

It's really hard to find someone who doesn't like music. Everywhere you go you can hear people listening to all sorts of music from all over the world. And if the music is really good people keep on playing it! How many weddings have you been to where Pachelbel's canon, 300 years old, is played? How many Christmas songs from decades ago are played in stores and homes? It's usually the tune more than the words that makes a person attracted to a song, yet in Church we sometimes sing old songs that we have no idea what they sounded like. The song of Mary: the Magnificat, is a great example. We keep on singing this ancient song to different pieces of music because its message is so powerful and so uplifting. Mary sang about Abraham and how he believed in his promised Savior before he was born. Then Mary sang about how she got to be with her promised savior, a Savior promised to us too. Jesus gives everyone something to sing about!

Mary has a lot to be excited about as she greets her relative Elizabeth. Last week we heard from Pastor Moldenhauer how great things would be done through the child that Elizabeth was carrying. Now Mary gets to see Elizabeth, but the excitement doesn't end with her; Mary also is pregnant with a child! Normally you would expect the two women to talk about their aches and pains and their own joy and excitement about having children, but Mary doesn't talk about that in her song of joy, she begins by praising God for his acts of mercy.

What makes his mercy so special? What is mercy? Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. If you believe in God you believe that he has power over you and the ability to do whatever he wants with you. When you believe in God you have a healthy respect for who he is. A person who doesn't believe in God won't be afraid of him. We know God has every right to be angry with and severely punish his creatures who sin against him, but instead he shows forgiveness and compassion to all who fear him!

A humble person often looks up to God, a humble person realizes that he or she fears God. But a proud person often looks down on others. A proud person is full of himself and who he is and what he can do instead of filling himself with who God is and what God can do for him. Mary warns that such an attitude makes it hard to be humble and warns that God will bring a proud person down. This should be a warning that pride has to go. We struggle with pride in many ways, whether we seek attention for ourselves by posting on facebook and constantly checking what comments and likes we get, or one-upping others when we talk to them, or by never admitting that we may be wrong about something, and it's always the other guy's fault. Pride gets in the way of fearing God.

Perhaps if God brings us down he does it so he can show us his mercy when we are humble. Mary sings praises to God for remembering to be merciful to generation after generation. God was merciful to Abraham and God gave Abraham righteousness. That mercy inspired Abraham to trust in God's promises and fear God for his great mercy. This is the gift that all descendants of Abraham have. Anyone who believes in God's promises receives God's mercy and righteousness.

The promise that Abraham and his family trusted in was the promise of a Savior to take away the sins of the world. This was the promise all his descendants in faith were waiting for. Now Mary got to see this promise to begin to be fulfilled through her! This promise wasn't only for the people of the past or Mary's time, but for Abraham's descendants forever! A promise of salvation for all who believe!

Now we can begin to imagine why Mary was happy. It was a joy much bigger than being happy about having a child. Elizabeth also was pregnant with a miraculous baby, and blessed with a child in her old age. She never had a child before, and by this time she never would have expected to have any. But God showed his mercy to Elizabeth when he had compassion on her and gave her a blessing of a son; a son who would become John the Baptist and would preach repentance to prepare the way for the Messiah. Elizabeth certainly had a blessing of her own to be happy about, but she was only happy for Mary's child!

Elizabeth realized that she was blessed even more through the child Mary carried. While Elizabeth's son had an important job to do, he was not going to do anything for Elizabeth more than any other human being could. But through Mary's son, Jesus, Elizabeth would receive the salvation and eternal

life she had been waiting for her whole life! John also was excited that Jesus and Mary came to visit. He jumped with joy in the womb when he heard Mary's voice announce her arrival and the arrival of *his* savior..

What did Mary think about all this? Why was she chosen? You might expect that she would be tempted to think that she was the perfect choice to be the mother of God. She must have been a better option than all the others right? God did pick her after all. Yet if Mary thought she earned the honor of being the mother of the Savior of the world, she would have shown her pride in some way. Instead we see the opposite. Mary knew she didn't deserve this blessing. The first thing she does in her song is calling God her savior. If she didn't have any sin, she wouldn't need saving. Mary knew that she needed God's mercy and salvation just like anyone else.

We fit the same description as Mary. We didn't deserve God's gift of Jesus. We also sin in so many ways, in our pride and lack of humility. We realize that we need this Savior that came to live on earth in our place in Mary's womb. Mary humbled herself as she believed in the words of the angel Gabriel. Mary was humble because God was coming to her as her Savior, and to do his work through her! Only Mary could look down at her belly and say my son, my savior. As Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Maybe it's unfortunate not knowing what Mary's song sounded like as she sang praise and thanks to God. On the other hand who knows if we would even like the tune? I'm sure tastes in music have changed a lot in the past two thousand years. But the most important part of Mary's song hasn't changed. Mary's words remain and they have just as much meaning now as they did when she first said them. God has shown his mercy to all generations forever, to Abraham, to his descendants, to Mary and to us. Jesus gives us all something to sing about.

1. What usually attracts us to music?
2. What did Mary sing about?
3. What would you expect pregnant women to talk about?
4. What is mercy?
5. What does it mean to fear God?
6. Why is pride dangerous?
7. What was the promise Abraham believed in?
8. How was Elizabeth more blessed by Mary's pregnancy than her own?
9. Did Mary deserve to become the mother of Jesus?
10. Why does Jesus give us something to sing about?

1. Discuss ways God shows his mercy to us.
2. What makes being humble so difficult?
3. Have Lutherans been downplaying the role of Mary and her importance?
4. Discuss ways to share the gift of Jesus during this stressful and busy time of year.