

The Spirit of Christmas

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Code: 1286

This morning I'd like to share with you on the theme of the spirit of Christmas. I suppose that that is the most common phrase that we hear bantied about at this time of year. We have received many cards and expressions of greeting that say "We hope you enjoy the spirit of Christmas." We hear people talking and people interviewed and so forth talking about they wished that the world would enter into the spirit of Christmas. Our little children from the school did a program earlier in the week in which they talked about having the spirit of Christmas 365 days a year.

Well as I was mulling over in my mind all of these comments about the spirit of Christmas, I began to ask myself a very simple question, what is the spirit of Christmas? When we say that what are we saying? I've heard people say, "If the world could only enter in to the spirit of Christmas, all of our problems would be solved." We really ought to find out what the spirit of Christmas is then if it's going to be that effective.

And so I began to sort of analyze the thought of the spirit of Christmas. And I found that it varies from person to person. I even did a kind of a little survey just asking questions here and there to see what answers I got. Of course, to Scrooge the spirit of Christmas was a ghost. So I eliminated that rather rapidly. One little boy said the spirit of Christmas is sportsmanship because you don't always get what you ask for. To the liquor industry the spirit of Christmas comes in a bottle and they'll spend 30 to 50 million dollars this month to advertise it. And one liquor wholesaler in our city took in one million dollars in one day.

Some people feel that the spirit of Christmas is sending cards and so 95 percent of all Americans will pass back and forth four billion greeting cards. For some people the spirit of Christmas is the joy and happiness found in the corporate fund and fellowship that occurs while they're consuming ten million turkeys.

For other people the spirit of Christmas is a sad spirit. Earl Wyler wrote this, "Christmas is a bitter day for mothers who are poor. The wistful eyes of children are daggers to endure. Though shops are crammed with playthings and not for everyone, if a mother's purse is empty there might as well be none. My purse is full of money but I cannot buy a toy, only a wreath of holly for the grave of my little boy." And seasons like this intensify the sadness because of the anticipated joy.

For other people Christmas is a time for saying thanks, being thankful. I'm reminded of G.K. Chesterton's great remark, "When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings with toys at Christmas tide. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?"

But the most common response to the question, what is the spirit of Christmas, more than all the others that I've suggested is the spirit of Christmas is giving. And that really does consume us at this time, doesn't it? We all get involved in giving. Everything is given from a five-cent candy to a six-hundred dollar gold lace Gucci blouse, and everything in between. The Catholic Church in Italy has geared up for this, according to Time Magazine. And they are operating a jean producing factory where they produce what are called "Jesus Jeans," 45,000 pair a day, it's all under the management of Father Canado(?) Catani(?) and they are marketed with an ad poster featuring the backside of a tightly clad girl and the words written across her hips, "He who loves me follows me, Jesus Jeans." That's the spirit of Christmas for some people. By others giving, you get. You become wealthy. That fits in more with the December 25 date which originally was the celebration of the Roman Saturnalia which was the worship of the sun.

I've noticed also that for some people the spirit of Christmas seems to be an opportunity to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. It seems as though when the world starts to concentrate on Christ, the critics start crawling out from under their rocks and denying Christ and trying to keep the focus away from the truth. And you know, the critics have awful things to be said about Christ. Albert Switzer who is known to the world as a religious man said, "Christ was a deluded fanatic who futilely threw away His life on blind devotion to a mad dream. There's nothing more negative than the study of the life of Christ." George Bernard Shaw said, "Christ was a man who was sane until Peter hailed Him as the Christ and who then became a monomaniac. His delusion is a very common delusion among the insane, quite consistent with the cunning and penetration which Jesus displayed in Jerusalem after His delusion had taken complete hold of Him."

Rudolph Boatman(?), a noted European theologian said, "I do indeed think we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus." Shoenfield(?) who wrote The Passover Plot said, "His life was a nightmarish conception in undertaking the outcome of a frightened logic of a sick mind."

There are a lot of things that happen at Christmas that deflect us a lot of directions. And so we ask the basic question, what is the spirit of Christmas? All of these things we've suggested have been suggested by others as the proper perspective. But may I submit to you that all of them are wrong? Some are bad, some are nice but all are wrong. When contemplating the true spirit of Christmas, none of them really hits it. In fact, I can show you very clearly what the true spirit of Christmas is if you'll just open your Bible to the first and second chapter of Luke. And the best answer to the question and the answer that I sought and found is given to us by all of the people who participated in the birth of Christ. They tell us what is the spirit of Christmas, what is the right attitude and response

to the birth of Jesus Christ.

Let's begin with a very special woman by the name of Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, who had in her womb none other than John the Baptist. Mary went to be with Elizabeth and told Elizabeth that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. And Elizabeth responded in verse 41 of Luke 1, "It came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she spoke out with a loud voice...notice that, a loud voice, it is a voice of praise...and said, Blessed thou among women, blessed the fruit of thy womb. And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me, for lo, as soon as the voice of thy greeting sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy and blessed she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Now what was the response of Elizabeth to Christmas? What was the response of Elizabeth to the birth of Christ, anticipated birth of Christ? Very simply, praise. Blessed...blessed...blessed and it wasn't that Mary was blessed, it was that Mary was the recipient of the blessing of God.

Let's go to the next important individual in our thoughts. Verse 67 of chapter 1 and we meet Zacharias, a priest who was to be the father of John the Baptist. Zacharias, the husband of Elizabeth, and it says in verse 67, "His father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying...now here's his response to this tremendous event...Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He hath visited and redeemed His people." Now his response is identical to that of his wife, isn't it? He blesses God. He praises God.

Let's go to the next, in verse 10 we meet the angel. And the angel announces to the shepherds that the Savior is born. And then it says in verse 13, "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will." Now what is the response of the angelic host? It is praising God, glorifying God. It is the same as Zacharias, it is the same as Elizabeth.

What about the shepherds? What was their reaction? They came, they saw Mary, Joseph, the baby, verse 20 chapter 2, "And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told unto them."

Then some time passes and we meet two other individuals who enter the scene of the birth of Christ. Simeon in verse 25, a devout godly righteous man waiting for the coming of Messiah and when it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, he came by the Spirit to the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for Him after the custom of the law, he took Him in his arms and...what?...blessed God. He blessed God.

And then there's Anna, verse 36, a prophetess, a widow who night and day was in the temple fasting and praying. And verse 38, and she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord. And there that "likewise" is a key word. That just runs back a string to every other person involved, just the same as all the others she praised God, she thanked God, she glorified God, she blessed the Lord.

Now I would say after that little look at the people involved in the time of the birth of Christ, it would be fairly obvious what the spirit of Christmas is. Can I say it to you in one word? The spirit of Christmas is worship...worship. It is a godward focus. It is as wonderful as relationships are, not a focus on relationships on a human level. As wonderful as family and friends and food and gifts and love and so forth, that is not the focus of these individuals, theirs is a godward focus, one of adoration and praise and blessing.

And do you remember when the wise men came in Matthew 2? We must speak of them, we can't leave them out. They said this, "We have seen His star in the east," Matthew 2:2, "and have come to...what?...worship Him." Every personality attached to the nativity had one response, worship...worship of God who would stoop to save men by sending the Savior. That is the common response of everyone. Even the unbelievers could see that. Herod the hypocrite though he did not mean it said, "Tell me where the child is so that I may go and...what?...worship Him."

There's no deviation from this as the response to the birth of Christ. Every single individual involved had the same response. Now if Christmas then is a time for anything, it is a time for worship. And if there's no time for worship, then Christmas is utterly misused and misrepresented and misapplied. It is a time of worship. And worship is an attitude of the heart that is so filled with wonder and thanksgiving at the person and work of God that it is abandoned to praise and adoration. That is worship. Worship is an attitude of the heart that is so filled with wonder and thankfulness and the person and work of God that it is abandoned to praise and adoration. If ever there is a time of the year when you ought to be overflowing with praise and adoring wonder at God's great mercy to us in sending His Son, it is now. And if you have not had that as your reflected experience, you have not yet known the spirit of Christmas because that's it.

Now we've left out one very important individual, Mary the mother of our Lord. And we find her responding in Luke 1:46. By the way, she was the closest one to the birth of Christ as the one who bore Him. She had an intimacy with that child that no other person ever knew. She was the one person most directly touched by His birth, His own mother. And what is her response? Verse 46, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." And then she launches into what I call "the hymn of the incarnation...the hymn of the incarnation." Without question, she gives us the most magnificent psalm of worship in all of the New Testament. It is a psalm as much as any psalm in the Old Testament psalter is a psalm. It is magnificent praise to God, bursting out of her soul at the thought of redemption in the coming of the Messiah.

So, she becomes then the last personality of all of these who have had the very identical response. She knew she was to be the mother of the Son of God, she knew that. Back in verse 30 of chapter 1 the angel said she had found favor with the Lord. In verse 31, that she would conceive and bring forth a son and His name would be Jesus which meant Savior, that He would be great, verse 32, called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David and He would reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His Kingdom there shall be no end. He was an eternal king with an eternal kingdom, God in human flesh. She also knew His name was Emanuel which means God with us. Jesus, He shall save His people from their sins, Son of the Highest, she knew she would bear the Son of God.

And look at verse 41 where Elizabeth and Mary meet. And Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit. And having been filled with the Spirit she says in verse 43, "Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" She confirmed that Mary would bear the Lord, that she would give birth to the Lord. A tremendous affirmation.

So, the sum of all of this is that Mary knew she would be the mother of the Lord. And her heart was filled with praise. And may I add this note? I am convinced that her praise went far beyond the simple fact that she would be the mother of the Lord, it went to the fact which was greater than that that she would be redeemed by that Lord which was to be born. Redemption was the greater issue. And that, I believe, was the cause for Mary's praise because it says in verse 47, "My spirit hath rejoiced in God...what?...my Savior." She could see beyond the wonderful favor of bearing the Lord to the greater thing of being redeemed by Him. And our Lord confirmed that, by the way, as we saw in our study last week in Matthew, because on one occasion when Mary came and told Jesus through an intermediary she wanted to see Him, His response was, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" In other words, the physical relationship was not important, what was important was the spiritual one. And I believe Mary knew that and rejoiced not so much in her own honor as in her own dishonor to be resolved in the redemption provided by this child which she was to bear.

And so she swells out in a hymn of unspeakable joy and rejoicing, much as Hannah did in 1 Samuel 2 when told of the birth of Samuel. Now I want us to look at this hymn of praise and I want us to learn about worship. The Lord's really kind of laid this on my heart. We've talked about it some in our staff together. And in the next month or so I'm going to be speaking on the subject of worship. And I believe this will be a good place to begin.

But I want us to understand as we look at Mary's hymn three elements of worship...the attitude of worship, the object of worship and the reason for worship. Let's look first of all at the attitude and I want to major on this point because I think it most significant. Verse 46 and 47, "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior."

Now the first thing I'd like you to notice is that the attitude, the proper attitude of worship as illustrated by Mary, is that worship is internal...worship is internal. The word "soul" in verse 46, the word "spirit" in verse 47 are internal. They speak of the inner being, the mind, the emotion, the will, all the moral mental feeling impulses of the human heart. True worship swells from within. It is not external. Worship is not looking at stained glass windows, hearing organ music, hearing a choir, hearing a sermon, reading a Bible, carrying a Bible, coming to church, a functioning in a ritual, lighting a candle, kneeling down, praying a prayer, even taking the Lord's table. Those are functions in which true worship may occur, but they are not synonymous with true worship. True worship is in the inside. True worship is in the soul and the spirit and every part of the inner being like a great orchestra, every element of our inner person coming together to blend harmony in the whole crescendo is seen coming from the soul of Mary. She swells from her inner heart in adoring wondrous praise to God her Savior from the inside, "My spirit, my soul..."

And that is why I think the true spirit of Christmas is obviously missed because the preoccupation with Jesus is, for the most part, external, superficial and shallow. It is not worship because worship rises out of the depth of the inner being. Worship, in a way, is utterly spontaneous and uncontrollable response to the wonder of what God has done. It is not calculated. It does not function by the clock. In fact, in the Old Testament Isaiah 29:13 the prophet said of God's people, "This people draw near Me with their mouth, they draw near Me with their lips, they do honor Me." Now that sounds good, it sounds like worship, draw near me with their mouth, their lips, they honor Me. "But have removed their heart far from Me." What's He saying? He is saying it's all superficial. It's all on the surface. It's all shallow. Jesus said this, "God is a spirit," John 4:24, "and they that worship Him must worship Him in...what?...spirit and in truth."

True worship is worship in the spirit. That's why David said in Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and know my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me." I mean, look on the inside because that's the source of true response. The attitude of worship begins on the inside. It is that which springs out of a heart so utterly consumed with the reality of God and the wonder of His person that it expresses itself through all of the external faculties, but it begins inside.

Secondly, and we're going to fill out your understanding on this thought, it is not only internal but secondly, true worship is intense...it is intense. Notice the word "magnifies" in verse 46, that is an interesting word, megaluno. It has as the first half of it the word mega, megameans big, large. The translation magnify is an excellent translation, to cause to swell or to cause to grow. It's like something very small and you take a great huge magnifying glass and put it over it and it immediately swells. The term megais used of something that is extended, something that is made large, something that is very loud, something that is great or something that is very intense or consuming. And when it says she magnifies the Lord, it means she exalts, she glorifies, she lifts up, she extols, she extends loudly, greatly does she speak of the Lord. And there is an intensity, it is a consuming

thing.

And then there's the word "rejoiced" in verse 47, "And my spirit hath rejoiced..." agalliao(?), again it is a word of great intensity, it means to be overjoyed, it means to be exceedingly joyful, it means to be joyful out loud. It is a kind of a grand and great and swelling kind of joy. In fact, it is used in 1 Peter 1:8 of joy unspeakable and full of glory. And so Mary is not just sort of letting out a few nice thoughts and sort of giving expression in a very simple controlled way, Mary is literally bursting in an intense overwhelming overflow of praise and adoration to God. For Mary there's nothing shallow, for Mary there's nothing superficial, there is a spontaneous bursting out of an overjoyed heart. So worship is an attitude and the right attitude is an attitude of spontaneous intense joyful praise.

And I really think that this second thought of intensity is what our Lord had in mind in John 4:24 when He said, "Do you worship the Lord in spirit...that means it is internal...and in truth...that means it's intense." In truth means truthfully, or in sincerity. You worship God from the inner man with sincerity, with integrity, with honesty without hypocrisy. And that is that which springs out of a spontaneously overjoyed heart.

When is the last time you've been surprised by your joy? When is the last time you looked at the pages of the Word of God and a truth came off that page and you literally burst with joy and worship and praise? When is the last time that you thought about your salvation and you became absolutely ecstatic over that so that you poured out praise and worship to God? Frankly, most of us don't respond that way. We become so cold and so indifferent that if you look back, for example, over the last year of your life and you tried to write down on a piece of paper the times of highest joy, the times of the greatest happiness, the times when you really were sensing life to the fullest, it may have been related to some material possession you gained, some promotion you got on your job, some victory you had over illness, some circumstance in the world. I wonder if you have found those highest supreme times of joy in your life due to the fact that you've uncovered a truth in the Bible, you've seen God in His majesty, you have understood the greatness of your salvation, those should be the times of highest joy. And if they're not, then it just tells us how indifferent we've become to those things. How fast we forget.

The history of Israel can furnish us with an example of how God views worship without sincerity, how He views the empty facade of superficial attention. For example, through His prophet Malachi He said to the people, "You offer polluted bread upon Mine altar and then you say, Wherein have we polluted Thee? In that you say the table of the Lord is contemptible and if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it unto the governor, will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person, saith the Lord of host. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of host, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. And you have said, Behold, what a weariness it is."

God says you're coming to worship Me and you offer Me nothing but lame and the blind, you don't give Me the best out of your flock. And you say this is contemptible, this is boring. What a weariness...this whole deal.

I sense so much of that even in the church today. People just kind of bored with church, they can take it or leave it. There's no commitment. I've even heard people say, "You know, we've been so involved in the Lord's work, we've got to get away." I hope not from worship. Oh there's a time and a place for rest and refreshment, but I hope you don't want to get away from worshiping the Lord.

And the prophet Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa was sent by God to expose the hypocrisy of Israel. And this is what God said through him, "I hate, I despise your feasts. I'll not smell your solemn assemblies, though you offer Me burnt offering, meat offering, I'll not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from Me the noise of your songs. I will not hear their melody. But let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." In other words, God says I don't even want your celebrations, I don't even want your superficial shallow worship. It's hypocritical.

You see, David put it right. He said God desires truth in the inward parts, sincerity. And in the first chapter of Isaiah God exposes the treachery of Israel in these words, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me. I am full of the burnt offerings and rams and the fat of fed beasts. I delight not in the blood of bullocks and lambs and goats. Bring no more empty oblations, incense is an abomination to Me. Your new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies I cannot, away with. It is iniquity, even your solemn meetings. I am weary to hear about it." God doesn't want superficial worship. If it isn't internal and it isn't intense, forget it...forget it.

But Mary...Mary with her it was the right kind of worship. It was from the soul and the spirit and it was so intense. It was an overflowing of what was there. She was filled with joy, unspeakable and full of glory.

Thirdly, the right attitude of worship is habitual. Not only internal and intense but it is habitual. The verb there "magnify" in verse 46 is a continuous present tense verb that would best be translated magnifies. My soul continually magnifies the Lord. In other words, it was for this lovely woman a way of life. It was a continual magnification of the Lord. And I think that's such an important insight. I hate to think of it, but most of us only worship and magnify the Lord at certain intervals when things go the way we think they should and that is not the truest kind of worship. That may be simply the expression of our own happiness that we got what we wanted, extended under the illusion that we're worshiping God.

You see, if you go through life and all you do is wait for the highs of life and say, "O thank You, Lord," and whenever you go through the lows of life you just sort of crawl in your little hole, get back under your rock, that's not continuous habitual praise. But the Bible says, "In everything give thanks." Now that doesn't mean, "O, I've got to give thanks, yeah that happened. O I remember that verse, yes, thanks for that, Lord. And I remember again...thanks." It is that you are so utterly lost in the wonder of God that no matter what happens you always find yourself praising Him, worshiping. The whole of life becomes a magnifying of the Lord.

Paul had it summed up in Philippians 1:20 so magnificently, this is what he said, "My goal in life is that Christ may be magnified through me whether by life or by death." In other words, independent and apart from all circumstances and events of life I am committed to the fact that Christ will be magnified. That's a worshiping life. That's a way of life. That is a life style that worships. If worship happens for you on Sunday morning, it probably isn't worship. If it happens for you on Christmas, it most assuredly isn't worship. If it isn't happening all the time, if it isn't a way of life, if it isn't incessant, constant praise from deep within, intense and joyful for all that God has done for you, then it may be that it isn't worship at all because if you can't worship the Lord one of two things is true...one, you have unconfessed sin in your life that is clouding you and robbing your ability to worship, if you have dealt with that the second one is that you're left then with the sin of indifference. And there's a reason for that and that takes me to the fourth element of the proper attitude of worship, it is humble...it is internal and intense, it is habitual and it is humble.

Verse 48, "For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden." This is what overwhelmed Mary. She couldn't believe that God could possibly pick up one of such a low station in life...the term there means a common station in life...low status. She was humble. And may I say something that I want you to remember? Only...say it again...only true humility can give expression to true worship...only true humility can give expression to true worship. You see, pride always stands in the way of worship because pride is you competing with God, right? And most of us are so proud we are concentrating on ourselves. If we are happy it is because we've gotten what we want. If we're sad it is because somebody has messed up our program. We do not worship all the time because we are not so lost in God all the time but rather consumed with ourselves. And pride will always compete with God and pride will always eliminate worship. Worship is born out of the humble heart.

And here is Mary and she says, "I'm nobody, I am a lowly handmaiden, nothing. And He has regarded my lowliness and sent the Savior." Well, that's so basic. Anyone who comes to worship God must come in that kind of humility, he must. I mean, Jesus said that to the Pharisees. "Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed are the meek...blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness..." It's the empty people, the hurting, the people who know they have no resource, no worthiness, no nothing who are overwhelmed with God's grace and who therefore enter a life of worship. The people who have a hard time worshiping are the people who think they are getting what they deserve and they ought to get more of it. And when they don't, they're unhappy. The Bible says

God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Now if you had been involved in this situation and an angel had come and announced that you were to be the mother of the Lord, what would have been your reaction? Just humanly speaking we would perhaps have said, "I...I had no idea I was that good. I mean, I know I've very devout but...I mean, to be the mother of the Lord, I mean, there must be things in me that are so wonderful I don't even see them." That would be a rather human response. Or you might have said to Elizabeth when she said, "O, you are the mother of my Lord," "Oh, Elizabeth, it's nothing, I...I..." you know, and tried to play that kind of role.

Mary had no such thoughts. She didn't think, "Oh, I've got to stop and glorify God." I mean, the moment she knew that God was going to send a redeemer through her loins, she spontaneously burst into praise and the only thought she had at herself was an instant glance at the uselessness, the unworthiness and the lowliness of the one that God would redeem, and only a passing thought of that. If we achieve some great thing, we receive some great blessing, some great distinction or some great position, we tend always to speak of our success..."My soul doth glorify myself." That's the spirit of our empty worshipless age and it just keeps being pumped into us all the time. Mary didn't even look to herself and say thanks to me, she didn't look to Elizabeth and say thanks, Elizabeth, she looked to God and poured out her benediction to Him. Her first thought was to the one from whom all blessings flow, all gifts, all graces, all good things. Now that is the spirit of worship.

She says, "He's regarded the low estate of His handmaiden." "Handmaiden" is doulos, bondslave girl. He is the King and He will redeem the slave. Overwhelming. She had a low estate. By the way, that speaks of a state of being, a state of being as humiliated, as lowly, as nothing, as worthless. She was the simple wife of a simple village carpenter. She was no one. Other than the fact that the royal blood of David pumped in her vein, she had no station in life. And since there was no royal court, she was as insignificant...I should say...as any other individual in a common place in a common town.

Now I'm not saying she wasn't a pure and godly and virtuous woman, but I would add that the truest kind of spirituality is that which cannot recognize itself. Would you agree with that? The truest kind of spirituality is that which cannot recognize itself. Its greatest virtue is that it sees only its worthlessness. The more you contemplate how truly spiritual you are, the more you reveal the very opposite to be the truth. And I would submit that based upon Luke 14:11 it says, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted," if Mary was exalted above all women, it must have been that she was the humblest of all women. And so she like the psalmist says, "I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Isaiah 57:15 I think pulls it together. "Thus saith the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity," now that's about a grandiose a picture of God as you're going to get...high, lofty, inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, says Isaiah. "I dwell in the high and holy place." Listen to this, "With him that is of a

humble spirit." Don't you love that? God sets Himself up, way up there, high, lofty, exalted, holy, dwelling in the heavenlies. Who you dwelling with, God? The one of a humble spirit, the lowly.

What then is the attitude of worship? It is that deep heart born inner spring of love and adoration to God that bursts forth in intense gratitude and joy habitually because of an overwhelming humility that a holy God would pick up a useless sinner and redeem him. Now if it's been a long time since you worshiped the Lord like that, it's because you have become indifferent to the greatness of your salvation. That's tragic.

Secondly, the object of worship. From the attitude to the object, and the next two are going to be brief, I wanted to spend the time on the first one. And I'm going to be saying more about it in days to come. But the object of worship is easy to see. Verse 46, the Lord; verse 47, God my Savior...the Lord God my Savior. What does that tell us? That tells us that she worshiped God and there's none other to worship. Jesus said to Satan that He wouldn't bow down because the Scripture says that we are to worship God and Him only. Remember that? Luke 4:8...only God. And so Mary worshiped God. But in this sense, God my Savior.

Now may I add this and I think it's a very important understanding...the primary key to understanding worship is to understand that God is the Savior. That is that for which we worship Him. Look at it this way, if God had not saved us, would we worship Him? No, for two reasons...one, there wouldn't be a lot to worship Him about if He didn't save us. Two, if He didn't save us we wouldn't know Him and we couldn't worship Him. It is because He has redeemed us from sin and granted us salvation that we do worship Him. And so Mary says I worship God because He's my Savior. And if you back up to Zacharias and look what...or Zacharias, actually you go forward to verse 69, God has promised this great event and Zacharias says God has raised up an horn of salvation. And if you look at what Simeon said in chapter 2 verse 30, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." And what Anna said, she spoke of Him to all who looked for redemption. You see, the joy and the worship was always linked to salvation...salvation...salvation. His name shall be called Jesus for He shall do...what?...save His people from their sins. And there are many people in the Catholic Church who have tried to get around verse 47 and say that Mary is not talking about God as her Savior from sin because she's sinless, she's talking about God as her Savior from her lowly estate by exalting her to be the queen of heaven.

It is not that. She says "God my Savior." What kind of saving does she have in mind? It's pretty clear because the angel had said "Thou shalt call His name Jesus," Matthew 1:21, "for He shall not you from your low class estate but save His people from their...what?...sins." And the same Lord Jesus said, "Who is My mother? She's no different than anyone else. She needs saving." And she knew it and she acknowledged it. And so she worshiped God as Savior. And that was the well spring of all the worship that occurs around the birth of Christ. Worshiping is primarily acknowledging God as Savior and if you haven't been worshiping God then you have been taking for granted the

greatness of your salvation. And that is...that's an unthankful heart.

And may I add as a footnote, there's no homage, there's no worship of Christ at Christmas unless it acknowledges Him as the Savior from sin. All the rest of it is shallow and God would feel about it the same way He felt about the sacrifices of Israel as He expressed it through Malachi, Amos and Isaiah. Mary was saved from her sins. And that's why she rejoiced. It wasn't just that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. That wasn't the big issue with her. The big issue was that the Messiah was going to come and redeem from sin. And that's what the rest of her whole message is about.

That leads us to the third element, not only the attitude of worship, the object of worship but the reason for worship. And I want to share with you three aspects. Number one, very briefly, what God is doing for me. In verse 48 she says, "He's regarded the low estate of His handmaid and from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." May I hasten to add that she is not saying, "All nations will say, O Mary, what a marvelous exalted lady." That isn't what she's saying. She is saying, "All generations will say of me, O how she was blessed by God." See the difference? This is not a comment on the greatness of Mary, this is a comment on the greatness of God, verse 49, "For He that is mighty hath done to me great things and holy is His name."

In other words, how incredible that a God who is absolutely holy should do such great things for such an unholy one as I. O all generations shall say you are blessed...you are blessed. But the glory will be God's, not Mary's.

You know, the Bible judiciously purposely pointedly tells us absolutely nothing about Mary. We don't know anything about her. We don't know what she was like. We don't know anything about her personality except to know that she was sort of a meditative person...as often she pondered things in her heart. But apart from that we don't know anything. We don't know anything about her life style, her approach. We don't know anything about the things she liked or didn't like. We don't know her technique in raising Jesus or the rest of the children she had. We don't know how she dealt with her friends. We don't know how she treated Joseph. We don't know what anybody around her thought about her. There's not one opinion given of her character in the Bible other than that which it says of God that He found favor with her. We know nothing about her and that is purposely so that we will not exalt one who is not to be exalted. God is to be exalted. Mary was a slave, unworthy, who needed a Savior and was overwhelmed with what He was doing for her.

Now may I submit to you, beloved, that that's where praise and worship begins? And you can't praise God at all unless He's your Savior. That's why she's praising Him, He's my Savior, what He's doing for me. That's where praise and worship begins. We begin to worship when we really begin to understand from the depths of our heart what God is doing in redeeming us. And how tragic that we become cold. How tragic that some Sundays we can take it or leave it whether we come to church to express that worship. How tragic that we become so indifferent. How tragic that we get upset about

things through our life times and we think that they aren't going the way we are and we get a bitter spirit or a cantankerous attitude or whatever instead of just going through life with a worshiping heart because of God's great salvation.

She just can't believe humanly that a holy God, perfectly holy God, could reach down and pick up and redeem, let alone allow to be the mother of the redeemer such and one as she is. So her praise comes out of pure gratitude for God's gift of salvation. All generations shall call me blessed...blessed.

But she doesn't stop there. She goes on and praises God not only for what He's doing for her but for what He will do for others. Look at verse 50. She doesn't want to stop there because she doesn't want to be misunderstood and she says, "And His mercy will be on them that fear Him from generation to generation." I'm not alone in this, I'm not single in this. And her horizons immediately widen and she says, "His mercy will be on them that fear Him from generation to generation." She worships for what God will do for others.

I don't know about you but that's always a cause for worship in my heart, isn't it for you? When you see God redeem someone else, when you anticipate what God will do for others the same grace He bestowed on you, the same mercy He bestowed on you, the same love He bestowed on you, the same saving mighty power the holy God bestowed on you He will bestow on others. And notice verse 50, it is mercy because we are not worthy. It was mercy for Mary because she was not worthy either. And so, we worship because of what He is doing for us and what He will do for others.

And notice that note in the middle of verse 50. This mercy is available to only certain people. What is the qualification? "Them that...what?...fear Him." Reverence Him...may I hasten to add that fear is the guardian of the soul. Those who come to God with sincere awe, reverence, fearful regard for His holiness are those who will receive His mercy. Psalm 112:1 says, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord." Those who fear God are the ones who are truly saved. You can't truly be a Christian and have no reverence for God, no fear of God, no awe of God, no respect, regard for His holiness. So this is a description of true believers who fear God.

Worship then flowed out of Mary. She was absolutely overjoyed by the great things God was doing for her and the great things God would do for generation after generation of those that feared Him the way she did. And thirdly, she also worships because of what God has done in the past. What He is doing for her, what He will do and what He has done. And isn't our confidence in what God is doing and will do based on what He has done? Sure it is. And so she recites a marvelous record of what things God has done. She uses seven aorist tense verbs which lend themselves to a past thought. And it seems as if she may have in her mind specific occasions which would be a very typical Jewish approach to praise, such as in Habakkuk chapter 3 or in the Psalms where the one praising recites the works that God has done in the past. She reaches back and begins to pull in general and yet in her own mind they may have specific attachment the things that God has done in the past.

Verse 51, "He hath shown strength with His arm, He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted them of low degree, He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich He hath sent away empty. He hath helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever."

Oh, she worships God for what He is doing, what He will do, what He has done. That's the sum of the reason for worship. There may be times when you can't see clearly through what God is doing. There may be times when you can't focus on what He is going to do. But there are never times when you can't look back at what He has done. And she is reciting God's faithfulness. He has been faithful in the past, faithful in the past. And what has He done? Verse 51, He has scattered the proud which by contrast means He has gathered in the humble. He has shown His strength of His arm on behalf of those that are weak. Verse 52, He has pulled the mighty down from their thrones and put back on the throne those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich He sent empty away.

In other words, God has reversed all the social order. The people who live in the world in self-sufficiency, in pride and in honor of the world and in riches of the world and don't need God are all debased and all of those who are the meek and the poor who seek God are lifted up and exalted. And He helped the servant people, the servile people Israel in remembrance of His mercy, He is a God of faithfulness and He said He would to our fathers and to Abraham and to His seed forever. He promised us He'd redeem us from the fathers, through Abraham, throughout eternity, He said He'd redeem us and He will and He is in the birth of this child.

How are we to worship God? We are to worship Him in spirit. We are to worship Him in intensity. We are to worship Him habitually. We are to worship Him out of a heart of humility. And who? But God our Savior who in His infinite holiness has redeemed unholy sinners. And why? Because of what He is doing, what He will do, what He has done, He is worthy of such worship.

Now that, beloved, is the spirit of Christmas. That was the attitude of everybody gathered around that original nativity scene. Nothing less, nothing less can suffice as we today celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Pray with me.

I'd like you to pray silently in your heart this morning. And I'd like you to pray a simple prayer, will you do that? Lord, make me a true worshiper. Make me a true worshiper. May my attitude this Christmas and every day after be one of worship to God my Savior for what He is doing, redeeming me; what He will do, redeeming others; what He has done, redeeming those in the past.

And if you don't know Christ, this would be a great time to ask Him to redeem you, to save you. That's why He came.

Father, make us all true worshipers. Fill our hearts with praise and adoration as the carol says, "Come, let us adore Him." May it be that that becomes for us a way of life, that Christ is magnified through us whether by life or by death. May we live a life of adoration and worship. Thank You for the example of these dear people, even of the holy angels who worshiped. And may we experience that truest humility that allows us the spontaneity of a joyful heart. Bless every life here in Christ's name. Amen.

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