Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The True Christmas Spirit
Scripture: Luke 1:46-55
Code: 80-152

If you're like me, you have heard the world's comments and evaluations of this time of the year. And one of the phrases that you hear a lot is the Christmas spirit. We need to have the Christmas spirit. And of course, I began to think about that, being somewhat analytical. Just what is the Christmas spirit. And I suppose there are a lot of potential answers to that question. To Scrooge, the Christmas spirit was a ghost. To the liquor industry, the Christmas spirit comes in a bottle, somewhere around $75 million this month in America. Some people feel that the Christmas spirit is somehow the truce that takes place in the family when nobody brings up the issues, the quarrels.

I supposed for some people the Christmas spirit is expressed in a card that conveys a sentiment of wellbeing. 95 percent of all Americans will be involved in sending five billion plus Christmas cards expressing these sentiments. One little boy suggested that the Christmas spirit is really contentment, because that's what you need to be when you don't get what you want. For some people the Christmas spirit is an attitude of happiness found in the fellowship of friends. Or the party spirit while consuming 10 million to 15 million turkeys. For many, however, the Christmas spirit is not so trivial or so frivolous or so fun. For many the Christmas spirit is one of profound sadness, increased depression because all that is wrong in your life is then measured against the hilarity of the time and seems even more profoundly painful. As on poet put it, in a very personal expression of pain, 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, enough for everyone, if a mother's purse is empty, there might as well be none. And then the poet ended with these words, "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 Christmas is like that for some people. For others it's a time for saying thanks for some very basic things. G.K. Chesterton years ago said, "When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings with toys at Christmas, why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?" Mostly though, I guess the spirit of Christmas is giving presents, if the mall is any indication, billions of dollars of worth as a result of people colliding and careening around in crowded stores, everything from nickel candy to multimillion pieces of jewelry and everything in between, and stuffing stockings and wrapping packages and the spirit of Christmas, they tell us, is giving. And that's all right, I'm no scrooge, I don't want to rain on anybody's parade. But I would just like to get down to the core of this deal, what is the true spirit of Christmas? Is it fun? Is it fellowship? Is it giving? What is it?

Well, as always, the best answer to that question is to go to the Bible and so I would like to take you to Luke chapter 1 and chapter 2 and there, we will find out what the spirit of Christmas really is. It will

come clear to you as I read some selected reactions to the birth of Christ, among people and angels. Let's start with Elizabeth, Luke 1:41, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the holy spirit and she cried out with a loud voice and said, blessed among women are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb. How has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" That was Elizabeth's reaction and that conveys the spirit of Christmas in its reality.

But before we say what it is, let's look at another illustration of it over to verse 67 in Luke 1. Here we meet the husband of Elizabeth, the father of John the Baptist whom she was carrying. "And his father, Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. For he has visited us and accomplished redemption for his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David his servant." Now, that was Zacharias reaction and that tells us something of his spirit, his attitude.

Let's go to chapter 2 and verse 13. And here we go to the realm of the angels and we find in verse 13, that suddenly to the shepherds there appeared with the angel who had made the original announcement, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among men with whom he is pleased. That was the angel's response to this whole event. Down in verse 20, we get the shepherds response, "And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." Down in verse 25, we meet another unique individual attending to the period of the birth of Christ named Simeon. "There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous, devout, looking for the consolation of Israel and the holy spirit was upon him." Notice how many of these people have an usually described relationship to the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth, Zacharias, the angel, the child in the womb of Elizabeth, Mary, now Simeon. "The holy Spirit was upon him and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn't see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came into the spirit in the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for him the custom of the law," that would be circumcision, "then he took him into his arms and blessed God and said, now Lord thou does let they bondservant depart in peace according to thy word, for my eyes have seen they salvation which those hast prepared in the presence of all people, a light of revelation to the gentiles and a glory of thy people Israel." Another reaction comes down in verse 36, the reaction of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, the tribe of Asher, an older woman advance in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage and then as a widow to the age of 84. She never left the temple served night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, continued to speak of him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Elizabeth, Zacharias, angels, shepherds, Simeon, Anna, basically had one response. And that one response is the spirit of Christmas and the right word is worship. Worship. The spirit of Christmas in all those participants in the first Christmas was praise and thanks and blessing and glory to God in a word, that is worship.

And Matthew 2:2, just so we don't leave some very important folks out, tells us that the wise men came from the east and said, "We are come to worship him." Even wicked Herod picked up the spirit of the event and asked where the child was born, "That I may come and worship him also." Everybody was worshiping.

That is the spirit of Christmas. And though Herod told a lie, he did understand the appropriate attitude to be worshiped. This then is the supreme attitude of Christmas. This is the spirit of Christmas and it is the supreme time of worship for Christians as we celebrate the birth of our savior. This time of all times is a time of worship. Worship, let me give you a brief definition, is an attitude. IT is a spirit. It is something on the inside. It is an attitude of the heart that is so filled with wonder and gratitude at what God has done that there is not a thought of personal needs or personal blessings, only total abandonment to God in praise and adoration, that's worship.

It is the most selfless thing we do. It is as the hymn writer puts it, to be lost in wonder, love, and praise. It is to be so grateful and so filled with wonder at what the Lord has done that we lose ourselves in adoring worship, adoring praise. What better time for this than Christmas when we focus on the very giving of Christ who is our savior. Now, to give form to our worship, I am drawn to another person. Not Zacharias or Elizabeth, not the angels, not the shepherds, not the wise men, not Simeon, and not Anna. I am drawn to another person to giver form to our worship. A person who is the closest person in all the human realm to Jesus. Who had an intimacy with him that no other person ever knew. The one person most directly touched by this birth, not other than his mother Mary. Mary gives form to our worship. Without question, she gives the most magnificent psalm of worship. Really, the most magnificent psalm in the whole New Testament. And it is her magnificent. It is her psalm of praise to God for the coming of Jesus Christ, Luke 1:46. Let's look at it. Luck 1:46. "And Mary said, My soul exalts the Lord," you see, immediately she had the same response that everybody else had, worship and praise and adoration and gratitude. "My spirit has rejoiced in God my savior for he has had regard for the humble state of his bond slave, for behold from this time on, all generations will count me blessed. For the mighty one has done great things for me. And holy is his name. And his mercy is upon generation after generation towards those that fear him. He has done mighty deeds with his arm. He has scattered those who were proud and the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty handed. He has given help to Israel his servant. In remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever." That is the hymn of the incarnation. That is the psalm. That is a song, that is a worship song. Mary knew that she was to be the mother of the son of God. She had been told that back in verse 35, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The power of the most high will overshadow you, for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the son of God."

She had been told that this offspring would be great, verse 32, would be called the son of the most high. The Lord God would give him the throne of his father David over which he would reign forever. Elizabeth even called her “the mother of my Lord.” And so she bursts forth in the only appropriate response and that is the response of worship. Now in the prayers of Roman Catholics, particularly in regard to the rosary, Mary is called the Mother of God. And that is in fact the case, she is the mother of Jesus Christ, who is God. But understand it this way, she is the mother of God, not in the sense that Jesus derived any of his divine nature from her, he did not.

But only in the sense that he derived his human nature from her. She bore the human being who was God incarnate. Unfortunately, many have perverted that reality into developing the worship of Mary as somehow contributing to the divinity of Jesus Christ. That has become, historically a major separation between the Roman Catholic church and Protestantism. And Roman Catholicism, in all candor and in all honestly, Roman Catholicism all over the world is a Mary cult, largely. It is devoted to worshiping Mary.

In fact, in many case, you will find Jesus is somewhat incidental and Mary is the main figure. And this is because the Roman Catholic Church has decreed the following doctrines as having always been true of Mary, and there are five of them. These are unalterable, fixed, unchanging doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church and here are the five that related to Mary. Number one is called the immaculate conception of Mary. It doesn’t mean that she immaculately conceived Jesus Christ. It means that she was immaculately conceived by her mother, thus making Mary free from original sin.

The immaculate conception has not to do with the birth of Christ, it has to do with the birth of Mary. The second doctrine the Roman Catholic Church decreed is the sinlessness of Mary, that she lived her entire life and never sinned. The third doctrine is the perpetual virginity of Mary, that is that she never knew a man all her life long. She was a perpetual virgin, thus preserving in their system something of the singular purity and untouched character of Mary. Fourthly, the Roman Catholic Church has determined the doctrine and they call it the assumption of Mary, or the bodily ascension of Mary into heaven. Fifthly, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that when Mary assumed her place into heaven, when she ascended into heaven, she was coroneted as the queen of heaven. A position of sovereignty and a position of authority, and in all honesty, in the Catholic system, Jesus himself is put in a position, on occasion to be appealing to his sovereign mother. So the Roman Catholic church came up with these doctrines. The immaculate conception of Mary that is she is free from original sin, her sinlessness throughout her life, her perpetual virginity. Her bodily assumption into heaven. She is coroneted as the queen of heaven and the result of that kind of concocted theology is the Mary cult that is at the core of worldwide Romanism. You see idols and shrines to Mary all over the world, in every church, in every cathedral, in homes, rooms, restaurants, hotels, businesses along the roads, the highways and the footpaths, Mary is worshiped.

And you may not know this, but Rome has even said, that when Gabriel came and announced to Mary that she would bear the Lord, that she would bear the son of the most high, that she would bear the savior, the angel was only asking of this could happen. He was submitting to her authority, and Roman Catholic theologians say that he was asking her permission that this could happen and that she gave her permission when she said, in verse 38, “Behold the bond slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.” They interpret that as saying, Mary said you have my permission. So the whole redemptive plan rested then on Mary’s authority and Mary’s agreement and her command back to the angel set redemption in motion. Now all of that presents a convoluted and perverse picture of Mary, and as a result does inestimable damage to the psalm. And to an understanding of worship, because of that’s true of Mary then she is not the worshiper, she is the object of worship. If she is a sinless being who never died, who is a sovereign in heaven, who had to give permission to Gabriel to do the redemptive plan, to carry it out, then this is something quite different than a worshipper. But in this hymn, Mary is not the worshipped, Mary is the worshiper.

It is a hymn of worship from Mary to God. And in it is such beauty and such magnificence that it can be looked at a diamond with many facets and flashing brilliance on many different fronts. And maybe sometime we’ll do that, but for now, I just want us to look at the elements that are in this psalm that speak of the significant and the meaning of worship. Here is a worshipper. Here is a Christmas, if I my borrow the word, a Christmas worshipper. Here is Mary and she teaches us how we are to worship. First point and I’ll give you three. First point, we see in her the attitude of worship. We see in her the attitude of worship. Now, as we look at this attitude of worship, we are going to see this in the first verse and into the second verse, “And Mary said, my soul exults the lord and my sprit has rejoiced in God my savior for he has had regard for the humble state of his bond slave.” In just those two and then into the third verse of this psalm, verses 46, 47, and just into the first line of verse 48, we get the attitude of worship and I’m going to give you four comments about it. Number one, it is internal. It is internal. Mary said, “My soul exalts the Lord.” Or magnifies the Lord, and then, my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior and the term soul and the term spirit, which are, by the way synonymous and speak of the inner person, and the reason that you use two of them is not because of the literary element of it, but also, because of the all-encompassing element of it. She is simply summing her whole inner being. She is saying that worship rises from inside. It’s not something you do on the outside it’s not a performance. It’s not a set of words or a set of actions. It becomes that, but it is something that is moral and mental and emotional. IT’s in the mind and the will and the emotion, it sums up the whole inner being.

All that is in her. All that the heart can feel, she feels. All that the mind can comprehend she holds too. Like a great orchestra, every element of the inner self has its place, and every element of the inner self adds to the harmony of the whole grand crescendo. The whole of her inner being is worshiping. This thing is deep. Worship comes up from inside. It bubbles up and bubbles over as one New Testament word would identify it. It is not coming to church. It is not singing a hymn alone. It is not reading words in a bible. Hearing a sermon. It is not just giving something in the offering. It is not just

carrying out a ritual, even the Lord's table. Those are potential, of course, effects of a worshiping heart, but they can't stand alone as true worship. It is the inner heart of adoring praise that is the essence of true worship. It is when the soul and the spirit are overwhelmed. It is an internal thing. In fact, external shallow observance of the birth of Christ is distasteful to God and most of what goes on at the Christmas season breaks his heart. Superficial worship finds no place of acceptance with him. For example, Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 29:13 said, "This people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips." If I can put it in the Christmas vernacular, they talk about me, they put things about me on their Christmas cards and they sing my carols, but they do not honor me. They have removed their heart from me. Isaiah 29:13, there's no heart. Jesus said, God is a spirit and they that worship him must start by worshiping him in spirit. The true worshipper is the one whose heart is devoted, the one whose heart is overflowing. It comes from deep down inside and it therefore goes on all the time and that takes me to the second point. It is intense. It is not only internal. It is intense. Notice, my spirit magnifies the Lord. My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. Now, when you read that in English, maybe it doesn't grab you, the word exalts or magnifies is the word *megalun*, now you know a little bit about the word *mega*, that is a Greek work that often gets transliterated over into English when we want to say something is bigger than normal. When it is larger than normal or louder. Sometimes you see it on a speaker, mega bass, it means, more bass than you need or care to listen too.

Something is a mega thing, it just takes the word large. And what she is doing here is not just exalting, but it is a mega exaltation, it is a large one. It literally, the word *megalune* means to cause to swell or to cause to grow. Or to crescendo as if starting at some point and extending and becoming larger and larger and the word rejoices and there could be a number of words used there in the Greek. The word chosen is one that means to be overjoyed. The one that speaks about the unspeakable joy. It even is referred in some uses to an out loud kind of joy, an almost kind of exuberant kind of joy that is uncontained, those are the terms, spontaneous, exuberant joy bursts out in worship. So you have two components of true worship. It is internal. It rises from what the heart comprehends. It rises from what the mind understands and when Mary came to grips with what was going on, it literally captured her mind. Her mind transferred it to her emotions. It got every part of her inner being moving and it just erupted in intensity.

That's' the stuff of which worship is made, but it starts with revelation to the mind, doesn't it? This is what's going to happen, here are the facts and then the explosion in response. This is sincere intense worship. Not at all shallow. Not at all superficial, not at all temporary. Worship then is the right attitude. It is internal and it is intense. IF you look at the history of Israel, you will find how God despised superficial worship through the prophet Malachi, he says, you have brought me the torn and the lame and the sick. You have brought an offering, should I accept this of your hand, saith the Lord, Malachi 1. You bring me the worst animal, the blind, the lame, the broken, that's what you give me. He even asked him in the first chapter of Malachi, give it to the governor and see how he likes it, let alone giving it to me.

The prophet Amos, the herdsman of Tacoa was sent by God to both expose and denounce the apostasy and the hypocrisy of Israel. And among other things, God said through Amos these words, “I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell, I won’t sniff in your solemn assemblies when all the smells and the incense rises, though you offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I won’t 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 the melody of your instruments. Let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. Your superficial worship sickens me.”

The very feast, by the way, which God himself had given him explicit directions to observer became through their hypocrisy and double dealing a stench to his nostrils. David put it this way, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, in the heart. Isiah said the same thing in Isaiah chapter 1. I am full of the burnt offerings and fat of fed beasts, I delight not in the blood of bullocks or lambs or goats. Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination to me the new moons and the Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I can’t tolerate. It is iniquity, your new moons and your feasts, my soul hates, they are a trouble to me, I am weary to hear them. And he goes on and on. This is another way of saying, you have to worship him from the heart and Mary did that.

All known sin must be mercilessly judged and confessed to do that and the focus of everything must be on the Lord. How long for you since you were as C.S. Lewis put it, surprised by joy just bursting out from inside of you? How long since you were so overjoyed? Just a couple nights ago at our home, we had Ken and Joni Erickson Tada at our house as we have started a little kind of Christmas tradition as we were sitting around the table eating and talking about the things of the Lord and Joni as she is somewhat prone to do said, we have to sing. We have to sing. We have to sing right now and you just knew it was coming up from inside as we were talking about the things of the Lord and we were dealing with the issues of life where God has manifested his grace and we have to sing and she said, do you have a book? We have to get a book and sing, but before I could get a book she launched into a song and she said, you’ve got to sing with me and we all started singing and singing and I don’t know, I guess we sang for an hour or an hour and a half and I finally got a book with all the great hymns in it and we just went down the lyrics of one after another after another. That’s the stuff that rises up from inside purely in response to the contemplation of great spiritual reality. That’s the worship that honors God. It is internal and it is intense. In fact, she’s supposed to be home by 8:30 because it takes 2 ½ hours or so to put her down because of her disability, but she didn’t leave till long after that in the time of rejoicing we couldn’t seem to find an ending for it.

The third thing about praise, it is habitual. It is habitual. My soul exalts or magnifies, continuous action, present tense. It isn’t that it’s just related to an event or a moment, particularly an event or a moment like this that has eternal consequences. It goes on and on and on. It’s not that you just rejoiced when you were saved. It is that you started rejoicing then and never will stop. Fluctuating circumstances do not, let me say that again, fluctuating circumstances do not impact true worship.

They don’t affect it. They don’t have anything to do with it. It flows on uninterrupted. It’s not really difficult for one who is a true worshiper from the heart, with intensity to be able to fulfill the words of Paul, in everything give thanks. True worship becomes a way of life, because it’s fixed on something that never changes. God never changes. Christ never changes, salvation never changes. His promises never changes, his covenant never changes, our future never changes, the spirit never leaves. That never changes, so why should worship rise and fall? Why should it ebb and flow? True worship doesn’t. If worship for you only happens on a Sunday morning when it sort of gets pumped up or only happens around the Christmas season or other special events, you are kidding yourself about whether you are a true worshiper. If worship only happens when things are going well in your life and you can whistle a tune because you got what you wanted or because you are happy about the current events in your life, or because your measure of comfort has been met. If worship is connected to that, then you don’t understand the real stuff because true worship is unaffected by fluctuating circumstances. It doesn’t rise and it doesn’t fall. It is the constant praises that comes from deep within the soul because that which is spiritually true is unchanging, unchanging.

It doesn’t matter what goes on in life and when you begin to ebb and flow in your attitude and your demeanor and your joy comes and goes, it is because you have attached yourself to another priority than the unchanging work of God and the unchanging presence of Christ. You have attached your joy to the changing circumstance of life, which means your focus isn’t on him. Your focus is on you. You can tell a true worshiper because they go through the circumstances of life with an unmitigated contentment and an unchanging joy. And that leads me to a fourth element in the attitude. The attitude of worship is internal, intense, habitual and fourthly, and here is really the key one. It is humble. It is humble. True worship only comes from a humble heart, only from a humble heart. What is a humble heart? A humble heart is a heart that has no thought for itself.

No thought for itself. Pride is the worship of self, that’s what it is. And it competes with God. And if you are not thankful, it’s not because God hasn’t fulfilled his promise, it’s because your comfort level isn’t where you want it, and that’s because you are focused on you. It’s because you didn’t get what you deserved, didn’t get what you counted on, hoped for, prayed for, thought you deserved. Pride remembers all wrongs done to it. Pride wants to strike back when it is offended. Pride wants to retaliate. It is not filled with praise because it fixes itself on the ebb and flow of lives issues. Humility cares nothing for those. Humility isn’t going around all the time beating on your chest bemoaning your iniquity. That’s a component of it. Humility is being so focused on God that what may or may not be yours is of little consequence. You don’t focus on you. You are not the issue. God hates pride and God hates the proud, the Bible says and God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble and anyone who comes to worship must come in humility, because that’s being lost in God. And that means that you are not an issue. Now, we see this in Mary. Look at it, verse 48, “For he has regard, has had regard for the humble condition of his handmaid, his bondservant.” The thing that strikes Mary about this whole deal is that it is, it’s just incomprehensible that God would have had such regard for such a humble common girl. That’s what’s amazing. She doesn’t say anything about

herself, nothing. Spontaneously, she bursts forth, “My soul exalts the Lord.” She doesn’t have a thought like this, well, I think he made a pretty good choice. Or, well, I certainly know a lot of woman who are not as Godly as me. Not a thought. It almost is unfair to even mention such a possibility.

You know, we are, it’s part of being fallen creatures, but we are rather anxious to spread our successes to all who will listen. And to some who have to listen. Even our smallest successes turn into tall tales, don’t they? And if we have achieved some great thing or if we have received some great blessing or met some great person or had some distinction or some position, we tend to speak of our success and our initial response might be, my soul doth magnify myself. And we stick the plaque on the wall. Well, Mary didn’t have such a thought. She didn’t even think to pick up the telephone if there had been one, and boy that would be a tough temptation if you just were told that you were going to be the mother of God, to stay away from the phone.

I mean, her immediate thought was directed heavenward, from whom all goodness comes and all gifts and all graces and all blessings and all benedictions. She just was overwhelmed. She didn’t even respond to Elizabeth. She didn’t even say thanks to Elizabeth for Elizabeth made a gracious benediction there in verses 42 to 45, she couldn’t even think of what Elizabeth was saying. Her focus was not on Elizabeth. Her focus was not on her, except for the fact that she couldn’t comprehend how God could possibly do this with somebody so absolutely common as she. That’s the kind of attitude out of which worship rises.

If she does glance at herself for only the brief moment it is only to wonder how she could have ever been noticed by God. How could God have ever noticed her? How could God have ever known her and cared about her or thought her in any sense suitable for this. How could God have ever concluded, that she was one to be favored? How could God have been well pleased with her, why her, why her? You see, it is characteristic of humility that it has no thought for itself and that it is surprised by any commendation if not shocked. When she says that God regarded her low estate, literally she uses a term that means that she was in a humiliated state of being. She was a nobody. She was a nobody socially, culturally. She was just a handmaid capable of nothing and worthy of nothing. A simple wife of a village carpenter. An unlikely mother for God and Joseph, he made yokes, plows, tables, chairs and perhaps doors and maybe a few buildings. But there was one very unique thing about Mary, she was bearing in her veins the royal blood of David.

Now we are sure she was pure and a godly woman. But do you know something about the pure and the godly, they never see themselves that way. Those who are truly pure and truly godly and truly righteous don’t think they are, in fact they know they are not. Because one of the functions of Godliness and purity and righteousness is to be able to search out every nook and cranny of your iniquity and they can do it. And the more godly you are, the less godly you believe yourself to be and so there is a certain brokenness and a humility.

The essence of true spirituality is not to think you have it. But humility is at the heart of true worship. A sense of unworthiness, a sense of sinfulness. A lack of qualification for anything, for any blessing, for any goodness, for any gift from God and when it comes you are just absolutely overwhelmed. Now, worship is internal, intense, habitual, and humble. If Mary was exalted above all women, she might have been the humblest of all women. I mean, if God lifted her to the heights, it must have been because she was the lowest. She may have been the godliest young woman in that country.

Isaiah 57:15 puts it all in perspective, “Thus saith the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity whose name is holy.”

And this all elevating God higher and higher, those words. “I dwell in the high and holy place.” Really? Anybody else up there with you? Yes, those who are of a humble spirit. What is the attitude then of worship? A deep heartfelt inner spring of intense gratitude of joy that bursts forth habitually from a humble soul who knows it’s utter unworthiness. That’s worship. And that’s the spirit of Christmas. Who are we that we should be so highly favored as to be made not the mother of God, but the children of God, who are we that he should come to die for us. Such overwhelming grace, undeserved.

Okay, secondly the object of worship, just so we never miss this and it’s obvious. Mary said, my soul exalts the lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my savoir. The object of worship is God. All the glory goes to him. All the honor goes to him. All the worship goes to him. Worship is very central in that sense, very simple, very focused, very one-dimensional. We worship God. In Luke 4:8, Jesus said, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only. Worship is limited to one being in the universe and that is God. And May knew it. 1 Timothy 1:17 “To the king eternal, immortal invisible, the only God be honor and glory for ever and ever amen.” That is the center and the circumference of worship. It is all directed right at God.

And most particularly, the heart of worship is that God is our savior and she says that, God my savior. You know, in all honestly, if I wasn’t saved, if God hadn’t saved me through Jesus Christ I would have a hard time getting into worshiping him just for the rest of the stuff that’s true about him. I can’t honestly say that I get real excited about his incommunicable attributes like omniscience, that he knows everything, omnipresence, that he’s everywhere at the same time. Omnipotence, that he’s all-powerful and all mighty and that there is nothing that he can’t do and that he’s immutable, that is he never changes. Those are all true about God, but I can’t honestly say that I would be the first guy to write a hymn about that if I was on my way to eternal hell to be destroyed there. I really couldn’t get into worshiping him for his other attributes if it weren’t that he were my savior, do you understand that? In fact, I don’t see people who don’t know him as savior writing hymns to him as a judge. I don’t know any hymns about hell and judgment and damnation and condemnation and punishment and wrath.

If he weren't a savior, none of us would be worshiping him. We would be hiding in fear, wouldn't we? Cowering. And probably cursing. Now worship, all of it, every bit of it no matter what attribute of God, no matter what dimension of his person and work you are talking about, all of worship is basically set loose in the great reality that we are saved from our sins and thus from judgment. I mean, the whole thing is that the son of man is to seek and to save that which was lost. The whole reason he came, it was said when they gave him his name, they shall call his name Jesus for he shall what? Save his people form their sins. That's what Jesus means, savior. Savior. And if it weren't for the fact that he was savior, nothing else would mean anything.

Savior. So she worships God the savior. He is called God our savior a number of times in 1 Timothy and Titus. God is a saving God. He sent his son into the world to save us from our sin. He was manifested to save us, to deliver us from sin. So the object is God who is a savior. You don't have to pled and beg with God like you do pagan deities, to be nice, God is a saving God by nature and he initiated the whole thing. The spirit of worship, it is internal, intense, habitual and humble. That is the attitude of it. The object of worship is the God who saves.

Thirdly and lastly, the cause of worship. What makes it happen? What motivates it? Well, three things. First, what God does for me personally. Look at verse 48, middle of the verse. For behold from this time on, all generations will count me blessed, why, Mary? Because the mighty one has done great things for me and holy is his name. It's as if she is saying, can you believe that a holy God would do this for me. A sinner? That's where worship starts, that an absolutely holy God would do this for a sinful me.

From this time on, all generations are going to count me blessed because of what God in his holiness has done for a sinner. That's where worship starts and let me tell you something friend, it doesn't mean anything that God is a savior unless you have experience his salvation, right? It has to come down to you. And Mary knew she was a sinner and she knew God was holy and she knew she needed a savior and she was worshiping because the savior had come. And she knew that that meant her sins were to be dealt with. She like everybody else who was saved from their sins owes all to the sacrifice to Jesus Christ. She offered soul felt praise because the redeemer was coming. The one who would bear her sin, the one who would fulfill all the sacrificial imagery.

And that's where worship starts. That's what motivates it. That's what causes it, when you personally experience the saving reality of Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't change her social status. Didn't change at all. Her whole life she never became some earthly queen. Even though she was the mother of God, she maintained the same social status. She had the same friends. She even had to be given over to John the apostle to be cared for because she needed someone to take care of her after Jesus left.

Her social status never changed. Her spiritual status changed just like all who ever believed before and after Christ. His death was her death for sin. And so she knew it. She knew the redeemer was coming. Her praise comes out of pure gratitude for salvation. And that's where it always starts. It has to start with what the Lord has done for you and anything less is sort of meaningless and superficial. The mighty one has done great things for me and what I need is to be saved from my sins.

Secondly, praise rises not only from what the Lord has done for her, but what he has done for others. Verse 50, and she doesn't want to single herself out, so she quotes from the Old Testament here, from Psalm 103 verse 17. "And his mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him." Immediately, her humility comes into play again and she doesn't want anybody to think that it's just her. This is going to happen from generation to generation to those who fear him.

She realizes that the Lord is going to do the same for others and that brings joy to her heart, why? Because she has spiritual priorities. Because she's concerned about what is spiritual and eternal and soul saving. She was absolutely overwhelmed with what the Lord was doing for her and what the Lord would do for generation after generation after generation. That's the stuff that elicits praise. Her own salvation and the salvation of others.

And then the third element. She worshiped because of what God does for his own. This is marvelous and I wish we had time to go into detail, we don't. But look at verse 51 and let me just read. There's a recitation of all that God historically had done for his own people. He has done mighty deeds with his arm. That is, he has shown them strength and power, he has scattered those who were proud and the thoughts of their heart. In contrast, he doesn't do good things for those who reject him. He has brought down rulers from their thrones and on the other hand, each of these kind of reverses and has exalted those who were humble. He has taken his own who were humble and lifted them up. He has taken his own who were weak and given them power. Verse 53, he has filled the hungry with good things. He has taken his own who were hungry and who had need and met that need. That too, comes out of Psalm 107, and on the other hand, sent the rich empty handed. He has given help to Israel his servant. He has remembered his mercy and as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever, he has kept his covenants. That's cause for worship. Salvation, personally, salvation of generation after generation after generation, and the faithfulness of God to meet every need of his own beloved people.

By the way, in verses 51 to 55, aorist verbs are used to describe the recitation of what God does for his own. Only because the mighty God has done mighty things is there Good news to tell. Only because God has saved, does save and remains faithful is there worship and praise and glory and adoration. What is the spirit of Christmas? Worship, in a word, worship, nothing more and nothing less. And you know, as you look back over the Christmases of the ages and we do that every Christmas season we go back through history. I'll tell you how we do it. We do it when we sing the carols. Do you realize that we have sung carols from as far back as the 5th century that have gone

through several translations and finally reached us and we have sang carols from the 15th century, the 11th century, the 17th, 18th, the 16th, as well as the 19th, and as you go back through the history of the Christmases and you touch those Christmas carols, you touch the most brilliant poets and articulators of Christmas truth and their attitude is always worship. It's always been worship.

Listen to some of the Christmas carols. Martian Luther born in 1483, died in 1546, if he had any commitment, he had a commitment to bring scripture and to bring theology out of Latin and into the language of the people, which was German so they could understand and so their praise would have meaning. We know him for his great theological work, but sometimes forget his great poetic work. He was committed two writing hymns and translating hymns. Here is one, all praise to thee eternal Lord, clothed in a garb of flesh and blood, choosing a manger for thy throne while worlds on worlds are thine alone. Once did the skies before thee bow a virgins arms contain thee now. Angels who did in thee rejoice now listen for thine infant voice. A little child though art out guest, that weary ones in thee may rest. Forlorn and lowly is they birth that we might rise to heaven from earth. Thou comest in the darksome night to make us children of the light, to make us in the realms divine like thine own angels round thee shine. And then he ends with this, all this for us, thy love hath done, by this to thee our love is won. For this, we tune our cheerful leis and shout our thanks in ceaseless praise. That's worship. On one Christmas season, Martin Luther wanted to write a Christmas carol for his little son, Hans. This is what he wrote, "From heaven above to earth I come to bear good news to every home. Glad tidings of great joy I bring where of I now will say and sing. To you this night is born a child, of Mary, chosen mother mild. This little child of lowly birth shall be the joy of all the earth. Were earth a thousand times as fair, beset with golden jewels rare, she yet were far too poor to be a narrow cradle, Lord, to thee." And then he ends, "Ah, dearest Jesus, holy child, make thee a bed, soft, undefiled, within my heart that it may be a quiet chamber kept for thee." That's worship. Take up your place in my heart. William Dicks who died in 1898 wrote the words to What Child Is This? Which was set to the familiar English folk song, Greensleeves, and you know how that What Child Is This Ends, so bring him incense, gold, myrrh, come peasant, king to own him, the kind of kings salvation brings, let loving hearts enthrone him. That's worship, that's worship. Charles Wesley wrote 6,000 hymns. Maybe the best. You heard played this morning, Hark the Herald Angels Sing. The last verse, hail the heaven born prince of peace. Hail the son of righteousness. That means worship. Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, that's the incarnation, born that man no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth, hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king, that's worship.

One of my favorite poets of the 19th century is Christina Rossetti who lived from 1830 to 1894. Christina was the daughter of Italian immigrants. A woman of great beauty it is said. Striking beauty. A woman of immense poetic talent. A devout Christian once engaged to a Roman Catholic who promised to convert. When he had second thoughts she broke the engagement and remained single all her life. Through that life, she wrote some of the most magnificent poetry. All of it tribute to Christ. She wrote this poem and it was set to music 12 years after he death.

In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan. Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone. Snow had fallen snow on snow. Snow on snow in the bleak midwinter long ago. Our God, heaven cannot hold him. Nor earth sustain, heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign. In the bleak midwinter, a stable place sufficed the Lord God all mighty Jesus Christ. Angels and archangels may have gathered there, cherubim and seraphim thronged the air, but his mother only in her maiden bliss worshiped the beloved with a kiss. And then she ends with this great, great stanza. What can I give him, poor as I am, if were a shepherd I would give him a lamb. If I were a wiseman, I would do my part. But what can I give him? Give my heart. That's worship. And maybe it was John Francis Wade who died in 1786 who summed it all up in the simple words, oh come, let us adore him. Oh come let us adore him. Oh come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Father, we thank you for this marvelous reminder of the focus of life which is worship. May it come from deep within us, directed toward you our saving God. For what you have done for us, what you have done for generation after generation of saved sinners. And the way in which you have kept every promise to your people. We rejoice. And our rejoice finds its focus in this great historic moment when you came into the world as a baby, thank you. We praise you. We offer you our heart worship. In your son's name, amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).