - Like I said, she had a full understanding of just how insignificant she was.
    - Which makes the fact that God knew her, that he knew her station and situation in life and yet still focused His attention on her a reason for Jubilee.
      * She doesn’t need to magnify her problems for God to see them – He already sees them and knows them and has come to do something about them!
      * And for some inexplicable reason, He has chosen to include her in the process.
    - Mary believes God.
* And while there is much she doesn’t understand, she does seem to grasp the enormous significance of what God is doing in her life and stands amazed by it.
  + God has taken this dirt poor, disreputable, Jewish woman and made her a part of His plan to end injustice and make all oppression cease!
  + She can hardly believe it when she declares:

*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

*49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,*

* + - Why would she ever pull out her microscope?
    - Why would she ever focus on magnifying her problems, when she can magnify the One who will obliterate them?
    - Surely, Mary would agree with the Apostle Paul who wrote years later in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18:

*17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

* + - * Or, we choose to “make large” the One who will change everything forever, rather than the comparatively small troubles we are experiencing in the present circumstance.
      * This is a recipe for Jubilee.

But a key ingredient to that recipe is humility. Do you see how Mary’s humility was such a huge part of her Jubilee?

* She had no illusions of her own importance or significance.
  + She did not feel as though God owed her anything, or that He existed to serve her or make her life easier.
  + From her perspective, He had already given her everything she held dear – her faith, her family, her land, her life, her hope, and now her child.
* To her, *Every good gift and every perfect gift was from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* (James 1:17)
* By “making large” God’s presence in her life, rather than her misfortune, she was able to see God at work in and around her all the time.
  + So, she never felt ripped off or dealt with unfairly.
    - In fact, all she could see was blessing.
  + Is it any wonder she enjoyed the Jubilee of God.

But if we choose to magnify our sense of injustice, our problems, what we lack, what we want – and see God as not fulfilling His end of the bargin.

* Then disillusionment, conflict, discontentedness, and frustration will be our lot.
  + And we may miss what God IS doing.

Mary didn’t miss it. In fact, she demonstrates in the Magnificat that she can see that God is doing far more than just blessing HER life.

* For in vs. 50 she branches out, declaring that if God is aware of her lowly life and wants to involve her in His plans, then He is ALSO aware of all who are lowly and insignificant on the earth, and that He knows each one.

*50 And his mercy* [she says] *is* [not just for her – as if she were someone special, but is] *for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

* That is, those who believe Him, who take Him at his word, who magnify Him.

*51 He has shown strength with his arm;*

*he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

*52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones*

*and exalted those of humble estate;*

*53 he has filled the hungry with good things,*

*and the rich he has sent away empty.*

* Here we have nearly a literal description of Old Testament Jubilee, where indentured slaves are set free, the impoverished are forgiven their debts, the displaced are restored to their lands, and the hungry are fed and rested.
  + Mary is declaring that God’s grace and mercy is not just for her.
    - She says over and over again that she is nothing special – but rather has been especially blessed.
    - As will be all who will humbly entrust themselves to the mercy of the God who knows them and loves them in their lowly estate.
* In this beautiful song, Mary declares that the same blessing she enjoys is for anyone who will take Christ at His word.

*For behold, from now on all generations will call us blessed;*

*49 for he who is mighty has done great things for us,*

*and holy is his name.*

Friends, if anyone had reason to complain and magnify her problems in life, it was Mary – but she refused.

* Instead, she magnified God, and spread God’s Jubilee to Elizabeth and to Joseph, and to everyone else she came into contact with for the remainder of her days.
  + And she lived to see her son, the Son of God, bring Jubilee to all who will humbly acknowledge that we are debtors in need of reconciliation, we slaves in need of redemption, we are the insignificant in need of God’s mercy, we are the displaced in need of restoration.
    - She lived to see that what God had promised He had carried out.
      * So to her dying day, she spread Jubilee by magnifying the Lord.

**Benediction**

*So now, let us make our boast in the Lord;*

*let the humble hear and be glad.*

*Oh, magnify the Lord with me,*

*and let us exalt his name together!*