

Thursday—Through His Faithfulness

Read Luke 1:54-55. Mary was Jewish. She understood the promised Messiah in terms of Israel's larger story, beginning with God's promise to Abraham back in Genesis 12:1-3. Especially because she was a teen, I like her perspective. Her role will be important, but it is connected to a much larger, multi-generational story. One of the things I love about our church is that it is multi-generational. We have newborns and ninety-somethings. When my family and I would have a tough day planting a church in Mexico we would say, 'This is a hundred year church. These setbacks are minor compared to what we are trusting God to do!' That faith-filled, long-term perspective encouraged us so many times. Now in our 85th year here at First Baptist Church of Elk Grove, I have to imagine that those founding generations also had their challenges. As they relied on God's promises He empowered them to be faithful in life and ministry on some of the same streets that we use today. We have a great heritage as a church. Would you join me in praying that God would give us even greater faith than those who have gone before us at First Baptist Church? May their faithfulness -- and our faith going forward -- lift the Name of Jesus higher and higher!

Friday—Your Lifesong

Read Luke 1:56. I love the final phrase of this passage, 'Mary ... returned to her home.' Although Mary was used of God to put this beautiful song together, she returned to regular life -- and continued to be used of God. Her song was not the highlight of her service to God, her life was. I like that. When matters relating to the Christian life sound too good, I find myself hungering for authenticity. I am so glad that Scripture sheds light on Mary's life first as a mom and then as a follower of Jesus over three decades *after* she sang this song. Because songs are so powerful, and living for God is difficult at times, we can get caught with just the song, rather than a life-song. In your own life, when is it that your singing actually becomes worship? When is it that living actually becomes ministry? Whether you have a great voice, as so many in our church do, or a rather regular voice like mine, may your Christmas singing spill over into an authentic lifesong lived for Jesus long into the future.

enJOY Christmas The Joy of Mercy Luke 1:5-2:20

Mary Sang To God: (1:46-47)

1. Because _____ ...

* Notices Us (1:48-49)

* Has Mercy (1:50)

Which Shows Up In ...

His Power (1:51-53):

God humbles the proud and promotes the lowly

His Faithfulness (1:54-55):

God kept His promises to Israel

2. The _____ of her _____ (1:56)

Tuning Up My Lifesong

Communion

Sunday, December 6, 2009

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...and he opened to us the Scriptures (Luke 24:32)

I love to sing, but I'm not an especially good singer. Our family has developed a tradition of singing Happy Birthday to members of our extended family – often over the phone, sometimes into their voice mail and always including the 'cha-cha-cha' (the boys really like that part). We don't make it a particularly pretty song, but we do communicate our love to others. Some of our family members have even started encouraging us by singing birthday songs back to us. Paul told the believers in Colossae to encourage one another with songs (Col. 3:16). While Mary's song predates the church, it encourages me because it was born of an intense spiritual experience. In circumstances that no one had previously experienced, her soul cried out to make great the Lord and her spirit was overflowing with joy within her. As we countdown to Christmas, let's see how Mary's Magnificat can help us live our lives as songs to Jesus.

Monday—God Notices You

Read Luke 1:48-49. Have you ever felt overlooked? Invisible? Like you really didn't matter? If you are like me, you have. Loneliness is one of life's most acute pains. Scripture gives no indication that Mary received special recognition from God or people prior to being enlisted in God's plan to bring the Savior to earth. If she was like most teenagers, she probably felt out of step at times. We do know that she describes herself as of 'humble estate'. But God noticed her. The God who knows the (sometimes changing) number of hairs on our heads, notices us! God is at once vast, grand, immense, containing and sustaining the cosmos -- and at the same time intimate, personal and involved in the details of our lives. That God noticed Mary encouraged her heart; it led her to rejoice and magnify Him. What are a few of the personal, even petty, challenges that you are going through? What perplexes or troubles your heart? I want you to know that God notices. He knows. And He is with you. Part of what we celebrate at Christmas is Emmanuel – God breaking into human history to be with us. Read Romans 8:11. God has given us His Spirit – which had the power to raise Jesus from the dead! Ask God to minister to you at those sensitive points today. He notices you – every aspect of you. And He can empower you through His Spirit to experience abundant life today.

Tuesday—God Has Mercy

Read Luke 1:50. In my life mercy has often seemed like a seatbelt. I don't really need it – until I do. I frequently lose contact with my own need for mercy. My energy and interest in a typical day take over and I am off into my activities. But before too long, as a fallen person in a fallen world, events conspire to confront me with my own deep need for mercy. Like a seatbelt, mercy is really nice to have when you need it. One of the songs I learned as a child comes from Lamentations 3:22-23:

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end;

²³ they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

What does it say about you and me that God makes new mercies available to us every single day? I think it says that we are going to need them! What does it say about God that His mercies never come to an end? I think that it says that you cannot outlast the mercy of God. So, would you allow God to create additional space in your soul to store up His unending mercy today? Perhaps you feel you need to count on that mercy right now. It is there for you. Perhaps you are flying high. His mercy will be there when you need it. Either way, celebrate today, that, like Mary, you have found mercy with God through Jesus.

Wednesday—Through His Power

Read Luke 1:51-53. This is quite a passage. Mary sees the Lord turning everything upside down: the weak dethrone the mighty, the humble scatter the proud, the nobodies are exalted, the hungry are filled, and the rich end up poor! Although Christianity remains the dominant faith in our culture, in its original setting, for Mary and those who followed Jesus with her, this faith was subversive. It threatened and eventually helped overturn an empire. Although earthly kingdoms will rise and fall, only God's kingdom will eventually endure. As we wait for God's kingdom to come fully, His work through people into the public realm can be powerful – but only because it has first impacted our personal lives. One of the ways God might use this power in your life and mine this Christmas is around tuning up our worship. It strikes me that worship is something that only humble people can give. Worship requires a selfless, satisfaction with Jesus. Would you take the faith-challenge today to ask the Lord if there is anything in your heart that needs to be 'scattered' or 'brought down' so you can be satisfied with Jesus? Pray along with the Psalmist 'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts ...' (Ps. 139:23-24). As you make new room in your heart to focus on Jesus, I just bet that He will give you abundant reasons to worship Him!