

The True Spirit of Christmas

One of the phrases we hear so often at this time of year is "The Spirit of Christmas." What is the Spirit of Christmas? I know when I worked for Giant Food back in my seminary days. I always jumped at the opportunity to fill in for parcel pick-up around this time of year. You'd load a bag or two of groceries and people would give you a dollar for a tip. That could turn out to be quite profitable.

Something was different about those people than at other times of the year. The usual explanation was, "They've got the Christmas Spirit!" TV specials want to say the spirit of Christmas is giving, or family, or caring for others.

One little boy suggested that the Christmas spirit is really contentment because that's what you need to be when you don't get what you want. For many, however, the Christmas spirit is not so trivial or so frivolous or so fun. For many the Christmas spirit is one of profound sadness, increased feelings of depression because all that is wrong in your life is then measured against the gladness of the time and seems even more profoundly painful.

For others it's a time for saying thanks for some very basic things. G. K. Chesterton years ago said, "When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings with toys at Christmas, why are we not grateful to God for filling our stocking with legs?"

Mostly though, I guess the spirit of Christmas is giving presents. It's what we seemed to be consumed with.

This morning I'd like to challenge all of those definitions of the Christmas Spirit and say that the true biblical definition of the Christmas Spirit is a spirit of worship. The focus on giving, family, and caring for others will certainly grow out of worship, but the real spirit of Christmas is the worship of the living God.

No where is the Spirit of Christmas exemplified in any greater clarity than in Mary's song of praise in Luke chapter 1.

Turn to Luke 1:40 pg 990

Three weeks ago we started studying the book of Luke. What we've seen so far is Luke's account of the angelic birth announcements. First was the announcement that Zacharias & Elizabeth would be the parents of John the Baptist. Then Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus.

When the angel Gabriel told the young virgin Mary that she was going to have a child who would be the Son of God and reign over the house of Jacob forever, she said, "How can this be?" He answered her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her so that the child's conception would be divine. And then he gave Mary the added confirmation that nothing is impossible with God by telling her that her cousin Elizabeth who was old and barren was also pregnant.

Read vs 39-40

The angel had told Zechariah that John the Baptist would be filled with the Spirit even from his mother's womb. That is, the Spirit of God would exercise a unique control on this man from the time he is in his mother's womb until he completes his ministry as a grown man. Then Luke gives evidence of this:

Read vs 41-45

Mary approaches carrying the Son of God in her womb and little John gives Elizabeth a good kick in the diaphragm. Then Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and cries out: "Mary, my child is leaping for joy. The Holy Spirit has helped him before he can even speak to bear witness to the Lord in your womb."

That's all the confirmation Mary needs. She sees clearly a most remarkable thing about God: He is about to change the course of all human history; the most important three decades in all of time are about to begin. And where is God? Occupying Himself with two obscure, humble women—one old and barren, the other a young virgin. And Mary is so moved by this vision of God, the lover of the lowly, that she breaks out in a song—a song that has come to be known as the *Magnificat*.

From a humble woman comes a tremendous lesson on worship. This is the spirit of Christmas. To worship the living God for His love and commitment to us.

I. First Mary gives praise to the Lord God, who was in her womb, for being her Savior. **Read 46-47**

Last week we saw all of the difficulties Mary faced. A virgin who had saved herself for her husband; a godly young woman who lived for the Lord now pregnant and not married. She could lose her family, her friends, the respect of her neighbors, and Joseph, who she was engaged to.

Mary had a lot to loose. But rather than sitting in a corner weeping, she's rejoicing. She's excited. She is worshipping God who alone is to be glorified.

Back 700 years before this God had spoken through Isaiah: *Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* (Isa 7:14)

The name Immanuel literally means "God with us." Elizabeth said "My Lord is in your womb."

We worship because God has come to earth. He took on flesh as Jesus Christ. He robed himself with frail humanity so that He might go to the cross to die for our sins.

Mary says worship rises inside of me, from the inside out I rejoice, because God is my Savior.

Later on in the Book of Isaiah we read these words about Immanuel. *He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

The spirit of Christmas is first of all the worship of our Creator who judged our sin, then became our sinbearer to die as payment for that sin.

Does that excite you? Can you sit here this morning and kind of yawn and say, "Hey Ed, that's nice. I wonder if those Redskins are ever going to get their act together."

Mary didn't say, **(DRONE)** "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

The word she uses in Greek for "magnifies" is *megaluno*. We know what mega means. It means "really big." She says, "My soul mega praises. My soul mega exalts God."

The the word she uses for rejoiced is *agalliao*. That word comes from *agan* which means "much" and *hallomai* which means "to leap!" In other words "I'm jumping for joy here."

"It's coming from the inside out, and I'm excited about God my Savior."

- I. First Mary worships the Lord God, who was in her womb, for being her Savior.
- II. Secondly, Mary worships because of His grace.

Read vs 48

The Christmas spirit is a spirit of worship because the Holy God has done great things for us personally. Like Mary we're on the receiving end of God's grace.

God alone is holy. Habakkuk 1:13 *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.*

God is righteous in the fullest sense of that word. He is perfect.

But *we're* another story. The Bible says: *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;*

God alone is holy and sin is an affront to His very nature. God hates sin. He is righteously indignant in the face of sin. In fact the Bible tells us that *the wages of sin is death.*

We deserve nothing but judgement from a holy and righteous God. If we got what we deserved it would be separation from God for all eternity. But God has chosen to show us grace.

Mary could say, "*He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; Who am I? What do I deserve? Not to be the mother of Immanuel, that's for sure! But He chose me. He worked in my life.*"

Christmas is about grace. Christmas is about God joining us in the lowly state of humanity so that He could make us His children for eternity. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

- I. First, Mary worships the Lord for being her Savior.
- II. Second, Mary worships because of His grace.
- III. Mary worships God because of the great things He has done. **Read vs 49 -53**

PSA 107 *Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! The righteous see it and rejoice, And all iniquity stops its mouth. Whoever is wise will observe these things, And they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD.*

Mary's words are a warning to us not to make the common mistake that because God is great He is partial to great men, or because God is exalted He favors what is exalted among men. Just the opposite is true. God's holiness has expressed itself by exalting the humble and humbling the proud.

What causes Mary to worship is that God loves to undertake for the underdog who calls on His mercy. She mentions this three times: verse 50: "He has mercy on those who fear Him"; verse 52: "He exalts the lowly"; verse 53: "He has filled the hungry with good things." That's one side of God's holiness.

The other side is that God opposes and humbles the proud. Mary mentions this three times also: verse 51: "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts"; verse 52: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones"; verse 53: "The rich He has sent away empty."

God is not partial to the rich, the powerful or the proud. How could God be partial to the things which in our world are more often than not substitutes for God rather than pointers to God?

Think about all the people who have perished because they were enamored by pride, power and wealth.

There is a word of warning, and of salvation here. Look at what God is really like: He is not the least impressed by any of our pride, power or money. He has mercy on those who fear Him. He has a special place in His heart for those who humble themselves and turn from trusting wealth to humility. This is the way God is. This is how His holiness expresses itself.

The great and holy God magnifies His greatness by blessing the lowly who admire His greatness and by abasing the proud who resent His greatness.

The spirit of Christmas is worship of the mighty God who not only resists the proud but humbled Himself for us.

The Bible explains: *...Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

God could have come into the world with lightning flashing, angelic voices booming, and signs in the heavens for the whole world to see. He could have come as the most powerful political ruler, the richest king, the most honored and respected man who ever lived.

Instead He came as the Son of Mary. Humble, lowly, meek, modest, and unassuming.

- I. First, Mary worships the Lord for being her Savior.
- II. Second, Mary worships because of His grace.
- III. Mary worships God because of the great things He has done.
- IV. Mary worships the Lord God for His faithfulness. **Read vs 54-55**

As Mary focuses on what God has done for her, she looks back on the sovereignty of God in the history of her people. What God did for Abraham, he was in essence doing for all of Abraham's descendants. In fact, the fulfillment of the covenant to Abraham was what the birth of Christ was all about.

Back around 2000 BC God called a man named Abraham out of his homeland and promised him a new land. Abraham went and God made him this promise.

By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD...in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...

The rest of the Old Testament is the story of God's fulfillment of that promise. Abraham fathered Isaac, Isaac fathered Jacob, and Jacob sons fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.

Abraham's decedents multiplied and no matter how much opposition they faced, no matter how many kings and nations came against them no one could wipe them out. Ancient peoples like the Hittites, Amorites, Assyrians could all be destroyed or melded in with other nations but not the Jews.

God was faithful to His promise to Abraham and his descendents *in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed...*

The blessing of Christmas is the fulfillment of God's promise. No one could wipe out Israel because Jesus would come though Israel.

Here's Mary living out God's redemptive promise. All nations of the earth are about to be blessed through the baby that's in her womb.

In Matthew I the angel tells Joseph of God's plan for Mary and he says: *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.*

Because the mighty God has done mighty things is there good news to tell. Because God has saved, does save and remains faithful there is worship and praise and glory and adoration.

What is the spirit of Christmas? Worship, in a word, worship. Mary sang her song of worship and believers have been singing ever since.

Every Christmas season, we go back through history. We do it when we sing the carols. We sing carols from as far back as the fifth century that have gone through several translations and finally reached us. We have carols from the fifteenth century, the eleventh century, the seventeenth, the eighteenth, the sixteenth...as well as the nineteenth.

And as you go back through the history of Christmas and you read those Christmas carols, the attitude is always worship, it's always been worship.

William Dix who died in 1898 wrote the words to, "What child is this?" which was set to the English folk song "Greensleeves." How does "What child is this?" end? "So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh, come, peasant king to own Him, the King of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone Him." That's worship.

Charles Wesley wrote six thousand hymns including "Hark the herald angels sing." The last verse, "Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace, hail the Son of righteousness," means worship. "Light and life to all He brings, risen with healing in His wings, mild He lays His glory by," that's the incarnation, "born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King." That's worship.

And then John Francis Wade, who died in 1786, summed it all up in the simple words, "O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

The real spirit of Christmas is the worship of the living God.

