

Crossings Community Church
Matt Powell
Series: Celebrate the Season of Advent
December 20, 2015

Luke 1:46-55

It's good to be here with you guys this morning. Today marks the completion of 18 years of marriage for me. It's crazy to say out loud. It's not just a guy thing; some of you other couples in here know when you get around that mark, you both have to begin adding it together to realize how long it's been. It doesn't come easy anymore. So we have to kind of do the math. "We were married... Has it really been that long? Surely not!" We always default less, because it doesn't feel like it's been that long.

What an amazing journey. I thought about this a lot this week for multiple reasons. I have an amazing wife. In ministry, I cannot tell you how important that is. There are no words to articulate how important a wife is in ministry. I was thinking about that with our staff this week. We kind of did a little staff Christmas shindig, and I'm so thankful for Kimberly and Casey, the wives of Daniel and Chris, and just the way they blow wind in the sails of those guys and support them so well. It was just a great time of reflection.

It always feels weird for me this week. We don't celebrate our anniversary on the 20th because of the craziness that's always around that time of year. We wait till right after Christmas, and that's kind of a deep breath moment for us. I always get here, and I'm like, "It's that time again! Here we are again."

I don't know about you guys, but as we get to this week... This is it. Some of you may be in denial, but guess what? This is Christmas week, okay? It's coming next week, and there's nothing you can do about it. So if you're at that point, you've got to trust some Amazon drone technology at this point. If you haven't done any Christmas shopping, then you're in trouble. I don't know that Amazon Prime 2-Day shipping is going to make it or not. Maybe they can, but I'm not sure.

We're here. You've all been through it, and you know this to be true. Here's what's going to happen. We're looking ahead, and Thursday (Christmas Eve), we're going to be here. Hopefully you, your family, friends, neighbors will be here, and we'll be worshipping. We'll have a great evening together. You'll go home, and you've got traditions and stuff you do on Christmas Eve.

Then you'll wake up Christmas Day, and you'll be engaged in all of that stuff. It'll all come, and it'll all go. Right? In the blink of an eye. It does every year. This week, as you're looking ahead, some of you are looking ahead to some really interesting weeks, interesting because of who you're going to be spending some time with. Some of you have those families where you're looking ahead at what's coming, and you're like, "Oh, man. We've got to really psych ourselves up for this."

Others of you, you're blessed, and it will be a great, relaxing time. You look ahead at it, and I think (maybe some of you have already begun the race) it really begins this week, especially if

you have school-age kids and they're out now. So the chaos is going to begin. If you look ahead at this week, and you don't do anything differently or think about it differently, then with the snap of a finger it's all going to be done and over, and it's going to go like every other year.

I think this is a great point where we're at, right here today, Sunday, December 20th, and we're looking ahead at the 24th and the 25th this week. We have such a great opportunity. We're looking ahead at a week that we can make decisions right now to make this year unique or different in some way. We don't have to just ride the usual rat race ahead. We can look ahead, and we can say, "This year is going to be different."

So maybe I begin this morning with just asking you that question... *What would you want to be different this year?* Because today is the day to make that decision. Today is the day, as we look ahead, that something can change, and it can be different. We're looking today at a passage of Scripture, Mary's song. I've preached on this passage a lot, and one of the reasons is it comes up every year in this Advent season, for obvious reasons.

I love this. I love it for so many different reasons. One is I love the music that's been written to it, if you're familiar with the Magnificat. There have been all kinds of different beautiful choral arrangements that have been put to these lyrics. As we'll see this morning, to get inside the heart and mind of young Mary for a minute as she kind of erupts in this moment with praise, is such a unique gift that we have.

So we're looking at this passage (just to bring you up to speed a little bit), Mary's song. We've often heard it called *the Magnificat*. It gets that name from the very first verse. We'll see that in just a moment. If you remember back to the beginning... You've all heard the Christmas story so many times. In the beginning of chapter 1, Mary has this startling moment; startling may be an incredible understatement.

Gabriel, a messenger of God, shows up. He comes, and he begins to communicate with Mary. He has to calm her for a bit immediately upon showing up, for obvious reasons. He shares with her the news that she's found favor in the eyes of God, and something really amazing is going to happen. He says about this child called Jesus: ***"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, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."***

Can you imagine Mary hearing and receiving that news? You can't, okay? None of us can. How must she have felt to hear that in that moment, not only the experiential aspect of this messenger of God, Gabriel, showing up and delivering news... She was scared, but then to be told what she's told here. It's huge and, I think, so confusing. It would have incited in her so many different fears and insecurities. I think as we read this, that's exactly where she is after she hears that news.

"Oh my goodness! What in the world is this? How is it ever going to work? How is it going to affect me?" Some of the ways are unknown, but many of them are known on how they're going to affect her. Mary goes to see Elizabeth and has this awesome work of confirmation. We don't have this black and white, but just looking at the way this story unfolds, I believe she's really

questioning, she's confused, and there's almost some doubt there in Mary when she hears this from Gabriel. She says, "Could this even be?"

She gets to Elizabeth, and God does this awesome miraculous work of confirmation in Elizabeth. She gets there, and I think the doubt that would have been in Mary, in her mind and in her heart, God begins to ease that as she's there with Elizabeth. God does that miraculous baby-jumping moment in the womb of Elizabeth.

The song. The song that we're looking at... I think, from the moment she hears the news from Gabriel, she's wrestling with "How in the world could this be?" Doubt. Fear. Insecurity. She gets to Elizabeth, and God takes and brings her this confirmation gift. Then she just lets this song out. I think this isn't a premeditated prose that she sings, but I believe this is the most intimate, raw eruption of praise as she, maybe for the first moment, understands this is really going to happen.

So we get in the mind, we get in the heart, of Mary. How did she get there? How did she get past all of these doubts, fears, and insecurities? How did she respond to being called to something that was not only so much bigger than herself but beyond her imagination? I want to read it to you one more time as you've got kind of a context on how to think about it, and then we'll look at it in detail. She begins:

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on 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 for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 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 Abraham and to his offspring forever."

I hear perspective in Mary's response. I hear a perspective that really has shifted, and as we begin to look at her words, it's being displayed. That perspective change or shift is being projected for us to be able to see in 3D. How is her heart changing? How is she looking at this differently, from going from a place of maybe doubt, fear, and insecurity, not knowing how this is ever going to happen (still, I would say, not knowing how it's going to happen), but coming to a place where she's trusting and willing, excited maybe, to engage in this journey ahead?

We don't know this for sure; we don't know the exact answer, but I can give you a pretty good span. Mary is 12 to 15 years old, depending on who you read. There's all kind of different marks for them, but it doesn't really matter. You get somewhere between 12 and 15. Now I can tell you firsthand, as a parent of a daughter in that zone, that perspective is miraculous. My daughter is incredibly mature.

She's wonderful, but it doesn't matter how good they are, those of you who are teachers in here and around individuals, or maybe you've been engaged in ministry and you know (guys are

probably the same way, so I don't want to make this sound like it's all about the girls) individuals in that 12 to 15 zone... I remember back at myself in that phase. All of the thoughts that were going through my mind and the things, the reality that I had painted in this mind, were so far from a realistic reality.

So imagine for a minute. Here's Mary. I know times were different, and I can hear people saying, "Well, they had to grow up earlier." Look. They may have had to grow up real quick, but she's 12 to 15. She is an immature young girl. The fears and insecurities that surround her would have been incredibly powerful just because of the limited number of years she had journeyed through life.

Here she is at this young age, and immediately I think what would've come to her mind would've been, "Here I am, unwed, and I'm going to be pregnant with a baby. I'm going to be a complete cultural outcast. Not only will I be a cultural outcast, but I could receive possible physical harm for being an unwed mother amidst this culture.

Not only will it be a season of nine months, but here this will be a child who will always be known to be a child who was born out of wedlock. It's not only momentary fears and insecurities. What is my family going to say? Not only am I going to receive this from the culture, but I'm going to be an outcast from my family! How long will this last? It will probably last forever."

You can get into Mary's mind and begin to see the snowball. All the dominoes begin to fall, all of the fears and insecurities that would flood her mind, but then she gets to this place where she exclaims this song or these words. Those insecurities and fears don't seem to be there anymore. Let's read and see the how and why.

She begins, ***"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."*** She begins with some real powerful language. The *soul* in their minds was the most raw and authentic expression of self.

So the differences here... Maybe you and I might use language like, "The words we say," or "With the mouth." With our mouth we can say a lot of things that we truly don't believe. The language here, ***"My soul magnifies the Lord..."*** is literally (in the most authentic, the most raw, the place where she cannot do anything but be honest) responding and magnifying the Lord. *Magnifying*. Literally, making larger or bringing glory to.

Notice a shift of focus here. First, insecurities, fears, and then she's responding. Immediately she's responding with ***"My soul magnifies the Lord..."*** "The innermost part of who I am worships God." Bubbling out of her is this all-encompassing enlargement of God. As she enlarges God, you also hear amidst this song this diminishing of self. "Less of me. All about you."

We've all heard people use this phrase, and we've probably all said it before. "Losing the forest for the trees." That idea. I've got this picture... I'm not a photographer; I'm the farthest thing in

the world from a photographer, but I love anything creative. I'll engage in anything that's creative. I've got that itch, so I scratch it in various ways.

Sometimes I'll take pictures. I enjoy it, because it's something creative. It's an outlet for me. I've got this picture that I took on our recent trip to Guatemala that I liked and wanted in our home. It's this old door of a very old church building. I saw it, and I was like, "Man, that's great. I want to take that." I got home, took out the picture, and it looked good. I began all this editing to it. There was a sign in the photo next to the door that was a very modern sign. It was something about, "Don't stand here," or something like that.

I wanted to remove that from the photo, so I did all this editing to try to get that out of the photo so that when you saw it, it was just the door, this snapshot of history. This was in Antigua, Guatemala, which is an incredibly old city. So I did all the editing, and I got it to where it was acceptable on my 13-inch computer screen. I blew it up to a 20 x 30 and hung it on the wall. Every single time I walk by...

Just to give you some little frame of reference, on that 20 x 30 print that's hanging on our wall, this error that I know is there is less than an eighth of an inch on that 20 x 30 piece. But every time I walk by it, that's all I see. No matter how far I am away from it or close to it, that is all I see; it doesn't matter. My wife doesn't even know it's there. I haven't told her because I'm scared that's all she'll see as well, but that's how hidden it is. That's how tiny it is. It's this one little spot I didn't edit perfectly, and yet my eye runs to that every single time I see it.

Many of you have experienced this too. Something you make or something you do, and that flaw is magnified in such a huge way to you. Filmmakers use this in such an awesome way. You'll see this frame as you're watching a movie, and your eye will be focused on something. Then all of a sudden, you'll notice something as the focus shifts from that thing to something else that was in the frame the whole time, but you didn't know was there until the focus shifts over to it. Then you see it. "Wow!"

I think that's one of the biggest struggles that you and I walk in in our day today. We get so focused with a laser-beam focus on all of our fears and insecurities and all of these circumstances that surround us, and that's all we see. God could be doing (and I would say *is* doing) mind-blowing and miraculous things all around us, but we miss it because we've got this laser-beam focus on this circumstance or this fear or this insecurity. We're walking through life, and that's all we're focused on, so it's huge. It's enormous.

What you see Mary doing here is she looks amidst those fears, insecurities, and all the unknowns... She takes her focus, and she places it on God. Everything else, then, begins to blur. God becomes bigger to her. Her trust becomes bigger, and her perspective begins to change. She had no idea. Think about all of the unknowns that were still in her heart. She asked the question, "How is this going to be?"

Here's Gabriel's answer, and tell me how much sense this would have made to her: "Well, the Holy Spirit is going to come on you, and the Most High will overshadow you." She's thinking, "I'm a virgin!" That would have given her nothing. So it's not like, as we begin to read this song,

that she had all the answers. She still has the fears, she still has the insecurities, and she still has all of the unknowns, but her focus shifts from them to her God.

As we look at our journey, all of us in here, we can name all of the unknowns. We can name all of the fears. We know what the fear of failure feels like. We know what the fear of all of the unknowns that surround us feels like. We know the fear of financial stress. We could go on and on naming those, but her perspective changes as she removes her focus from those circumstances and places it on her God. *Our obstacles shrink as our God comes into focus.* Let's continue reading.

Verse 50: ***"And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate."*** As Mary is praising, her transforming perspective is on display here in front of us. There are so many things that she could be focused on, all of the insecurities and all of the fears. Notice, ***"His mercy is for those who fear him."*** That's what she says. ***"His mercy is for those who fear him."***

I think what she's saying here, what she's feeling displayed in her words is, "I could focus on all of these other things, all of these fears and insecurities, but I need to take my focus and put it on him, because he is the author of mercy. His mercy is for those who fear him. Rather than fearing all of these things that surround me in the circumstances that I'm walking in, I need to fear the greatest fear, which is walking in disobedience to our God. I need to fear being faithless, not the circumstances that are around me, because God and his mercy are for those who fear him."

I know that for people who really struggle deeply with fear, one of the most difficult things can be rational thought in that fear. By God's grace and power, that's what we see Mary doing here. That's why I know it's by God's grace and God's power. We see, amidst a situation that would have been completely overwhelming with fear and insecurities, rational, God-directed, faithful language coming out of her.

Again, this is all about perspective. All of the things around her were overwhelming until an infinitely powerful and all-knowing God enters the picture; then everything changes. One other highlight that I want to make for you here is just that phrase that we would quickly read over: ***"...from generation to generation."*** Why would she throw that in there? ***"...from generation to generation."***

I think as Mary's perspective is transforming, and as she's singing, as she's praising, she's realizing that the God who parted the Red Sea (from generation to generation), the God who stopped the sun for Joshua's army (from generation to generation), the God who brought down the walls of Jericho (from generation to generation) is the God who will carry her through the circumstance. It's not a new God who works in different ways, but it's the same God who has displayed himself throughout our Scriptures and throughout history.

We have every reason to have all confidence and all faith in him, because he's proven himself faithful throughout all days and all circumstances. So when she says this, it's a reminder that I know the stories. She would have known all of the stories of the people of the Old Testament

who we read about; they were her ancestors. "That God who proved himself faithful is the same God who has called me to this, and he will be faithful today just like he was then."

Some of you are in situations of your life right now where you're questioning that. You're wrestling with it, but even in your own story, you're forgetting the ways that he was faithful just a few years ago. We come to those places, and we get stressed. We don't reflect upon, even in our own journeys and in our own stories, the way God has been so faithful as provider and protector, even healer, throughout our story. We come back to that situation again, and we don't look back at that. We don't find confidence in it.

So for us, it's not only about that God, from generation to generation throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, but in our *own* generation how has God proved himself faithful time after time after time. Nobody in this room is looking at the same call Mary had at this moment, but we're all looking at incredibly massive and overwhelming calls that have been placed on our lives.

Whether God has called you to this city, somewhere else, another state, around the world, your own neighborhood, he's called you to something bigger than yourself. As you reflect upon that ("God has called me to something that's so much bigger than myself"), that flood of insecurities and fears is going to crash down on you.

Parents, God has called you to something bigger than yourself. Not only are you supposed to raise these children to be respectable people, but you're to pour out your life to disciple them and train them to be people who live to glorify our God and love him, to the best of your ability. That's overwhelming and with that come fears and insecurities. All of us look ahead at this, and we could name so many different ways we're called to a calling that's so much bigger than ourselves, just like Mary.

The perspective and the realization that's going on in Mary here is the same one that you and I need to embrace. The same God who parted the Red Sea, the same God who held the sun still, the same God who brought down the walls of Jericho, is the one who equips us for our calling wherever we are and whatever that looks like. That should bring confidence in us. That should transform our perspectives. Rather than gazing and focusing on those fears, let's turn our eyes to this God, our God, our Savior. *Our insecurities disappear as our God comes into focus.*

The last three verses here: ***"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 Abraham and to his offspring forever."*** Oftentimes in Scripture what is *not* said is just as important as what *is* said there. I just want to make an observation for you.

What is *not* there is "He has filled the hungry with food," because that could be a logical conclusion. Right? "He has filled the hungry with food." But that's not what it says. It says, ***"He has filled the hungry with good things."*** I think on one level we need to take that at face value, because we can look throughout the pages of the Old Testament and see that the hungry people of Israel, as they were wandering aimlessly, were provided manna.

So yes, he is the provider of food to the hungry, but right now, at this very moment in history, they were hungry for a political king to come, one that looked like David but had more power than David, one who would come and bring them prominence, bring them freedom, and bring them a place politically that they desired to be, of affluence.

Now did he bring that? No, he brought good things. *Great things*, we would say. He provided Jesus, the Messiah, to be born of the virgin Mary, live a sinless life then die the worst death imaginable on a cross, and then rise again three days later, paying the penalty of sin for all, not only for the Israelites but for all of those who would come after, as they placed their faith on him.

They would walk in the forgiveness and the grace that was bought by the blood of Jesus as he died on the cross. The story wasn't over then. They would then walk in the victory of the resurrection of Christ. That's so much bigger and better than just what they wanted. *Our desires change as our God comes into focus.*

I want to make a really obvious statement here. What we're talking about this morning is the perspective shift and the promises, the transformation that happens when someone who has placed their faith in Jesus begins to look to Jesus as the source of all things. What we're not talking about here is how to navigate difficult circumstances. You see, I think oftentimes in the church...

I want to highlight it. I've been praying (just to let you a little bit into my prayer closet) this season that somehow, in some way, God would open the eyes of the spiritually blind in this season right now, either in the life of our church or somehow through this. I don't care to know about it; I don't need to. That's just what I'm praying for, that God would open the eyes of the spiritually blind.

So I want to make a real clear distinction here. We're not just talking about how everybody can deal with difficult circumstances. What we're talking about is those who have placed their faith in Jesus have a promise to stand on, which is what makes the gospel more beautiful to us. You place your faith in Jesus, and then you walk in the promises that we've been given in this Scripture.

If you haven't come to that place where you've placed your faith in Jesus, then this is another reason to do so. This confidence we're talking about this morning, the way we can gaze at Jesus, we can focus on Jesus and allow every other fear and insecurity fade into the background because we know and worship a Savior who sustains us every step of our way. That's why I encourage you in this season right now. Place your faith in Jesus.

Might we be a people who rather than walking through our calling... If you've placed your faith in him, you have a huge calling that's so much bigger than your gifts and talents and abilities. As individuals in this room who have placed our faith in Jesus, and we have that calling and mission on our lives to do things with eternal impact that's so much bigger than us, might we be a people who, rather than feeling paralyzed by all the fears and the insecurities and the what-ifs and the difficulties that are present or will come, might we be a people who focus on our God.

Might we focus on our God and allow all of those other things, all of the fears to fade, all of the obstacles to fade. Our own hearts' desires begin to be transformed by the grace of God as we look to him as the source for our endurance and strength in the calling he's appointed for us.