

Advent shapes the song believers sing.

Do you have a favorite Christmas song? It's likely you do... if you have a pulse! Singing is everywhere at Christmas (last week it was lights, this week I want to think about songs!) Songs convey so much... they tell a story, they sum up the emotion of the moment, they take us back to yesteryear and they give us hope for still what is to come.

This morning and on the 23rd I want to look at a couple of songs important during Advent and all the time.

Today we turn our attention to what is the first of Christmas songs. Sung by someone wonderfully close to the arrival of Jesus. And in surveying it we might discover how to sing our own song this Advent!

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Luke 1:46-55

The Magnificat. Mary's Song of Praise.

Here Mary's song, like all good Christmas songs, conveys such rich truth, glorious news, but this also gives us a model of worship. Something we can hold over our own way of singing and living in response to Jesus and see where we are at.

But before we dive into the song we have to know who is singing and what brought on the song.

Who is Mary? Now I know Protestants can get nervous when we focus on Mary. We don't see her as a co-redemptrix with Christ, but the mother of the Messiah. A very ordinary but obedient girl who is used for something marvelous.

It was through one woman's disobedience that the world fell under the power of the serpent. But through one woman's submission that the Seed came into the world who crushed the serpent.

But Mary is just that, a faithful servant, given a crazy promise and experiencing crazy circumstances.

A virgin betrothed, just beyond engaged, to Joseph. A girl from a no-name town living an ordinary life. You can imagine her mentality. Thinking through the life they would have together. Expectant and excited. Dreaming of the future. Then Gabriel the angel visits.

Luke 1:28–33 “And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” (ESV)

He tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of the Most High will overshadow her and the result will be the baby, Jesus. The One promised to generations. The Anointed heir of David’s throne. The Wonderful One that will work forgiveness and salvation for his people.

Luke 1:38 “And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.” (ESV)

From that place, Mary travels to visit her cousin Elizabeth who has also been given the gift of a pregnancy - of John the Baptizer who will prepare the way for the coming King. As Mary enters the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaps in excitement and she recognizes it as evidence that the mother of the Lord is before her. “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Imagine the emotion. The unknown. The fear of being visited by an angelic being. The mind-boggling promise that has come to bear.

Mary responds in worship. By singing a song.

“The Magnificat, a poignant, profound divine/human composition...” beautifully uncovers the reason for praise and glorifies the Lord.

Here is the model for us to think through. Mary’s song highlights the present, it recounts to the past, and it looks forward in future expectation. Maybe our song can too!

1) Present

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

Here is Mary in responsive worship. This miraculous thing has happened, the craziness is actually a tremendous good, it would take her more than 30 years to fully realize, but from this experience, she lifts the name of God in song.

“Mary, after the Annunciation by Gabriel and her visitation with Elizabeth, had begun to think bigger and grander thoughts than ever before: “A God who could do what he did in my

womb—what must he be able to do in the womb of the universe?” Her soul enlarged the Lord, and her mouth poured forth greater thoughts than ever before.”

In her ordinary life, God has done great things. In her “humble estate,” she is chosen for something divine. This amazing God, holy is his name!

God is very real to her in the present moment. A lifetime of learning of him. Memorizing psalms, words of the prophets. Of being on the outside looking in. But ever trusting and faithful to what she knew of God. And now she knows him in the extension of a miraculous overshadowing - that no one else before or after would experience.

Nothing to do but worship. God is good right now, I have to sing about it. Her song doesn't, however, stay only in the present, this is a blessing that has been brewing and she recounts the past as she magnifies the Lord.

2) Past

This is where the Magnificat comes into question. After all here is Mary, little, sweet and simple Mary. And yet her song is rich with a historical-theological perspective that few Rabbis can articulate.

“due to its greatness some critics have howled that the song could not have been sung by young Mary because it is too theological, too packed with Old Testament allusions, too carefully structured, too poetic, too subtle, too finished!”

Surely Luke wouldn't make this up as recounted to him. But what if the richness is to point to the opportunity for all of us. While Mary would have had Scripture memorized, she was as a woman still kept at a distance in the teaching and training. So even those simple, without the degrees can articulate the truth of who God is and what God has done. And they can do it with pizzazz, especially when they have experienced it.

‘His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.’ From ancient days to today he has been merciful - the fact that there were Jews to receive a King was proof of God's mercy.

God had made a promise to the fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever. And now that promise has been kept in this coming birth.

He has helped Israel. He keeps saving. The fulfillment Elizabeth spoke of. God's faithfulness, his steadfast resolve toward Israel in remembrance of his mercy.

Because of what he has done before, she sings. A past that meets the present with the weight of fruition. The accomplishment of God.

And just as Mary looks back and beholds God in the present, her song is full of anticipation.

3) Future Expectation

If we are reading the middle section of the song in English we don't notice as clearly. Because everything still sounds like it is done in the past... He has shown strength, he has brought down the mighty, he has filled the hungry...

But the Greek gives a forward view rather than a backward glance.

“This is the prophetic past tense (aorist), which views the future work of God as so sure that it is presented as past and accomplished”

It is as sure as done. By this seed in her womb. Who would crush the head of the serpent. Who would be called holy, the Son of God. Who will reign forever and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Mary's song sings with prophetic promise just as she does the past accomplishments of God and the present experience of it. Here is what is to come and because it is coming her soul magnifies the Lord and rejoices in him.

This God who will scatter the proud, those that attempt to claim his position for themselves. Who will remove worldly kings, even those strongest in earthly standards. The God who will fill the hearts of the spiritually hungry and those that refuse him he will send away.

Undertaken in the least expected way, through the ordinary, humble estate. By getting low God takes the high road.

“These and other historical precedents were prophetic of the gospel's mighty reversals in bringing about the descent of the haughty and the ascent of the humble. Jesus himself is an example *unraveled* because his willing humiliation in the incarnation and on the cross resulted in his being lifted up.”

This is the expectation in Mary's voice, this is the expectation at Advent. She sings but she didn't fully know how things were going to go down.

Some people pour salt on the song “Mary did you know?” Because she was visited by the angel etc. But she didn't know everything, that he would be punished in our place, or crucified, or even rise from the dead.

Even so, she had an informed hope because of who God was and what he had promised over and over again.

This is the Magnificat. The first Christmas song... joining the list along with Zechariah's, Simeon's and the angel choir. The present reality bubbling over in joy, a recounting of the past and a thorough embrace of future expectation - of what God would do, what this Messiah arriving had come to do.

The model of the perfect Advent song is sparked in the moment, from experience and with victorious hope.

Could it also be...

4) The Song We Sing

What is our Advent story?

A present not abandoned, but kept and indwelt by the very Spirit of God - an overshadowing if you will. Being transformed by the grace of Christ as we submit to his will and purpose in our lives. Awakened in new ways to his goodness as we take step after step pursuing him because he has first pursued us.

All of our present reality formed by what has occurred in the past. Because a promise was made from generation to generation. Because Mary was visited by the angel. Because the anointed One, the Messiah came as a baby, sure to be King. Who lived a life of perfection before God. Who, though he spoke the words of life, was harassed and beaten. The Christ that took on the tree of our judgment, separated from the Father so we would no longer have to be. Risen from death by taking the full dose of it and destroying it.

That forgiveness of sin should be proclaimed in his name. That eternal life is given to all who believe in him. And a grace that has stood the test of time - applied to us to cover our sin over and over again.

The Lamb has overcome and our lives as believers are now in him, united with Christ, secure, empowered, helped, fed, sent.

And it doesn't end there. There is future expectation!

To the coming arrival... when Jesus returns for his bride the church. To the end of sin and death. When the New Jerusalem descends and he wipes away every tear, and every nation comes to worship him, to live under the radiance of him, the light of life.

From the gloom of the moment to the glorious light of what is to come.

How can we not sing?!

It is everything we need to deal with our past. It is everything we need to get through the present and it is a brilliant hope bringing us all the way home, it is our future.

Oh to magnify to Lord... to rejoice in our Savior!

“Mary has set the standard for all who would experience the birth of Christ... But hear this: if we are Christians, if Jesus is truly born in us, we too will be called blessed, far beyond earth’s history. Jesus himself tells us: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (**Matthew 25:34**). And again, “Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!” (**Revelation 20:6**).”

Advent is God seeking hearts like Mary’s, children who magnify him, who enlarge him in their souls and on their lips, with the passion of their entire beings.

John 4:23–24 “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (ESV)

And we have everything we need. A bunch of ordinary people, in need of a savior, who have met Jesus. Who have been forever changed by his grace.

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Hear the song of Advent - the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for you. How the hoped-for King enters into the darkness of the moment and shines his light. Repent and believe in him. Turn from the darkness to the light.

Sing the Song of Advent - In season and out of season, may we magnify the Lord by worshiping, in our very present experience of him and his grace, from the faithfulness of God in our history, throughout all of history, and with the taste for the future, in joyful anticipation of what is to come.

The spiritually hungry and filled with good things... Its how we sing.

“St. Bernard of Clairvaux understood the hungry/full paradox and gave it memorable expression:

We taste Thee, O Thou living Bread,

And long to feast upon Thee still;

We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead

And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.”