

Message

11/28/21

Luke 1:46-55

Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!

In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.

He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.

Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
because the mighty one has done great things for me.

Holy is his name.

God shows mercy to everyone,
from one generation to the next,
who honors him as God.

God has shown strength with their arm.

God has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.

God has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.

God has come to the aid of their servant Israel,
remembering God’s mercy,

just as God promised to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”,

play video: Pentatonix, “Mary Did You Know?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>

I think most of you are probably familiar with the contemporary Christmas song, “Mary Did You Know?” Just as a reminder, the words are:

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;
This Child that you delivered Will soon deliver you?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a 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 kiss your little baby
You've kissed the face of God?
Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear,
The dead will live again,
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy Is Lord all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Was Heaven's perfect Lamb,
And the sleeping Child you're holding Is the great, the Great I AM?

Okay, first and foremost, let me emphatically state: I love that song! It's beautiful, and it's powerful, and the Pentatonix do my favorite version of it ever. I encourage you to watch and listen to it. It is awesome. Good job, Bill Hare!

And. It was written by a white guy, Mark Lowry, a member of the Gaither Vocal Band who attended Liberty Baptist College, now known as Liberty University. Yes, that Liberty University, of Jerry Falwell, and, more recently, Jerry Falwell, Jr., fame...or infamy. I offer this just as some contextualization. As I said, it's a great song, and it's been recorded by pretty much everybody on their obligatory Christmas albums. It's a good reflection for us, especially as we get caught up in the usual holiday rituals, reminding us of who this little-Lord-Jesus-no-crying-he-makes really is, what his life, death and resurrection will mean.

So yeah, maybe a good reminder for us. But...probably not for Mary. Some have said the "Mary Did You Know?" is man-splaining Jesus to Mary.

Turns out, Mary knew. Mary knew because she was paying attention. Because she listened to God's whispers. And she trusted God's presence. And she said yes. She said yes.

For any number of reasons, Mary has been sanitized and depoliticized and become a caricature of gentle Mary, meek and mild.

She is identified most often as "the virgin" Mary, which immediately conjures up images very different than the bold, brave, spirit-led young woman who is visited by the angel and told that God is with her, not to be afraid, that God is honoring her.

Part of what I love about this season of Advent, is that every year it gives us a chance to reenter the stories, hear them with new understanding, go deeper and wonder why they have endured for so long, and what they might be calling us to take from them. This Advent we're going to be looking at the four songs that the book of Luke includes in its recounting of the birth and infancy narrative of Jesus. As we consider the song that Mary sang, at the beginning of the book of Luke, the question for me is not Mary, did you know?

For me, the question is more something like: can I know what Mary knew? Can I know...*know*...that God is with me? How can I know? And once I know, what will I do with it?

Because Mary knew. She listened. She trusted. She became the one God was calling her to be. And she acted on it.

Mary was, without a doubt, awestruck. Probably in both meanings of the word awe. Certainly with fear, maybe even terror, at the unexpected, disruptive, and dangerous news that she would bear God's son into a hurting world. And then with awe that God chose her...*her!*...for this awesome responsibility.

The first thing she did after hearing this startling, disruptive news from the angel was travel to visit Elizabeth, the woman Luke describes as Mary's relative, because Mary knows that Elizabeth, too, has been visited by an angel and given startling, disruptive news. The moment she saw Mary, Elizabeth knew...*she knew*...that this was no ordinary visit from her kinswoman. She knew that this was a moment of blessing. And Mary knew

it too. And she sang the song that Kate read for us, what has come to be known as *The Magnificat*.

A few Advents ago, I came across this fresh interpretation of the Magnificat. Hear these words with fresh ears:

My soul is alive with thoughts of God.
What a wonder, Their liberating works.
Though the world has been harsh to me,
God has shown me kindness,
seen my worth,
and called me to courage.
Surely, those who come after me will call me blessed.
Even when my heart weighs heavy with grief,
still, so does hope abide with me.
Holy is the One who makes it so.
From generation to generation,
Love's Mercy is freely handed out;
None are beyond the borders of
God's transforming compassion.
The power of God is revealed
among those who labor for justice.
They humble the arrogant.
They turn unjust thrones into dust.
Their Wisdom is revealed in
the lives and truths of those on the margins.
God is a feast for the hungry.
God is the great re-distributor of wealth and resources.
God is the ceasing of excessive and destructive production
that all the earth might rest.
Through exiles and enslavement,
famines and wars,
hurricanes and gun violence,
God is a companion in loss,
a deliverer from evil,
a lover whose touch restores.
This is the promise They made
to my ancestors,
to me,
to all the creatures and creations,

now and yet coming,
and in this promise,
I find my strength.
Come, Great Healer,
and be with us.

Here's the question that I am pondering in my heart this Advent season: What if? What if this is true? What if this really happened? What if we de-mythologize this story and revitalize it and, at least for part of our Advent journey, strip away the noise and the hustle and the bustle and the conflation of nativity and North Pole, of shepherds and shopping, of stars and stores, of birth and bargains. What if God is trying to get our attention, just like God got Mary's attention? What if this really happened, and really happens? What if God's promises are true? Mary was young, faithful, and open to trusting with everything she was, and everything she would be, that the only certainty is that God is with us. The only certainty. Emmanuel. God with us. Mary knew. We can too.

Mary did you know,
that your ancient words
would still leap off our pages?
Mary did you know,
that your spirit song
would echo through the ages?

Did you know that your holy cry
would be subversive word,
that the tyrants would be trembling
when they know your truth is heard?

Mary did you know,
that your lullaby
would stir your own Child's passion?
Mary did you know,
that your song inspires
the work of liberation?

Did you know that your Jubilee
is hope within the heart

of all who dream of justice,
who yearn for it to start?

The truth will teach, the drum will sound, healing for the pain
The poor will rise, the rich will fall. Hope will live again

Mary did you know,
that we hear your voice
for the healing of the nations?
Mary did you know,
your unsettling cry
can help renew creation?

Do you know, that we need your faith,
the confidence of you,
May the God that you believe in,
be so true.

Amen