

Mary's Song

3rd Sunday of Advent

Note: This homily is based on Luke 1:46b–55. Please read that passage to the congregation before preaching this homily.

Today is the third Sunday in Advent - and we'll explore Mary's Song in Luke chapter 1. Her song leads us to **rejoice in God who is merciful, powerful and faithful.**

Song is a magnificent way to express our feelings of delight and adoration when something really significant and important happens. In today's reading Luke records Mary's ecstatic delight at the news she's been given. The angel from heaven, Gabriel, has appeared to Mary with a message from God, saying: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."*

This was news which Mary, and other God-fearing people had been longing to hear. This news marked the fulfilling of God's promise to King David 1000 years before.

Mary lived in Nazareth, a tradesmen's town. She was engaged to marry Joseph, who was a carpenter and who probably worked in the construction of a new town which would become the capital of that area.

In her delight, Mary travels some 180km south from Nazareth to the hill country of Judah, near Jerusalem. She has come to see her relative, Elizabeth. The

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angel had told Mary that Elizabeth was already 6 months pregnant. As Mary arrives she bursts into joy and delight:

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour ...

Her focus of delight is not herself, or Elizabeth, but the Lord. She rejoices **in God my Saviour**. Mary knows that all this is God's action, and she benefits from it. He is fulfilling promises he made; promises which bring salvation, rescue. And she recognises the special place God has given to her in his plan. She is aware that she is not the important one, but greatly privileged. Luke knows this is a remarkable moment - things will never be the same. When he writes: From now on ... Luke captures a view of the past, the present, and the future. Because of her role in God's plans, Mary realises that future generations will bless her. This baby will be so important in God's plans that he will affect every person - past, present and future. Indeed, her promised baby will be the one through whom God brings blessing to all those who fear him. Mary herself is what Luke calls a "God-fearer" - she respects and trusts God but does not know Jesus.

Mary knows what God has done - and in her mind's eye she recalls how God revealed his character to his people: he is the Mighty One, she sings in vs. 49. She knows that when God speaks, he is able to accomplish whatever he likes. He created this world, the stars, the heavens, the entire Universe by speaking. Yes, he is mighty. He is able to do whatever he promises.

As Mary reflects on God's sovereign power, she affirms in vs 49:

for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name.

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'Holy' means to be set apart. Mary is thinking of God's unique sovereign power as ruler over people. That sets him apart from every human power and authority. And it reveals a special graciousness of God in granting Mary the privilege of bearing Jesus. Indeed, God has done great things for her.

Vs 50 draws our attention to God's gracious faithfulness which is timeless and unchanging - Mary delights in God because:

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Mary sees herself as one of those who 'fear him'. Not in the sense of being afraid, but having a respectful recognition that this God has absolute power, and he is also merciful, compassionate, kind, loving, just. He is faithful to his promises and his character.

In vs. 50-53 Mary reflects on the mighty acts of God. She is thinking of how he has acted in the history of his people Israel. Notice how her attention has shifted from herself, to thinking of the whole nation of Israel. God has scattered those who are arrogant - who think so much of themselves and so little of God or his people. God accomplished his purposes and plans, despite the total opposition of other rulers - like Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Mary sees in the fullness of time that God will remove leaders and rulers from their position - vs 52 *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.* In particular Mary may be thinking of the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire over the nation of Israel. Through the Old Testament God promised that he would set up his King to rule. As a faithful Israelite, Mary is looking forward to that time.

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And her song of praise ends with vs. 54-55:

"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

She knows that God extends his support for his people Israel. Not the political state of Israel, but those people who fear God, as she does. To those who trust and rely on Him who is powerful, who is faithful and just; merciful and compassionate. Her mention of Abraham reveals her deep awareness of the nation's origins and the gracious way God chose Abraham, giving him a set of promises which Mary witnesses being fulfilled. These promises set the course of the nation's history and future. God will make a great nation of all those who trust and rely on him.

As we have today traced Mary's adoration and praise of the Sovereign God she adores:

What occasions in my life am I tempted to doubt God's Sovereign power, or his compassion, or his mercy; when am I tempted to think God has no good things to offer me. In those times, it may help your spirit to return again to Mary's Song, and be reminded of her awareness of these realities. Pray to God and ask him to strengthen your faith and trust in him. Thank him that even in the midst of our suffering, he rules. Not making us suffer, but always present with his people to see us through. And in the times of abundance and delight, to thank him for his goodness to you. Like Mary, put your trust in him.