

Reading: Luke 1:39-56

Theme: That Christmas Feeling!

Believe it or not, it is nearly Christmas! Do we feel "Christmassy"? Are we getting in the Christmas mood or feeling? For some it is the feeling they want to have this time of the year - for others it is a sense of goodwill and that all is right with the world; or it will centre on celebrating at a dark and miserable time of year. This morning I want to look at the right Christmas feeling, experienced by Mary almost 9 months before the first Christmas!

We read how Mary, an ordinary Jewish girl, a virgin, no one extra ordinary, was confronted with the angel Gabriel who told her amazing things (v31-33). Mary was shocked and could not grasp what she was told, even as Gabriel explained a bit more. Mary, probably still afraid, confused and even excited, submitted as the Lord's servant to what she had been told (v38). It would seem that she headed off straightway to visit Elizabeth and when Elizabeth heard her greeting, she was filled with the Spirit and "prophesies". Then Mary on hearing her "prophecy" says v46-55 which we will briefly look at this morning, it's headed in the NIV Mary's Song, although probably it was said not sung, it is termed *the Magnificat* and in it, especially its opening verses, we have the true feeling of Christmas crystallised for us. See 4 areas to help us consider the true Christmas feeling:

1. The Depth of Her Feelings.

People get in the Christmas mood - lights, the food, the sentiments etc. Mary had none of that. She was a peasant girl, expecting a child outside of marriage. In v46-47 we see the depth of her feeling - from her soul, from her spirit. Here we are

not in the realm of the psychological or the emotions, for it is something far deeper than that. In NT these two words are often used interchangeably and here in Mary's Song it would seem that the term 'soul' speaks of her rational powers and the term 'spirit' speaks of her understanding. Here she is saying that since Gabriel's visit and announcement, her whole heart and mind, her innermost being is affected and she is moved in and from the depths of her being. The news of the Son of God coming into the world through her affected her completely and utterly. It is not a superficial passing thing, but deeply affected her.

Does the Christmas message affect us in our innermost being? Do we find it incredible that God the Son should come down to earth, be born flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone to be the Saviour of all who trust Him? Something so magnificent and staggering should surely affect us and our feelings!

2. The Declaration of Her Feelings.

Mary is not half-hearted in the display of her Christmas feelings. She used very active and positive words. The first is concerned with adoration - glory, magnify and the word means to make much of, to make great. We know the word "mega" - it comes from this word to magnify, glorify, to make great. Mary wanted to make God greater, mega. She and we know that we cannot make Him greater than He is, but she wanted all to see of His greatness and for Him to be greater to them that He was previously. She wanted to be a magnifying glass to make Him appear greater in the eyes and the view of others. From her innermost being, her depth of feeling, she wanted this! As we consider God made flesh - do we want to magnify, glorify and adore God?

Mary also rejoiced, and here a strong word, stronger than the usual word for rejoices is used and this one means “*to exult, to be exceedingly glad, to be exceedingly joyful*”. Mary is not just pleased and glad, but exceedingly glad, exults in God her Saviour. This is what her Christmas feeling resulted in! To many people, Christmas is just about a nice story, or some nice feelings, but the true meaning of Christmas is about the Saviour born and knowing “*God my Saviour*” - there is to be a sense of personal possession as in Psalm 23. Can we rejoice, exult in God as our own Saviour? Mary could and it underlines that she was a sinner like us and needed saving.

3. The Design of Her Feelings.

Why was Mary feeling like this? It was not because she was special, for she owned she was not special, but was humble (v48), owned she was a sinner who needed a Saviour (v47). She knew she was blessed and would be rightly termed that, but knew it was all of God's favour (v30). The Bible says little of Mary, never says that she should be worshipped, prayed to, or through. She was blessed, but is really an incidental detail in the gospel narrative. The NT makes little of Mary, but makes everything of the One born to her.

Mary made much of God and what He was doing, for this which was happening to her was of God, His working, His plans, His purpose, His promises fulfilled, His mercy being extended. Here is God bringing His Son into the world to be the Saviour; she was the one honoured and blessed to bear Him and to bring Him forth from her own womb. The design, the aim of this song is to express her feelings to praise and glorify God, to draw attention

to Him and His purpose, point all to His mercy for all the great things He had done for her (v49).

We are to recognise that God was at work here and as we do so, as we understand it to be so, we too are to rejoice and let our joy be known, our feelings of praise and adoration are to show in telling of God's greatness and to draw attention to Him. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever. This was the design of Mary expressing her feelings - to glorify God her Saviour as she enjoyed His mercy and favour.

4. The Demonstration in Her Feelings.

What does Mary demonstrate she felt about God? She adored God for who He is - this is the basis of all our worship and praise. God is so glorious and great, that if we saw Him, even if He'd never done anything for us, we would have to adore Him and worship Him. Mary's attention, the centre of her feelings was on God alone as she reviewed what He was doing. We can learn from her and see some things to use in our own worship. She wanted to:

A. Glorify the Lord - she wanted to magnify, glorify the Lord. His greatness and glory were her chief end. Mary's Christmas feeling centred and focused on the glorious Lord of heaven and earth, the sovereign, eternal God. Our Christmas feeling is not to be a rose-tinted focus on a baby born in an unhygienic stable, but focused on the wonder that the Lord of heaven and earth humbled Himself to become a human baby, all His glory veiled and in the manger lay the Creator and Sustainer of all.

B. He is the Saviour - like Mary we can rejoice in God our Saviour; that this glorious Lord came to earth not in His raw,

unsheathed glory, but came born as a baby, contained in humanity, to be the Saviour and save His people from their sins. Mary saw and recognised that all the OT deliverances, all the OT references and promises of God delivering, rescuing His people and being their Saviour were all focused on the One she was carrying and these would be fulfilled in a most glorious way in Him and she rejoiced. She realised God was doing what He had always done! Do we rejoice in the Lord as our own Saviour? Or is it just a tale, a story, a basis for some Christmas sentiment? If sentimentalising it makes you feel good; consider how much greater is the true wonder and joy of knowing this Lord as your own Saviour!

C. His Power - Mary draws our attention to this in v49 & 51. How could God, the Lord, be her Saviour, our Saviour? It seems impossible. We do not deserve it, cannot earn or merit it. For Him to be our Saviour would mean God would have to do something amazing which took incredible power. Only the powerful, almighty God is able to be our Saviour because we are so far gone and helpless. Mary knew her own weakness; we are too weak and helpless to get right with God and the only hope is God's power and might revealed in His working. He is Almighty and He is able to do the impossible. Mary knew the facts of life, that she needed a man's involvement in conceiving a child and she hadn't had such, but she was assured God's power would be at work (v35) and that nothing is impossible with God (v37).

The message of the gospel may seem so foolish, helpless, weak and pathetic, but the gospel is the power of God to salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16). Only a powerful Saviour can provide hope for this helpless world. This world is in the grip

of, control of the devil; we are dead in trespasses and sins, blinded to God. We are helpless and hopeless and all mankind would have remained there if it were not for God, the almighty One, the all-powerful One who worked on our behalf. Mary had reinforced in her life and experience the truth that the Lord is the mighty, the strong One, for she had already been affected by His power, for the process of the conception of the humanity of Jesus involved God's awesome and yet gentle power overshadowing her by the Holy Spirit. We are to realise the almighty power of God for salvation was made known even in the conception of the Saviour.

God worked then in His power and He works today in His power in saving people. Those of us who are Christians, it is not because we decided, or reasoned it so, but because the power of God affected us, made us alive in Christ by His Spirit. Being a Christian involves the resurrection power of God in our lives. Mary then draws our attention to:

D. His Holiness - Mary in praising God as her Saviour, having owned He had done great things for her by His power, then draws attention to, says an odd thing "*holy is His name*"(v49)! This is not a passing remark, but is crucial to grasping what is going on here, as to why the Son of God was in her womb and would be born to be the Saviour. It is the key to understanding His birth, life and also His death on the cross of Calvary - all because God is holy.

God is so holy He cannot tolerate anything less holy than He is, for it is disgusting, nauseating, highly offensive and He hates such. This is what sin - my sin, your sin is like to this holy God. It is falling short of God's glory and He hates it with an intensity

and hatred which only His holy nature can. Because of that He must deal with sin, for sin is not going to triumph and defeat God. He sent the Saviour out of love, prompted by His holy nature and so the Saviour is holy from the moment of His conception, from His birth, in His life He was without sin. He was separate from sinners, holy and undefiled all His life and yet He became sin for us in order to bring us to God. He became sin, not a sinner, and for our sin took God's holy and just punishment on Himself on the cross so that we could be spared and forgiven. God's holy justice and holiness is satisfied and His holy love can be extended to us and Mary draws our attention to something of this:

E. His Mercy - if God were only Almighty and holy then we would have no hope; but mercy is found in and with Him and so instead of wiping us out, He sent the Saviour into the world to deliver us from our own sin, its guilt, condemnation and its misery. We all know that sin has many pleasures, but sin has its misery too and it is an awful, agonising misery. The Israelites in Egypt were slaves and though they had food, homes, possessions, flocks, yet were miserable and cried to God and He rescued them, delivered them. God in His mercy rescued them and in His mercy still rescues all who go to Him through the Saviour He sent. Do we know God's mercy, or are we still in sin's pleasure and misery? Do we appreciate as believers the great mercy and favour shown to us by this God in sending heavens best for us? If we do then we are to turn that realisation into praise and adoration as did Mary.

F. His Faithfulness - God promised this Saviour from long ago – to Adam and Eve - the seed of the woman would come, to Abraham that He would be the seed through whom God would

bless all nations. Mary as she scanned the whole of OT saw the One she was carrying in her womb to be the fulfilment of all God's promises and she drew attention to God's faithfulness at the end of v55. We are to recognise that Christmas is a glorious reminder of God's faithfulness, this God can be trusted because He is so reliable and trustworthy. You may feel that it is fine for me, but you say that is not true for you. Yet this Saviour is still offered to all and if we trust Him wholly, we will find Him wholly true. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us, He will never let us down. He is as faithful to His promises in our days as He was in the time of Mary and we will find they include us and He will keep His word and promises to us – in and for our lives and for the heaven He has promised.

I hope we have learned from Mary that the true Christmas feeling should be one of amazement, wonder, praise and joy and it is based solely on God and what He has done, is doing, can do and will do in our lives. I pray we would all know this Saviour that prompted such pre-first-Christmas feelings in Mary and we too would have the joy of the Lord as our Saviour all our days and we would always marvel at God sending His Son to be the Saviour of the world, and marvel even more that He sent Him to be our Saviour.