

Christmas 2021 #2 in series (12.12.21) #21101

Luke 1:39-56

The Psalm of the Redeemed

I. The account of the birth of Jesus Christ is not a children's story, contrary to almost universal opinion in our age. It was never considered a children's story in the generations that changed the Roman Empire, and it should not be today. In fact, nothing in the Bible is particularly oriented to Children. It's all very grown-up material. *And it is not "Christmasy" in any sense that we understand. Which is why there is a credibility gap between what Christmas really is and how it is experienced in our culture.*

A. It is not sentimental.

1. Much if not all of our Christmas material is very sentimental.
 - a) Excessively emotional, appealing to nostalgia instead of truth or facts.
2. Traditions are OK and enjoyable, but truth is crucial.

B. It is not "mythical." (It is not presented as a parable. (Lk.1:1-4)

1. Presented as historical testimony, not religious myth.
2. Eyewitness. Probably from Mary or someone close to her.
3. These people were not gullible (they resisted the idea of the resurrection until they experienced it themselves)
4. But they maintained to the end that this is what happened.
5. The presupposition of all the TV documentaries about the NT is that the original people who experienced these things were either mistaken or deceitful (perjurers). *There is no evidence for either of these presuppositions.*
6. 2 Peter 1:16; 1 Jn.1:1-4

C. It is not disconnected. (from the rest of the biblical narrative)

1. It is not a "stand alone" story with a nice moral, like an Aesop's Fable.
2. It is the turning point in an infinitely larger plot that stretches from Gen.3 to Rev.21-22
3. The Bible is one narrative, telling one story, the story of redemption of the world through Christ. (Eph.1:3-11; Heb.1:1-4)

II. Gabriel informs Zechariah of the Plan. Lk.1:1-24/Isa.40:3; Mal.3:1/4:6; Matt.11:13; Jn.3:22-28

A. Gabriel speaks to Zachariah in the temple that he and Elizabeth will have a son who will be forerunner to Messiah.

1. But Zachariah doesn't believe it (18).
2. So Gabriel closes his mouth and ears (62) until John is born.

B. Elizabeth (in her 60s) hides out for 5 months. 24

C. *Meanwhile...*

III. The Spirit gives Mary The Child. (If you want something done right...). 26-38

A. Three things about the Mother. Luke 1:26-38

1. She is young and has no franchise in this age.
2. She is surprised and confused, but faithful.
3. *She is willing to let the miracle happen in her.*

B. Four things about the Child (a true Human and More...)

1. He will be conceived without human initiative. 31, 35
 - a) The only thing like it is creation itself—out of nothing, like Adam.
 - b) Which is why Christ is called the “Last Adam.” (1 Cor 15:45) (See Bock, *BECNT Luke*, Vol 1, p 103)
 - c) *Which is why those who have a problem with incarnation also have a problem with the first verse of the Bible.*
2. He will be named Jesus = Joshua = YHWH is salvation. 32
 - a) A common name then, but more. (see Bock *BECNT* p 128)
3. He will be the Son of God, the Most High. 32, 35
 - a) Title 43 times in the NT, always by others about Jesus.
 - b) God’s DNA. Looked like Mary, but not like Joseph?
4. He will fulfill the Davidic Covenant. 32. 2 Sam 7:8-17.
 - a) Eternal Davidic king in God’s kingdom. **Isa 9:6-7**
 - b) *A real king with a real kingdom now and forever.*

IV. The Mothers of Destiny meet. 39-45

- A. Two mothers, both miraculously pregnant. Carrying in their wombs the destiny of the universe...
 - 1. Older Elizabeth in the manner of the OT promise/fulfillment theme.
 - a) A barren woman is able to conceive. (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael, Samson's mom (Judges 13), Samuel's mom, Hannah (1 Sam.1)
 - 2. Young Mary in an even more miraculous way, as a virgin.
 - a) Her Son will not simply be a prophet, but Messiah Himself.
- B. Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit and prophesies.
 - 1. Mary is pregnant, with Messiah (my Lord).
 - 2. Mary is the truly blessed woman of all time!
- C. *Note: both of these boys are real people, alive in the womb!*
 - 1. *God is pro-life!*

V. Mary gives the Psalm of the Redeemed. 46-56. The *Magnificat*. Inspired poetry, like the Psalms. Slow down and take in the feelings. **The grateful heart-poetry of a redeemed person.**

A. **She worships from her deepest being. 46-47**

- 1. Her soul, her heart, from deep within the human spirit praise and thanksgiving flow.
- 2. Deep in the soul and spirit. This is where the voice of God is heard.
- 3. What's going on in your soul...?

B. **Because God has blessed her personally, extravagantly, unexpectedly. 48-50**

- 1. **Personally:** God's grace is personal and individual.
 - a) *Before it is corporate and communal.*
 - b) *He loves you personally, by name. you are not an only child, but you are certainly his child. Jn.1:12-13*
- 2. **Extravagantly:** Beyond our wildest imagination. **Eph.2:4-10**
- 3. **Unexpectedly:** Rom.5:6-11
 - a) No entitlement here! She doesn't expect God to bless her!
 - b) *Entitlement is the antidote to gratitude and worship.*
- 4. *We have no rights in God's court, which is why coming to him for sovereign mercy is the only way into eternity.*
- 5. *God's Mercy is for those who fear him (50)*

C. **By Reversing the wisdom of the world. 51-53.**

- 1. The wisdom of the world is all about human effort and strength, presenting to God something we have accomplished.
- 2. The Lord turns this inside out and reveals himself to the helpless, the hungry and the humble. Matt.11:25-30
 - a) Rejecting the elites, powerful, prideful. Mk.10:25; Jer.9:23-24
- 3. *Which means that God's personal blessing is not and cannot be achieved by human success or merit!*
 - a) We must give up on ourselves in this sense.

D. **And Keeping his promise of Salvation. 54-55.**

- 1. Through Abraham's offspring. Gen.12:1-3; 15:1-6
- 2. The offspring of Abraham is Israel = fulfilled in Christ himself. Jn.15:1-6; Gal.3:16.
- 3. The faith of Abraham is the key to the New Covenant.

VI. Pastoral advice on the Joy of the Lord at Christmas.

- A. Worship come from deep within.
- B. Trust the Lord personally instead of theoretically.
 - 1. The fear of the Lord = coming to his grace
- C. Embrace God's view of reality instead of man's view.
- D. Rest in his promises instead of yours.

VII. This is why we come to the Lord's table...

VIII. More Notes.

A. Thoughts on Mary's Joy.

1. It is not grounded in this age, but in God's word. 45.
 - a) Joy/happiness sourced in this age alone is empty.
 - b) The knowledge of God comes from God.
2. It is not nourished by her potential, but by God's grace.
 - a) She is not joyful because of her ability to do things.
 - b) She does not feel entitled to God's work in her life.
 - c) Entitlement is the antidote to gratitude and praise.
 - d) We in the west are among the most entitled people in human history. Our "rights" are always uppermost in our minds.
 - (1) *But in God's court we are entitled to nothing.*

B. It is not institutional. (As in "the product of a religious institution")

1. Far from the temple and the religious technology of Judaism.
 - a) Poverty stricken young couple: virgin and her husband.
 - b) Unimpressive towns: Nazareth and Bethlehem
 - c) Natural locations: Fields and caves
2. Far from what later became "church" structures.
 - a) Subsequent cathedrals do not reflect the actual situation.
3. *This account produced the Church, not the other way around. The Church is about Christ; Christ is not about the Church*

C. Mary's Faith: A Paradigm (45)

1. **Exclusively Christian.** *Mary is nothing without Jesus. Neither are you.*
 - a) Christ is the focus of her faith, based on God's promise.
 - (1) She is in this sense the first Christian, *the first to trust in God as a human.*
 - (2) Her behavior, morals, religious activity, even her "faith"—nothing else was the focus of her faith but the Lord himself.
 - b) Because of who Christ is, all other validations are empty.
 - (1) *The effort to establish validation from within this age, apart from relationship to Christ, is the source of untold grief.*
 - (2) Religious validation. (moralism, religion)
 - (3) Personal validation in intellect, power, wealth (Jer.9:23)
 - c) Because of who Jesus really is all other "faiths" are missing the mark. Jn.14:6
 - (1) This sounds so bad to us, but can it be otherwise?
 - (2) *Jesus did not leave us the option of treating him as one among many possible religious leaders.*
 - (3) In order to maintain intellectual honesty and integrity, we must do one of three things with Jesus: (C.S.Lewis)
 - (a) *Ignore him as a crank*
 - (b) *Reject him as an imposter*
 - (c) *Worship him as Lord (and alter your worldview)*
2. **Freely Bound: I am blessed forever!**
 - a) *Her freedom and sense of blessing came directly from being called into something that made her let go of her "self"*
 - b) *Paul calls himself a slave of Christ yet preaches a profound freedom.*
 - c) *The reason is that we are free only to the extent that we are in the reality for which we are created. We were not created to be God (Satan's folly) but to serve and love him and be loved by him.*
 - d) **Quote Neuhaus and Willard**

IX. The Good News: This world has been redeemed by this man—Jesus Christ.

A. God loves us enough to join us forever, sacrifice himself for our evil, and regenerate us and our material world. His kingdom is worth anything to have, and he gives it freely to us.

X. Notes and Quotes

A. Richard John Neuhaus (d. 2009) R.C. Priest and writer. In Dallas Willard ed., *A Place For Truth*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010) 25.

We're not free until we're bound to be free, until there's something that has a claim upon us other than ourself, our aspirations, our psychological and intellectual and sexual ties and yearnings and desires for community. When all of that is somehow brought into a constellation of obedience to something other than ourself, we start to become, to taste, what it means to be free.

B. Dallas Willard, *A Place For Truth*, 165

So, if we want to see freedom, we don't look at a kid jumping around with nothing to do. We see freedom when we see an accomplished artist sit down at a piano and play something so beautiful that we can hardly stay in our seat. That's freedom. When Pavarotti steps up and does what he does, the incredible magic—that's freedom. Now how did he get there? He didn't get there by turning in on himself. He took the step that is always first in freedom, which is to submit himself to reality. That's the first step in freedom.

Mary realized what Reality is—Christ the King and God's coming kingdom (including the regeneration of the universe. Mtt.19:28

XI. Added Notes

A. Personally Simple. Simple Faith. What did Mary Do here?

1. In one sense, nothing. She couldn't make herself pregnant, so either this was going to happen to her or not.
 - a) Mary's faith did not create Jesus or anything else. It simply embraced as reality what already existed as reality.
 - b) People's "faith" doesn't get them through—*God does.*
 - c) *People do not "make themselves Christians."*
2. Yet in another sense, a lot, though it could scarcely be called a "work." (Jn 6:29)
 - a) She listened and trusted what the Lord was saying.
 - b) She let the pregnancy happen and gave birth and raised Jesus.
3. In no sense was it "churchy" in any way we would recognize.
 - a) *The key to a healthy relationship with all other Christians in any groups, is a deep sense of the personal blessing God bestows on each of us individually.*
4. She saw herself as a person who lived for God's purposes.
 - a) She saw her life as having purpose in God's plans (Though she probably never dreamed she would have such a highly visible purpose)
5. A real Christian will deal with God one way or another.
 - a) They will cooperate with him or they will struggle with him, but they will know it is God they are dealing with.
 - b) Often life is a combination of both (Rom.7)

B. Jesus lived and showed all of these elements of real faith:

1. Radical confidence in all that God would do through Him: Christ
2. Personally Simple faith in the Father
3. Confidently Releasing all success to God
 - a) "It Is Finished"
4. Joyfully Bound to the Father's will and to love for you.
5. His life has been given for you and to you so that in Christ you have this victory.

C. Contrast between Gabriel's announcement about John the Baptist and his announcement about Jesus

1. Announcement about John
 - a) To a priest
 - b) In the holiest place on earth (the temple)
 - c) At the most dramatic moment in Zechariah's life
 - d) Fulfilling years of personal prayer (for a son)
 - e) Not believed
 - f) Zechariah had every reason to believe Gabriel and was so skeptical that he asked for a further sign (more than being in the temple for the only time in his life, talking to an angel?).
 - (1) Yet he was skeptical.
2. Announcement about Jesus
 - a) To a 15 year-old peasant girl
 - (1) Few people had less social capital than this
 - b) In a backwater town in a backwater province
 - c) At a very normal moment in daily life
 - d) As a complete surprise.
 - (1) Mary had not been praying to be Messiah's mother.

- e) Believed simply.
- f) Mary had far less to go on than Zechariah, yet she trusted almost immediately. She asked not for a sign in skepticism, but for an explanation in faith—and got it.

D. Cosmic and Narratival. (it is a narrative, a story that includes the entire cosmos and all of time)

1. *This was not just God “blessing Mary.”*
 - a) It was God implementing His plan of the ages and drawing Mary into it—*that is how she was blessed.*
 - b) *She was drawn out of her story and into His.*
2. The world tells us stories, but they are not true.
 - a) The story that stuff is all there is and we are the unintended product of mindless, impersonal forces.
 - b) The story that the universe is alive with its own life instead of relying on God’s life. (Spiritism, pantheism, panentheism, New Age, etc)
 - c) The story that all religion says basically the same thing.
 - (1) And it’s about how we should act better.
 - d) The story that faith is about what you do in obedience to God to win his favor.
 - (1) Moralism, legalism, religion.
3. We tell ourselves stories, but they have weak plots
 - a) We live in a movie written, directed, and starring us.
 - b) In these stories God plays a supporting role to our desires, needs, ambitions, goals and purposes.
 - c) *The human dilemma stems from trying to be the star when God is the star. And we all do it—even Christians who know better!*
4. God tells us the real story and it’s the only one that will ultimately happen.
 - a) *The incarnation means that we are permanently caught up in God’s miraculous work on earth.*
 - b) *Mary’s thinking marriage then shocked into eternity – like us.*
 - (1) One minute caught up with her engagement, God’s eternal plans in a distant file as excitement of marriage beckoned
 - (2) The next minute, God’s plans take first place and all else becomes anti-climax.
 - c) Same with you, Christian. When we focus primarily on our need to be blessed in some way, we miss the real blessing of being in the flow of God’s regeneration of the universe.

XII. Three things you won’t learn in school these days:

- A. The reality but not the ultimacy of the physical world.
 1. How can this be? She said.
 2. Legitimate question. Life normally works in this way.
 3. *Physical life is the arena of the knowledge of God. But spiritual reality is the source of it all.*
- B. The primacy of God Himself.
 1. Her response was immediate when she realized God was in this. *She did not respond that miracles don’t happen. Why?*
 2. More than that nothing is impossible with God.
 3. *It is that nothing is possible without God.*
 - a) The nature of reality. 1st question of philosophy.
 - b) The biblical answer to all physical reality is that it came from spirit, from God. And

it is sustained moment by moment by God's ongoing will about it.

C. The centrality of Christ Jesus and His Kingdom. Heb 1:1-4

1. *Gabriel emphasizes the rule of Messiah more than his amazing birth*
2. Creation has changed and is being changed permanently: New Life; New Race; God's Kingdom
3. The Kingdom of God is ultimate reality. All else temporary.
4. It is an invisible, but very real kingdom that is happening right now.
 - a) The range of God's effective will, the aspect of life where God's will is being done right now, both in the spirit realm (the heavenlies) and in the physical realm.
5. It begins in the spirit realm (the heavenlies) but penetrates the physical realm through
 - a) The gospel, (Rom 1:16-17)
 - b) The regenerative work of the Spirit and those who are born from above (Jn 3)
 - c) The life that grows in the body of Christ

XIII. Two observations not often considered about birth narrative of Christ:

- A. It is about who he is rather than simply what he said.
1. It's not His philosophy, but his identity.
 2. His teaching gets its authority from his identity. Matt 28:18
 3. *People care about what Jesus said because of who he is.*

XIV. Three realities which follow from this:

- A. He will be called the Son of God. Lk. 1:35
1. Title used by others of Him. (43 times in NT)
 - a) Gabriel. Lk. 1:35
 - b) Jewish leaders? Mtt. 26:63
 - c) Demons. Mtt. 4:3, 6; 8:29; Mk. 3:11
 - d) The centurion at the Cross. Mtt. 27:54
 - e) John The Baptizer. Jn. 1:34
 - f) The Disciples. Mk. 1:1; Jn. 1:49
 - g) He agreed. Lk. 22:70; Jn. 3:18; 5:25
 - h) The Apostles. Acts 9:20; Rom. 1:4
 - i) All genuine believers. **Jn. 20:31**
- B. The incarnation is the central miracle in what Christians believe.
1. If you believe this, then everything else falls into place. (Packer)
 2. The incarnation -- most astounding miracle in the Bible
 - a) Divides Christianity and all other religions.
 - b) Dome of the Rock Mosque: "God did not beget, and is not begotten" (Sura 113:3)
 3. The resurrection is the central evidence of Christianity, but it is evidence of the *incarnation*.
 4. *He is not humanity deified, but deity as human. Jn. 1:1-14; Col. 2:9*
- C. The Incarnation forces us to fish or cut bait with God. Like the story of the game warden and the fisherman with the dynamite
1. Mary's Faith: "Behold, the slave of the Lord."
 2. *We will be shaped not by our intellect alone, but by our mind shaped by our faith. Faith is a choice.*
 3. Simply put, she believed God.
 4. Credo = Lat. I Believe. Close with **Apostles' Creed**.
 5. *This is what I believe and this is the way I live.*

D. Agree/ Disagree

1. We think with our mind, but believe with our heart.
2. It is possible to think one way and believe another.
3. God intends us to think about and believe certain things.
4. What we truly believe determines our eternal destiny.
5. Christmas is about believing, rather than thinking.
6. Faith in our culture is something we create for ourselves, not an affirmation of reality in any tangible, factual way. So people are free to believe anything they want and call it faith, but they are not free to say anything about God in the public arena, because “God” is considered non-factual.

E. Packer on Incarnation:

If Jesus had been no more than a very remarkable, godly man, the difficulties in believing what the New Testament tells us about his life and work would be truly mountainous. But if Jesus was the same person as the eternal Word, the Father’s agent in creation, “through whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:2), it is no wonder if fresh acts of creative power marked his coming into this world, and his life in it, and his exit from it. It is not strange that he, the Author of life, should rise from the dead. If he was truly God the Son, it is much more startling that he should die than that he should rise again. J. I. Packer. *Knowing God*, p. 54

F. What does the Incarnation tell us about God?

1. That he dwells in a dimension beyond ours. Jn 1:1-18
 - a) More than one person with the same essence.
2. That his character is infinitely greater than ours. Phil 2:5-8
 - a) Personal Honor demonstrated in self-limitation?
3. That he values us for reasons deeper than we value ourselves
 - a) *He values us because we were created to be like him. Our origin and destiny, not our current potential or existential courage.*

XV. Thoughts on faith and thought:

- A. We are what we believe. Belief is vastly underestimated and undervalued today, but remains the most distinctive, shaping reality in our lives. We often separate believing from thinking, as if thinking were rational, reasonable, purposeful, “scientific” and useful; but ‘believing’ was none of the above. But this is not true.
- B. Our thinking effects our believing, and our believing shapes our life
- C. We cannot ‘believe’ one way and ‘think’ another. We will do what we believe, either on purpose or by default. And we will inevitably believe what we feed our thoughts, what we think.
- D. Christmas is about God saying in effect, “I want you to think about and believe this: that I have entered your existence and am seeking a relationship with you personally.”