

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
December 8 & 9, 2012  
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The Voices of Christmas: MARY  
Luke 1:39-56**

Last summer when I preached, I showed you this picture of my sister Leslie and her little boy, Riley (*slide shown*.) I was telling you about God's mercy and how my sister had experienced His mercy in the midst of a reoccurrence of breast cancer in her lungs and bones, but there is so much more to my sister's story than this. Like so many of us, she has had many moments, where God worked in her, through her, maybe even despite her, to do His extraordinary things.

Our stories remind us that God uses ordinary people, like my sister, like you and me. He uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things, things that reflect His love to the world. I'm reminded of a book that a lot of us around here have been reading called *Love Does*. It's really a book of short stories that talk about what God's love does through regular people and how we all get to be part of that.

About 20 years ago, my sister joined this church as a young, single woman. Then she brought her fiancée, Troy, now her husband, with her to this place, and he fell in love with God here. He also really liked Rich Phenow a lot! But he fell in love with God here, and Rich married Leslie and Troy in my backyard. Then, off to Boulder, Colorado they moved. In Boulder, God continued to do extraordinary things in these two ordinary people. They found a church community, and through God's love, a love they experienced here through all of you, they started a ministry in their church to provide shelter for homeless people in their community who didn't have a place to sleep at night.

For the last six years, any time it is below 20 degrees, my sister and her husband, along with a team of friends, set up cots in their church and invite people on the streets to come in and have a warm place to sleep. That is what God's love does. Then, after years of wrestling with infertility, they decided to adopt (*slide shown*). That is their son, Riley, a beautiful little Scandinavian boy with blond hair and blue eyes. That little guy's birth mom used meth throughout her entire pregnancy. That's not what my sister and her husband signed up for, but God's love was calling them, two very ordinary people living ordinary lives, to step out in faith to be Riley's parents (*slide shown*). And when God called, they responded. Through the gift of Riley, God has done things beyond anything they could have ever imagined.

It reminds me of Mary, the mother of Jesus, an ordinary 16-year-old Palestinian girl, whom God called to be the mother of our Messiah. We are in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Advent, and last weekend John [Pastor John Crosby] kicked off our *Voices of Advent* series talking about the voice of the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied Jesus' coming 500 years before He came, and what John said was that Isaiah's voice was a voice of waiting, waiting in hope.

Today we are going to look at the voice of Mary in the Book of Luke. Luke tells us that the angel Gabriel comes to Mary and gives her the news that she will bear the Son of God, the Christ Child. That is quite an assignment. Can you imagine? God chose Mary, a young, poor female. These characteristics would make the people of her day assume that she would be unusable by God. Talk about doing the extraordinary through the ordinary!

<sup>38</sup> “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me according to your word.”

Having already believed and having already said yes to being the bearer of the Son of God, Mary checks out the Angel’s story by going to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Luke tells us,

<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then Elizabeth says,

<sup>45</sup> “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

In response to Elizabeth’s words and in response to carrying the unborn Jesus, Mary speaks the words that have become known as the *Magnificat*, the Song of Mary. So in today’s text we are going to be looking at Luke 1:46-55. If you would like, you can read along in the pew Bible. It’s on page 1,523. Here is Mary’s song.

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me—  
holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
but has lifted up the humble.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things  
but has sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering to be merciful

<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Mary’s song of praise in these verses traditionally has been called the *Magnificat*, a title derived from the opening word *magnificat* (magnifies) in the Latin translation. What I hear in Mary’s song, in Mary’s voice, is a voice of response. In this text I believe she **responds in three**

**ways—with joy, with faith, and with humility.** Mary's life has just been turned upside down, the course of her life altered in ways that she couldn't yet imagine. And what does she do? She responds to God with this hymn. That what God's love does. God's love calls our hearts and souls to respond to Him. It causes us to respond in a way that moves beyond our circumstances.

It says in verses 46 and 47, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary's hymn of praise is full of joy. Mary's entire being is caught up in praising God. There is joy in her song, joy that after 400 years, God was breaking His silence. Joy that something truly wonderful was happening. Joy that God not only cares for the humble, the poor, and the ordinary, but that He uses us all for His purposes and in His plans for His kingdom. Joy for the coming Savior and Redeemer.

Then we hear her response of faith; faith in a God who is mighty, a God who will right the injustices of the world, faith in a God who is the champion of the poor, the lowly, the oppressed and the humble. Mary's amazing faith allowed her to believe that God could use even someone like her,

<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful  
of the humble state of his servant.  
From now on all generations will call me blessed,  
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Mary's response is one of joy, one of faith, and lastly one of humility. What she gets is that it isn't about her. It's about God. She understands that all generations calling her blessed isn't about her work in the world. It's about God and His work in the world. Mary's humility, her realistic understanding of herself, enables her to open herself up to be used for God's purpose. And when we get that, God will take ordinary people like us and do extraordinary things. Our hearts will respond, like Mary's, in a song of joy, and faith, and humility. That's what God's love does.

I get to see that all the time in my job here. I'm not kidding. In just this past week, I could give you dozens of times I have seen of what God's love does through the ordinary people around here. Last Tuesday night we had our Candlelight Memorial Service, and I saw how our musicians, the prayer team, and the grief team came together to bring God's love and comfort to the grieving. I saw God's love on Wednesday when a friend stopped and prayed with me in the middle of the parking lot at just the exact moment I needed it. On Thursday at the hospital when I was doing calls, I ran into one of our brand new lay care ministers, fresh out of training, as he was going to visit one of our members who had just undergone surgery. And what about the music from our choir tonight? Wow! God is doing extraordinary things through ordinary people.

That's what God's love does. It is a love that calls us to respond. Advent is a time of preparation. It is a time of waiting, but I think it's also a time of responding. So, how are we doing responding this Advent season? Our song, like Mary's song, should be a song of joy, of faith, and of humility; a response to the great fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Jesus. So I say this simple thing to you. Let's slow down and look for God's love and what His love does in our lives.

This past fall I was sitting in the stands at my daughter Annie's soccer game, and I got a call from my sister. She was singing her own song of praise to God (*slide shown*). Like us, she doesn't know the rest of her story, but for now, her cancer is in remission. And while we are all filled with gratitude, her song of joy, faith, and humility is not just about her circumstance. Her song of response is to a story of a God who loves us so much that He came into the world as a baby. He came into the world to show us how to live and how to love. He came to the world to save us from our sins. He came that we may know Him and have a glimpse of what eternal life may be like. That is something to sing about. We don't know what tomorrow will bring or what the next chapter holds for us, but what we *do* know is that God will continue to work through us, ordinary people, to do his extraordinary work, because that is what God's love does. It calls us to respond. Let's pray.

Gracious God, we are so grateful that You love us so much, that You came to this earth as a baby and that You came, Lord, to show us how to live, how to love. So I pray, God, that during this Advent Season we can slow our lives down, that we can look for the places where Your love is at work, and that we can have our own songs of joy and faith and humility. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*