

I did a search on Google with the words, “Christmas songs” and got a response of 278 million possibilities. Right up at the top of Christmas songs was, “All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.” Bing Crosby was right up at the top of search engine with “White Christmas”. Of course “Silent Night” and “Joy to the World” were right up there as well. In a few weeks our Fellowship group will go out and sing Christmas carols at Steeplechase. But I am sure they will not be singing the Christmas carol in our lesson for tonight. So let’s take a look at a neglected Christmas carol: Mary’s Song..

So what do we know about Mary who sings this song? There is uncertainty about exactly where she was born – some traditions say Jerusalem, some say Nazareth. However, she was born to Joachim and Anna – members of the Davidic line - and grew up as part of the staunch Jewish community living in the dry Galilean hills surrounding Nazareth.

Her daily responsibilities as part of a rural Galilean family would have included grinding wheat and barley into flour, preparing dishes of vegetables, nuts and mutton, baking bread, spinning wool and making clothes, and fetching jars of water from the well for cooking and washing. There would also be a few chickens and a donkey to feed.

In spite of their land having been conquered and ravaged for centuries by one super power after another – the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, and now the mighty Romans - together with the people of Nazareth, Mary would have had a deep and strong faith in God’s promise to one day send His Messiah who would free Israel from its enemies.

The Lord who heard the cry of His people in Egypt and mightily came to their rescue through Moses would certainly one day do so again. The God who had shown Himself over and over throughout their history to be on the side of the poor and oppressed and defenseless would not forever delay in showing His salvation.

In a culture where women were barely noticed, except as a wife and mother, around the age of 15, Mary’s parents took the customary step of arranging her marriage and the man of their choice was Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, to be her husband. Following the engagement ceremony, Mary returned to live at home with her parents for about a year when she would then go to live with her husband.

And that’s when it all happened! The visit by the angel Gabriel, the announcement that she had been specially chosen, hand picked by God to bear His Son Jesus – His Messiah – who would establish a Kingdom that would never end. The power of the Holy Spirit would conceive the child within her womb without any human intervention. She also learned that one of her older relatives, a woman named Elizabeth, was already six months pregnant. These were pretty amazing things for her to hear – so immediately she went to visit her relative Elizabeth.

Mark Lowry puts the mystery to music in his song Mary Did You Know? The words say: Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new; and this child that you delivered will soon deliver you? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would give sight to the blind man? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would calm a storm with his hand? Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels

trod? And, when you kissed your little baby you've kissed the face of God? Oh, Mary, did you know? Mary, did you know?

Sometimes, God picks people. Regular, ordinary people like Mary, like you and me, and he asks us to do great things. And it doesn't matter if you have to work, or if you're busy, or if you're too old or too young, or if you're not ready. There are times when God interrupts what you're doing and says to you, "I want you to do something great for me."

That's what happened to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a regular, ordinary girl, probably in her middle teens, living in a small village. She didn't go to a special school that trained women on how to mother the Son of God. And Mary wasn't holy. She had sin, just like everybody else. Notice in her song she referred to Jesus as God, My Savior. This was inconvenient for her – she was engaged, and this would cause a great deal of stress between her and Joseph. Socially, this wouldn't look good – an unwed Jewish teenager who is pregnant. I'm sure Mary was wondering to herself, "Why me?"

What God did to Mary is similar to what God sometimes does to us. Sometimes, God interrupts your life and says to you, "You're the one I've chosen to do something big," and then you say to yourself, "Why me?" Maybe God does this to you in your personal life – he places a huge challenge in front of you – the challenge of taking care of an aging parent, or the challenge of loving difficult relatives, or the challenge of being the strong one in the family. Or the challenge of dealing with a lingering illness. And you're not ready for that challenge. But God says to you, "I've chosen you." God does this to churches too. He has placed a huge challenge in front of us – the challenge of reaching out to our community. Maybe you say to yourself, "I'm not ready for this challenge." And God says, "But I've chosen you. You have no training. It's very inconvenient. I know you're not ready. But I've chosen you," God says.

How did Mary respond? We see her response in the words of her song, called the "Magnificat." And as we read through this song, you can see three things. You can see, first of all, that Mary responds to God with humble faith. Mary believed that God would do this great thing through her: "From now on, all generations will call me blessed," Mary said. Mary believed that she would be the mother of the Messiah, even though it seemed unbelievable to her. And Mary responded to all of this not just with humble faith, but also with humble obedience. As you read through her song, you can tell that Mary wasn't resisting. Instead, she calls herself God's "servant" (48). Mary was going to obey, and walk the road that God had placed in front of her. And as she thought about this, Mary also responded with joy. She says "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." She was happy that God had chosen her, a small and insignificant person, to do such a great thing.

I wish I would respond to God's challenges like Mary. When God turns your life upside down, and asks you to do great things for him, how do you respond? With humble faith? Or do you say to God, "God, I don't think you know what you're doing. You're wrong God, you're wrong!" When God turns your life upside down, do you respond with humble obedience? Or do you say, "No God, I don't think so. I'm not going to cooperate with you." When God turns your life upside down, do you respond with joy, like Mary? Or do you complain and grumble? When

we look at Mary's life, and how Mary responded when God turned her life upside down, we are humbled, because we realize that we sin. We doubt and resist and complain.

But our God is a God who loves sinners. He came to Mary, not because she was so perfect, but purely out of his grace and mercy. And that same God comes to us. Mary called God her "Savior," and he is your Savior too. God did great things for Mary, and God also does great things for you. Instead of condemning you for your sins, God sends his Son, who takes your sins away. Instead of condemning you, God has mercy on you, and forgives you, just as he had mercy on Mary.

One of the events when the summer Olympics takes place is the decathlon. Each athlete in the decathlon has to compete in ten events, from shot put to high jump to javelin throwing to hurdles, to sprints, to long jump – ten different events. Imagine that - you have to excel at all those different events, in order to win the gold medal. When Jesus was here, he had to excel in all different kinds of events, in order to win for us our salvation. Just think about that – he had to fulfill all the Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament, perfectly. He had to keep God's Ten Commandments, perfectly. He had to teach and train his disciples. He had to reach out to the unbelievers of first century Palestine. He had to endure all the sufferings of the cross, as a sacrifice for your sins. He had to rise from the dead. All these things Jesus had to do – it makes the decathlon seem so small, compared to what Jesus accomplished. And those are just some of the mighty deeds that God has done, that Mary sings about in her song. God has done great things for you.

And trusting in that God, that Messiah – that's where Mary found the strength and courage she needed, to move forward, as the future mother of the Christ. Ultimately, what happened, was the God turned Mary into a person that she had never planned to be, someone that all generations would call "blessed." And if you were to ask Mary if she would change anything, I'm sure she'd say no. God turned her life upside down. He asked this small peasant girl to do a big thing. But God also gave her faith, and strength to obey, and joy, as she carried out God's plan.

Remember this, when God challenges you, when God turns your life upside down. God loves to ask small people to do big things. And when God does that to you, remember that he will also give you faith, and courage, and joy, as you carry out God's plan in your life. Ultimately, God is working on you, turning you into a person that you had never planned to be. That's how God works. May He bless you, just as he blessed that young, surprised, peasant girl Mary, many many years ago. Amen.