**December 19, 2021 Luke 1:46-55**

***Love***

**Scripture:** *Luke 1:46-55 NRSV*

*(46)And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, (47)and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (48)for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; (49)for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (50)His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. (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 powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; (53)he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (54)He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, (55)according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

**Notes:**

1. Mary had an astute understanding of the mission of God through ***Jesus***.
   1. Zechariah is silenced, but Mary ***sings***.
   2. Zechariah questions but Mary ***believes***.
2. Mary, ***believes*** in the power of God.
   1. Something ***different*** is happening here.
   2. Mary’s song reveals the kingdom of God is entering the world ***unexpected*** ways.
3. Mary’s song is a ***love*** song—but not in the ways we expect.
   1. Mary responds by rejoicing *in* God, an act of ***love***.
   2. Mary glorifies God’s ***character***, declaring God’s mercy.
   3. This song reflects the depth of Mary’s ***faith***
4. These references paint a picture of Mary as a ***prophet***.
   1. Mary reminded the world where God was ***faithful***,
   2. Mary was ***revealing*** what God was doing now.
5. Mary’s song was ***powerful*** and ***subversive***.
   1. Mary, revealed the Messiah coming through ***humility***.
   2. Mary declared the kingdom of God as a kingdom of ***justice***.
   3. God continues to be ***faithful*** to God’s people.
6. Love is not ***fragile***
   1. God’s love came in ***powerful*** and unexpected ways.
   2. This story is the ***greatest*** ***love*** story ever, a story that continues with us, all around us, in us, and through us.

**Script:**

We are now into the 4th week of advent. We will celebrate the birth of our Lord in a few days and we are now in high gear in regards to the traditions we uphold for Christmas. We decorate our homes, the tree the lights, the bows. There is also the preparation of the Christmas cookies, Snicker doodles, chocolate chip, peanut butter, and many, many, others. And then there is the Christmas music; you either love it or hate it, but what is Christmas without the Christmas songs. Songs like Joy To The World, Silent Night, Away in a Manger, and then there are all the other Christmas songs that really do not have anything to do with the birth of Jesus, but they are Christmas songs just the same.

It has been said that if mothers wrote more of the songs we sing at Christmas, we would probably have fewer songs about silent nights and babies who don’t cry. It’s an interesting—and somewhat humorous—thought, but the truth is, we do have a song written by the very mother of Jesus. And it doesn’t, in fact, mention silent nights or non-crying babies. In fact, it doesn’t mention the Baby Jesus at all.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about it is that it isn’t a soft and sweet lullaby at all; it’s a powerfully subversive song that speaks of the mighty power of God the mighty power of God that is breaking into the world in unexpected ways. It speaks of strong arms, of promise, of the powerful thrown down from their thrones, and of the meek and humble being raised up. It’s a song of love but not in a soft way. Instead, it conveys the strong and steadfast way that the love of God has been and continues to be expressed in the world. It’s a song of a mother’s love for and gratitude to God. Join me this morning as we share in the reading of this song and our Gospel passage for today, Luke 1:46-55.

*Luke 1:46-55 NRSV (46)And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, (47)and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (48)for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; (49)for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (50)His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. (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 powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; (53)he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. (54)He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, (55)according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

This is quite an amazing passage and song if you listen closely. We sing songs that speculate about whether Mary fully knew what God was asking her to do, and what we find here in Luke 1 is that Mary had an astute understanding of the mission of God through Jesus in ways that many around her didn’t seem to grasp. Mary understood, better than some who perhaps should’ve known better; like the priest Zechariah; Mary understood that God was moving in new ways.

ZECHARIAH IS SILENCED, BUT MARY SINGS. Luke 1 focuses on the voices of women. Zechariah is silenced immediately upon his unbelief at Elizabeth’s pregnancy. For those unfamiliar with the story, an angel appears to Zechariah, who is a priest, and announces that his wife is pregnant. Due to their old age, Zechariah doesn’t believe it possible, and the angel renders him mute until after the baby is born.

The story of Mary and the angel is a stark contrast to the story of Zechariah. Zechariah questions Elizabeth’s miracle pregnancy, but Mary believes the words of the Angel Gabriel. Even though Mary, too, questions what the angel says, she is not silenced, and shortly afterward, she sings. This contrast is significant because Zechariah was a religious leader if anyone were going to believe God, and then speak prophetic words about God, it would be him. Elizabeth, however, is the one who speaks prophetic words, she speaks prophetic words over Mary upon her visit. She declares that the child in Mary’s womb is her Lord. Mary, in contrast to Zechariah, is just a humble peasant girl, yet she believes in the power of God for a miraculous pregnancy. She declares the power of God through song.

This dominant focus on female dialogue in Luke 1 represents a stark contrast to the cultural norms of that time as well. Remember, they lived in a patriarchal society, where women couldn’t own property or testify in court. The fact that Luke puts the prophetic words of women at the front and center of his book reveals that something different is happening here. Their culture is going to be upended by this coming Messiah upended in ways that no one expected. It is also significant to note that the fact that Mary’s song precedes Zechariah’s reveals that the kingdom of God is not entering the world in the ways they expected. It would’ve been expected for the kingdom of God to be ushered in through power or prestige, but the Messiah is not coming through those channels; instead, the Messiah is coming through a humble peasant girl from a no-name town.

So what is so special about Mary’s song? MARY’S SONG IS A LOVE SONG—BUT NOT IN THE WAYS WE EXPECT. When we think of love songs, we generally think of sappy or sentimental, but this is a power song. Mary responds to God by rejoicing *in* God, which is an act of love. She sees God as being faithful and ever-present to her. She gives God thanks for being present not just with her but also with the world. She speaks of the generations honoring God and declares the miracles of the past done for Abraham and Sarah. She glorifies God’s character, declaring God’s mercy toward humanity. She uses the language of filling people up. She speaks to the strength and power of God and God’s mighty arm.

This song is not isolated; it reflects the depth of Mary’s faith because she references so many songs of the Old Testament, words she would have heard growing up. Her song echoes the prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and 2, borrowing some of the same language that Hannah used as she prayed for a son with deep longing. Verse 48 references 1 Samuel 1:11, *“…O LORD of hosts, if only you … will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death…”.* Verse 53 references 1 Samuel 2:5, *“Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.”*

The psalms are also referenced throughout the song. Verse 46 references Psalm 34:2, *“My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.”;* Verse 47 references Psalm 35:9, *“Then my soul shall rejoice in the LORD, exulting in his deliverance.”;* Verse 49 references Psalm 111:9, *“He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.”.* Verse 51 references Psalm 89:10–11, *“(10)You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. (11)The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it--you have founded them.”.* Verse 53 references Psalm 107:9, *“For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.”.* Verse 54 references Psalm 98:3, *“He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.”*

The Minor Prophets are also referenced. Verse 52 references Job 12:9 and 5:11, *“Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this?”; “…he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.”.* Verse 55 references Micah 7:20, *“You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.”*  Verse 53 references Genesis 17:7, 9, *“ (7)I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. …(9)God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.”*

These references to the Old Testament don’t just show Mary’s dedication to the scriptures, but they also paint a picture of Mary as a prophet. It was common for prophets to use Scripture to speak to what’s happening around them. Jesus himself did this on multiple occasions. The vast number of references Mary used to illuminate and reveal what was happening around her, to her, and within her was the work of a prophet. She was reminding the world where God was faithful and at work in the past, and she was declaring and revealing what God was doing now and what God was going to do. Once again, words we would expect to come from a place of power or privilege instead, they came from a humble young woman.

MARY’S SONG WAS POWERFUL AND SUBVERSIVE. It was subversive because of the messenger. Mary was a humble peasant with nothing to her name. Thomas Cahill called the Magnificat, “the most muscular piece of celebration poetry in all of ancient literature.” The subversive nature of the song was significant because people assumed power was coming from a particular place, but that is not at all how it happened.

The power center of the day was Rome. The thought was that the Messiah would overthrow this type of power using the same worldly and empire-building tactics that Rome and all the other powers that came before had used. Caesar even declared himself to be the son of God, claiming that he could forgive sins. Mary’s song, however, revealed that the Messiah was coming but not through power, war, and money but through humility and an ordinary person. The message Mary declared, by her very presence as the messenger, declared that the kingdom of God is not for the wealthy and powerful but for those who are oppressed, forgotten, and downtrodden, and this was an era full of downtrodden people. They were taxed by Caesar and Herod. The Jews had lived under the thumb of the powerful for centuries. People were starving and desperate.

Mary’s song declared that the kingdom of God would be a kingdom of justice. Those who had the power were going to be torn from their seats of power (verse 52). They would lose their power to control others, Losing the power to inflict war and cruelty, Lose the power to tax people to a breaking point. Those who had wealth were going to be sent away empty (verse 53). They would lose the wealth and power gained by stepping on the backs of others. They would lose the ability to hoard or acquire wealth while those around suffered. Those who would be remembered would be the faithful who remembered God (verse 50); they would be shown mercy. It would be a safe assumption that not everyone in a culture of empire would remember or follow God. The easy route would be to bow to Caesar. It would be much harder, in a culture trying to dilute or drown your faith, to live in a faithful way.

This was a message of extreme hope to a people who had been waiting for a long time. These were an oppressed and desperate people who were likely wondering if God was listening. It had been centuries since the last prophet had spoken another reason to note Mary as a prophetic force, and it would have been easy for them to feel abandoned. This message reminded humanity that God had not abandoned them. God continues to be faithful to God’s people, and God is going to bring about the day of the Lord—in unexpected ways.

Love is not fragile. The character Kristoff in *Frozen II* declares to Anna at one point that his love is not fragile. It’s a pretty important plotline, but it’s an idea that we often miss when we think, talk, or sing about love.

So it might feel odd to read such a strong and powerful song on the week of Advent when we reflect on love, but it is fitting because the love of God isn’t fragile either. God’s love is not something that is going to be broken easily; it’s something that came in powerful and unexpected ways. It didn’t enter into the world through the typical avenues of power and prestige; rather, it came through a simple peasant girl with no claim to her name.

And this story of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, the truly greatest love story ever told, about God leaving the glory of heaven to take on humanity is a story of strength and beauty displayed in unexpected ways. It’s the story of a love that sacrifices itself, instead of wounding others. It’s a story of mercy instead of judgment. It’s a story of humility and humanity. It’s a story of what love should be: strong and powerful in mercy and justice. It’s a love story in the truest sense of the word, a story that continues today with us, as we reveal the love of God in the ways we live in the world and continue to see the kingdom of God break through all around us, in us, and through us.