

This Christmas season, I like to get into the four parents of Christmas. I want to talk about Elizabeth, Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph. They are great parents. At Christmas time, we often think about the children, but the parents love the children the most. There are things about these four parents that we can learn that may help us become better parents or even better grandparents. And, you know, we're always trying to improve our skills and abilities to do a better job in these areas. So there are things we can learn.

### **What About Mary**

So today, we're going to pick up on this most wonderful woman, Mary, and we're going to look at what Mary wrote. Her poems or her writings about Christmas are very insightful to the kind of person that she was. And there are things that we can learn about that. And I'll give you my outline of that in just a second.

### **Think about a conversation between God and an Angel.**

But years ago, I read an excellent book, *Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis. In it, the master demon is trying to help the demon under him to deal with this person who's become a Christian. And strategies that might help get the fellow to think about other things to distract him from knowing Christ more. It's a great book to read. It's, you know, it is. It would be a good book to read on the other side of the coin. God was talking with the angels, and what was that like?

### **God and Gabriel**

I was reading Luke in this particular section, and Dr. Swindell, in his commentary on Luke on page 47, gives us a conversation between Gabriel and God. So, I'm going to read the following:

"Gabriel and the other angels probably struggled to understand the Lord's extraordinary efforts to redeem sinful humanity. And they may have found his plan to be equally perplexing. If the Lord were to explain why God must become a man to redeem humanity, I imagine that the conversation might go something like this." And this is from Gabriel's perspective.

"Unable to resolve the dilemma," Gabriel asked, "how will you destroy sin and preserve the people?"

Well, the Lord gloated, "with pleasure and the opportunity to reveal the next detail of his plan. I'll provide a substitute, someone to pay the penalty of sin on their behalf."

"But who?" I protested. "How can someone pay for the sins of another if he dies paying for his own?"

God answers, "That's a very astute question. The substitute must not have any sin on his own."

Well, Gabriel, I was more perplexed. "But Lord, the substitute would have to be a human in order to represent humanity. Yet, all humanity has been infected with evil.

Furthermore, this substitute would have to be superhuman in order to pay the penalty for all the people. To die a death that would cover not just one person's penalty but that of the whole multitude. What substitute can possibly suffice?"

Well, God gave a very short answer. He said, "God."

I stood dumbfounded. It didn't seem possible. And if it were, it didn't seem fair. Indeed, it wasn't. This was grace so characteristic of him and he utterly went beyond my ability to comprehend.

He continued, "I will send my eternal son to be the Messiah. He will be the substitute. The Messiah will not be the son of a sinful earthly father, but my son, born of a virgin to preserve his sinlessness. The Messiah will be a man. The Messiah will be God. Being God, man, he will represent humankind, yet he will have no sin. Furthermore, after he dies on behalf of all humankind, he will conquer death by rising from the grave."

Gabriel, I could not speak. The perfection of his plan, so ingenious, so simple, so intricate, left me more amazed than to see him create the universe with just a mere word."

The Bible tells us that the angels are studying how God redeems people. And it is incredible to think about how God worked this out from eternity past. A closer look - Eph. 3:8-10; Col. 1:26, 27; Col 2:2, 3; 1: Pe. 1:12

### **What about Mary**

Well, we're going to encounter a very remarkable woman here. Mary is worthy of our admiration for at least two good reasons.

First of all, God chose Mary among all women to bring Christ into the world. Though not sinless, though very much a woman in need of a savior, she was nevertheless chosen as a qualified vessel to bear God's Son.

Secondly, Mary set aside her dreams of everyday life to accept the complications of obedience. God's blessings notwithstanding, she accepted a tough assignment. Again, I'm quoting Dr. Swindoll in his commentary on Luke. So Mary is someone that we should pay attention to and learn about.

But you know, Dr. Swindoll again points out that the Roman Catholic Church has not helped us the situation by adding several unbiblical doctrines to the teaching of Mary. Now, these unbiblical doctrines involve The Immaculate Conception is the notion that Mary was born without a fallen, sinful nature and was free from original sin. Perpetual Virginity, which insists that Mary remained a virgin her entire life. And then the Bodily Assumption, the belief that Mary never succumbed to death but was taken directly into heaven in bodily form.

The Bible doesn't teach all the doctrines they come up with. We're going to see here from Mary's own words that she knew that one, she was a sinner. She doesn't have to have an unfallen nature herself. That doesn't work out. We see Mary as very human occasionally, even disagreeing with her son as he was doing the will of God. She did this on two occasions, by the way. But it's an unnecessary doctrine. Mary knew that she needed a Savior. Two, she didn't need to remain a virgin. There was

nothing wrong with married people having sexual human relationships. It's very normal and natural. It's not sinful. She didn't need to be that way. The Bible tells us that she had at least six kids besides Jesus. We know the names of four of them, the brothers. And the two sisters, we don't know what their names are. All right, but she had a family. And two of those brothers, Judas and James, would write two books of the Bible. Pretty remarkable. It shows what a good parent Mary was. Joseph, as well. So, it's an unnecessary doctrine.

The other one is that her body was, that she went up to heaven without dying. We have no record of that. And it's unnecessary. Mary would go to be with the Lord at death, waiting for the resurrection of the body, just like every one of us. And so Mary, we will get to see in heaven and get to know her. So, these doctrines have other purposes, which I won't get into. However, there are reasons why they came up with these ideas. But they don't flow from the scriptures. You can look at the Bible and see that when Jesus had brothers and sisters, The Bible used brothers and sisters. And it doesn't mean cousins, as some believe what was meant.

### **Mary knew her Bible**

Anyway, we get God's plan here, which is given to Mary. Let's consider the passage now. Turn with me to Luke chapter 1, verse 46. We will look at verse 46 and then cover all the way to 56.

### **Mary's song.**

Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord." (μεγαλύνω megalunó meg-al-oo'-no To magnify, to exalt, to make great - εἶπεν Μαριάμ Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ Verb-Present Indicative Active-3d person plural) Now, that word is from the Greek, which refers to magnifying. We get that; we get magnified from the Greek. And this song has often been called the Magnificent because that's how it's translated in the Latin translation. But even Latin is magnificent; that word comes from Greek.

So, who is Mary magnifying? Is she the one being magnified, or is it someone else? "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior." She needed a Savior. She wasn't sinless. "For he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant. For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those that fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones. He has exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to God and his seed Abraham, forever."

Interestingly, this Song of Mary is filled with Old Testament quotes. We have 14 references from the Old Testament from the Scofield reference Bible. The New King James Study Bible has about 24 references to the Old Testament. In his study Bible, Ryrie said, "There are at least 15 discernible quotations from the Old Testament in his poem, showing how much the Old Testament was known and loved in this home in which Jesus would be reared." Now, catch that. Jesus would live in a home where they

knew the Bible. And the beautiful thing about how they knew the Bible, they also knew how to apply it and how to work it out.

We get a picture of that life later in the Gospels, which tells us that Jesus was in Jerusalem, listening to the teachers and the law's experts and asking and answering questions at age 12. When Mary and Joseph discover that he's not in their particular group or any other, they go back to Jerusalem to get him. And they search for him with great anxiety until they find him. And he said to them, "You should know that I would be in my father's house." You know how different it would be to have Jesus in your home as a child. But in that home that he was raised in, where Mary would teach him the Bible, she would teach him about God. And, of course, we have no idea how the baby was communing with the Father in heaven. He certainly had a different relationship altogether. But Mary was doing her part. Joseph was doing their part. We even see that, at age 12, if you look at that incident, they're reasoning together. They're talking back and forth with respect. They will have a home applying the Bible and the Word of God. And they're living it out.

Now, they didn't understand what was going on with Jesus. And Mary kept these things in her heart, as she always tried to figure this out. But you can see in their process that this family is very functional. And they are very much connected. And Joseph would have taught Jesus a trade. And he would have learned how to do the work he and Joseph would do to make a living for the family. And it's applied faith. Joseph and Mary go down like many people in the Old Testament that lived for God. And they're just another example of it.

Anyway, this psalm contains many references to the Old Testament. I'm going to give you some of these references. I won't be able to provide you with all of them because of time constraints, but here they are. (See chart in end notes.) We'll see how that goes.

Now, Mary said, in Verse 46, "My soul magnifies the Lord." She had to be thinking about her experiences as well. Elizabeth did the same thing with Hannah in 1 Samuel 2. Now, look there, if you would, verses 1 and 2 in Samuel 2. "And Hannah prayed and said, 'My heart rejoices in the Lord. My horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none beside you, nor is there any rock like our God.'" Now, notice over here that not only did Mary know the history part of the Old Testament, but she also knew the words of prophecy in the prophets. And she listened to this out of Habakkuk 3.18. "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will enjoy in the God of my salvation." It sounds like what she's saying here in verses 46 and 47.

Look at Matthew 1.47. "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." And we see that in Habakkuk here. "I will join the God of my salvation." Now, it also says in Psalms 25.5, "He shall receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from God of his salvation." Psalm 25:5, "Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation. On you, I wait all the day." That's why that was a functional home. They were walking with God and trying to apply the truth in their life, moment by moment. Isaiah, "Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid." That's pretty good. She would be thinking about these Old Testament ideas that she puts here in her poem.

Now we have verse 48. "For he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant. For behold, henceforth, all generations will call me blessed." Now, when you look at the Greek here on the maid servant, you will see in the word of *douvlos*, *doulos* you will see the feminine form, *δούλης*, *doulays* here, maid servant, and that's precisely what we have here. Notice what it says in Samuel 1.11, referring back to Hannah. "Then she made a vow and said, 'O Lord, our host, if you indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but I will give your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, no razor shall come upon his head.'" So, we see a direct reference here to something Mary must have thought about in her situation as it relates to Hannah. Now, Psalms 138:6, "Though the Lord is on high, yet he regards the lowly, and the proud he knows from afar." We can see how Mary draws these things from the Old Testament.

Verse 49 in Luke, "For he is mighty, who has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Psalm 71:9, "Also your righteousness, O God, is very high, and you have done great things. O God, who is like you?" Psalm 126:2 and 3, "Then our mouth is filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'" The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad. You know, these things are very, very wonderful. Psalm 119, "He has sent redemption to his people. He has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name." One of my favorite verses, Zephaniah 3:17, "The Lord your God is in your midst. The mighty one will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness and will quiet you with his love. He will rejoice over you with singing." We used to sing a song, and that particular song was something the kids liked a lot. But it shows us great things.

Now, verse 50, "And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation." Mary was a dispensationalist. That should excite people. Anyway, here, Genesis 17:7, speaking of Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant to be God to you and your descendants after you." Psalm 103:17: "But the mercy of the Lord is everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children." Psalm 9:9, "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. His judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." So we see, again, from the Old Testament, many places where she's drawing these ideas into her poem.

Verse 51, "He has shown strength with his arm and has scattered the proud in their imagination of their hearts." There's nothing so strong like the arm of the Lord. The arm of the Lord is mighty. Here we go, Psalm 98:1, "Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and holy arm, his holy arm, have gained him the victory." Samuel, 1 Samuel 2:7 and 8, "The Lord makes the poor rich. He brings low and lifts up. He rises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap." You know, Hannah, like Mary, they all come from humble beginnings, and yet it's God who can take somebody in a humble situation and can elevate them. David was the youngest of the children of Jesse, and he's out doing the work that everybody else is outgrowing. He's doing the servant's work, protecting the sheep. And it's him, David, not the older, more accomplished brothers, but David, that God chooses to be the king. God elevated Samuel as one of the great prophets in Israel. God exalts the humble.

Verse 52, "He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly." We've already talked about that in 2 Samuel, where the Lord makes the poor and makes rich. He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust and the beggar from the ash heap. Notice this from Job 5:11: He sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn, he lifts to safety. Job went through being elevated by the Lord, humbled by the Lord, and restored by the Lord. He went through all of that in that book. When it comes to the Lord working with the nations, they have a plan against the Lord and his anointed. And they have come against him. Now, we see this at the cross, where the powers of Rome and the powers of the Jewish leadership join together with the political leadership among the Jewish people that Herod represented. They all come together against the Lord and his anointed. And this is what it says in Psalm 2. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh, and the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then he shall speak to them in great wrath and distress them in his deep displeasure. Yet I have set my king on a holy hill in Zion. You see, nations have never accepted the Lord. They don't today. They might give lip service here or there, but they operate in a man-centered way.

He has filled, verse 53, the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. Psalm 107:9, "Oh, he satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Okay, that's what God does. That's his grace and his love. Continuing, verse 54, "He has helped his servant Israel and his remembrance of his mercy." Isaiah, oh, she knew the prophets. Isaiah 41:8-10, "But you, Israel, are my servant, and Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend. And I have taken from the ends of the earth and called from its farther regions. And I said to you, you are my servant, and I have chosen you and not cast you away. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I uphold you with my righteous hand." Okay, and so we see that the Lord remembers his promises and helps his people, and that's what Mary is saying here.

In verse 55, "He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever." Now, we get that again in Gen. 17:19, where he has remembered his mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel, to the ends of the earth, have seen the salvation of our God. Psalm 132:11, "The Lord has sworn in truth to David, he will not turn away from it. I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body." And that's precisely what he did when Jesus was born. Jesus would offer the kingdom to his people, but they would reject it. But the Bible tells us, John 1:11, 12, "To many who have received him, to them he gives the power to become children of God, even those who believe in his name." Okay, our little Savior, born in a manger, will come and do a mighty work on the cross that saves us.

Alright, so I want to look at verse 56, which reads, "Now Mary remained with her for about three months, and then she returned to her house." Something is interesting here with Mary and Elizabeth. Mary gets a proposal from God that God will choose her to be the mother of the Savior, the Messiah. When God comes down to earth, Jesus will be called Emmanuel, God with us. And he will be called Jesus, he who saves. And it's Mary who chose to obey the Lord in saying, "Yes, Lord, whatever is your will." The Holy Spirit came over her and performed this miracle, but Mary had to endure the controversy about having this child. God will go over it to Joseph especially, and he will

talk to Joseph about it. But he also is letting Mary know something here right off the bat.

You know, with man, salvation's not possible. But with God, all things are possible. So she's going, you know, God will show her that he did the impossible. He went and talked to Zacharias and Elizabeth and told them that they were going to have a child. Now, like Mary, Elizabeth did not complain or anything. She was happy with the whole thing. Zacharias wondered, and he had to go through a little bit of not talking for a while. We'll get to that when we get to it. But she goes to Elizabeth's house. Now, remember, that's a long walk for somebody to take from Nazareth down to the area nearby Bethlehem, where Zacharias and Elizabeth were from. And she goes down there, and the minute she goes into the room, the baby inside Elizabeth, now he's at the stage where he can let his mother know that he's inside the body. So he's kicking and hitting the ribs, and he's excited because the Messiah is in the room. Now, Mary, she's not showing those signs yet. Her pregnancy is earlier here. But Elizabeth tells Mary, before she can even say anything, that she will give birth to the Messiah. And this is an encouragement to Mary that God does impossible things. So, what do we learn from this?

### **3 Applications**

Well, I think it's essential for us to understand that God has a couple of basic applications that we can get from this right off the bat:

One, God's in control. God's plan to save humankind by sending His Son was made before the foundations of the world. And he's going to bring it about. He will move the whole world for Mary to have that baby in Bethlehem. He will move Mary and Joseph to another country so they can be protected and fulfill prophecy. But he's in control. Now, Herod, he's going to do crazy things. But God is in control.

I have tried to show that Mary, a mother, knew and applied her Bible. She was able to express herself in a brilliant biblical poem. It is a good thing for mothers to read and understand their Bibles. For a mother to share and give her children the essential things to live by is quite something. Look at her son James, who wrote a New Testament proverbs. The book of James is very practical. Her other son, Jude, could express the importance of being in the faith. She would learn from her son, Jesus, all of her life, but for us, she illustrates the importance of knowing and applying the Bible in daily living.

The other thing that this teaches us that's very important is that faith is a decision. Mary made a decision. She was going to be the mother of our Savior. She would be the mother of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. For her, it was a decision. She made it. And when she made it, it wasn't a feeling. It was a decision. That's what faith is. It's making a decision. When we trust the Lord and make decisions to do that, God can work through our lives as He did for this wonderful person.

We should remember Mary for what the Bible teaches about her and honor her in that way. And when she comes across the Scriptures, where we get a little more insight into who she is, what she did, and all that kind of stuff, we should have great appreciation for her. We don't need to develop false ideas about her. She's quite a mother. She's quite a person. She's a person of faith. She came to know the Lord as

her Savior and walked with God. From a young mother to a mother of seven, she strongly influences all of them, which helps us. So when we think about this Christmas, what kind of parent was she? Pretty good. Not perfect. Okay, she wasn't perfect, but she knew the Bible. She knew how to apply it, and she did her best to try to raise this child. And she did pretty well with the others. So there's a lot there that we can learn. So next week, we'll explore another parent.