

The True Spirit of Christmas (Part 2)

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[0:00] Luke chapter 1 and 5 verse 46 and we've been looking at last Sunday and again this Sunday.

! I'm really focusing on the first few verses of it and drawing from it a very important truth about the spirit of Christmas, the true spirit of Christmas.

And we'll get back to that here in just a minute. But let me read verses 46 through verse 50, okay?

And Mary said, Fear Him from generation to generation.

And that is marvelous, are marvelous words. And the entire psalm is tremendous. We call this Mary's Magnificat.

The angel Gabriel, you see, had made a visit to Mary. You know the story.

[1:50] I mean, we all know the Christmas story very well. Not just Luke chapter 2. Perhaps the most familiar part of Scripture that describes the birth of Jesus.

But we also know the story about the angel and the angel Gabriel coming to Mary. And he did come and he had a divine visitation with her and made an incredible announcement to her.

And we're talking about Mary. This young Jewish girl. Young maiden.

Who was espoused, the Bible tells us, or engaged to be married to a man by the name of Joseph. She's a virgin.

And this virgin is going to have a child. And you might remember, in fact, let me just remind you what the angel said to her back there in verse 28 of chapter 1.

[2:53] Let me read that to you again. You can follow along if you want to in your Scriptures. And having come in, the angel said to her, Rejoice, highly favored one.

The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women. That was his first announcement to her. How did she react? Well, the Bible says that when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying.

And considered what manner of greeting this was. I mean, literally, what's this all about? Then the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. What an announcement that this angel gave to Mary.

[3:51] And how important that is to her. And it was this announcement that led her, eventually, to make this psalm.

To really compose within her, within her heart and through her lips, this psalm of praise. But what an unbelievable announcement.

I mean, this is incredible, isn't it? Would you have believed it if you had been married? Not any of us, I would assume, I think it's safe to assume, not any of us have ever had an angel visitation.

If you have, well, I started to say I'd love to talk with you afterward. But that would be a bit unbelievable. Though angels could still do that. But none of us have had this kind of visitation.

And certainly none of us have ever been told such a thing that Mary was told on that day. Would you have believed it? Did Mary believe it?

[5:04] Well, yes. She did believe it. Though I might add here that she did kind of go out of her way to seek some kind of confirmation.

Did you know that? It's interesting. And I think it's a reasonable conclusion that the angel, in his announcement to her, not only the part that I read, but the part that I didn't read, what came next, the angel really did give her a way to confirm the validity, or, if nothing else, that he was a bonafide messenger of God.

Why else do you think Mary traveled to see her cousin Elizabeth? Now think about this. Remember, and we don't have to go back and read it, you remember the story, the angel also told Mary something very important about her cousin Elizabeth.

The angel said that she too was going to have a baby. In fact, she was already pregnant. And so the angel shared that with Mary, and that in itself was an amazing announcement.

Elizabeth in her old age. Elizabeth who had been barren all these years, and the angel told Mary that Elizabeth was now, very specifically, in her sixth month.

[6:30] Pretty specific information. And so then the Bible tells us that Mary went to visit with Elizabeth. And I think it's safe to assume that she went to check it out.

Not because she didn't have any faith. I think the angel purposefully shared that little bit with her so that she could verify that, at the very least, he was a bonafide messenger of God, of Yahweh God. And so she went to visit Elizabeth to check that out. And I think in her thinking that if the angel was right about Elizabeth's condition, then he must also be right about what was going to happen to her, to Mary.

And so when she came to Elizabeth and she saw Elizabeth, and as soon as she saw Elizabeth, and that she was with child, and learned that she was in her sixth month, Mary then, her heart rather, erupted in praise and worship.

I think maybe she suddenly thought in her heart, it's true. What the angel said is true. And what the angel said about me is true.

[7:39] God's word is true. And so she said, my soul magnifies the Lord. She said, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Now, I believe that we have here a profound demonstration of the true spirit of Christmas from this story that occurred on that very first Christmas.

And as I mentioned last week, we have other demonstrations of it in the Christmas story. We have the shepherds who came, and what did they do? They worshiped. We have the wise men who were looking for Jesus there in Jerusalem, and they eventually did find Him, but they said, we're looking for Jesus so that we can go and worship Him.

Even Herod said that he wanted to worship Him. And that's the true spirit of Christmas. And it's worship.

The true spirit of Christmas, as much as we enjoy these aspects of Christmas, the true spirit of Christmas is not gift-giving. Some of the younger ones might say, well, you're right.

[8:48] It's gift-getting that's the true spirit of Christmas. But it's not that, is it? Well, that's an important part of how we celebrate this holiday. And let's not remember the source of that, or what ought to be the source of the gift-giving.

I mean, why do we give gifts at Christmas time? Because the greatest gift was given to us. And yet, the gift-giving is not necessarily, in and of itself, the true spirit of Christmas.

Turkey and all the trimmings is not the true spirit of Christmas, though you may choose some other kind of meat during the holiday. Or desserts and such.

And even family and friends, as they gather, and we're going to have a great Christmas this year.

Crowded house, but we're going to have a great Christmas. All of our kids are going to be here.

My mom and dad are going to be here for a few days. And I look forward to that and enjoy that.

Don't you enjoy that? Having family, whether you travel so that you can meet with family, or they travel to come to you, and you get together, and for that day, it's just a special time, isn't it?

[9:53] And yet, as wonderful as that is, that is not the true spirit of Christmas. Carol singing is not the true spirit of Christmas.

Brightly lit decorations, and Christmas trees, and Santa Claus, and reindeer, and little elves with pointed ears. And as much as we may enjoy some of that feature or aspect of the holiday, that certainly is not the true Christmas spirit.

And I think we do get close to the true spirit of Christmas when we ponder the nativity. That nativity scene, that is how we kind of have, over the years, conceptualize what it must have looked like.

We glean certain things from Scripture, and we kind of put it together. And I think we get close to that when we look at the nativity, however it may be set up.

And we have, of course, the shepherds are there, and Mary and Joseph are there, of course. And though the wise men did not come to the stable, or come to where Jesus was born, we usually have them there as well.

[11:03] And we have other characters, maybe we have the little drummer boy there. I don't know where we get that. And other characters, you know. We have several sets there, nativities in our home, and we have many other characters that are there.

But the important thing is that they're all surrounded around a centrifugal point, which is, of course, Jesus.

The little baby Jesus. Lying there, of course, in that animal feeding trough. And everyone there at the stable is surrounded around, even the cows and the goats and sheep and the shepherds, and they're all looking at that center focal point.

And it's Jesus. The focus. The focus of worship.

And I love the nativity. I keep talking about it every time I have preached during this holiday. I always mention the nativity. We must have a dozen of them in our home. I love them.

[12:17] I love to look at them. And so I'm saying to you that we get close to maybe understanding the true spirit of Christmas. That is, when we truly ponder the significance of the nativity and that center of it, that focal point.

And we really do worship. That's what the true spirit of Christmas is. It's worship. It really is. I tell you, really, the true spirit of Christianity in all seasons should be, ought to be, worship, worship of Christ.

That's the true spirit of Christmas. Now, last Sunday, we began to look at that and we, again, were using Mary's song of worship, her Magnificat, and we began there to look at what true worship is.

That is, gleaning from from what Mary said here and also gleaning the emotion of it as well. And first of all, as we saw last Sunday, that worship is internal in its reality.

It's internal in its reality. That is, it's something that comes from within. I tell you, dear people, we need to understand that about worship. And it is, perhaps, at that point, that many in the church today have gone astray in regard to worship.

[14:00] It's internal. It comes from within. within. It does not come from without in the sense that Jonathan, though he can lead us and does lead us in worship, he cannot create it.

And the choir, they did such a wonderful job this morning to bless my heart and the words of what they sang stirs in our souls. But, they can lead in that sense and remind us of the truths of God's Word and worship takes place but they don't create that.

I believe worship also takes place and even primarily should take place around the preaching of God's Word and this preacher wants to preach God's Word but I cannot create worship.

I cannot make you worship. Cannot manipulate you into some form of worship. Now, certainly, Jonathan and the choir and special soloists and other kinds of things and even preachers can create something that looks like worship.

That by all indication appears to be and in some cases is because it takes place in the individual hearts of God's people.

[15:25] And then when we come together, of course, and we're all engaged in true worship, then we call that corporate worship and there is a dynamic about that that is just such a blessing.

and yet it comes from within. And we learn this from Mary. She said, my soul magnifies the Lord. That's inside. And just to make sure we didn't miss it, God inspired her to say, my spirit, my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

Soul, spirit, inside. inside. See, now I'm not just talking about an emotional response. Don't misunderstand me. And I'm not just talking about a feeling that she had.

That feeling that comes from inside. Though emotion is often attached to it. And I think true worship almost always triggers some kind of emotional response.

[16:24] I'm not denying that. But I'm not talking about emotion per se. when you and I stand or look and ponder again, the nativity.

I want that to be our focus here. When we ponder that nativity, what happens when we really begin to think about it?

And we look deep into the significance of it. What happens when you consider who that baby is lying there in that manger?

He's not just simply a cute little Jesus boy. That He is God in human flesh. And then when you go further and ponder why He came and the significance of that for your life and my life not only in this life but for all eternity.

And we begin to consider that. What begins to bubble up in your soul and in your mind? And when you read or hear it quoted what the angel said to the shepherds for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.

[17:49] A Savior. A Savior. When you hear that or read that and ponder that consider that what happens inside of you.

Worship is internal. And I say it's internal in its reality because certainly if it's going to come from inside it must come from a reality a spiritual reality in your heart and in your life that can only come through the new birth through faith in Christ.

Alright so worship is internal in reality and then second as we saw last week because I've got to put all these together. Worship is intense in its response.

Here's where perhaps we consider the emotion of it. The feeling of it. The expression of it.

Because Mary certainly expressed emotion. I mean you can't read her psalm of praise without sensing the deep emotion that was involved here.

[19:06] And so I say it's intense in its response. And Mary said my soul magnifies the Lord. It's an interesting word. Magnifies.

Or more literally she said my soul is enlarged and enlarging. And it's just getting bigger and bigger as it wells up inside of me.

She said my soul is enlarged and enlarging at what the Lord has said he will do. I tell you that is a perfect definition of worship.

It is. You see we don't worship because we just really like the sound of a certain piece of music. Music because music in and of itself can be a catalyst for emotion.

I mean you can listen to some pagan music and it can stir something inside. So you notice not the music. Worship yes comes from inside but it does have a source and the source is revelation.

[20:25] It's God's words. It's what God said and what he has promised and what he said he will do and what he reminds us that he has done and what it says about his character and nature and purposes and we could go on and on.

It comes from revelation and that in effect is what she said my soul magnifies the Lord it is enlarged and enlarging at what the Lord has said he will do.

This is intense worship. There's no denying it. And the intensification of course varies obviously from person to person sometimes well we're all wired just a little bit differently for one thing.

Not just the difference between men and women but even within genders we're just wired differently and so forth and so the intensification or the magnification of it in terms of how it might be observed and emotion are going to be different and yet still we must admit that true worship is intense intense in its response and then to again punctuate it she said my spirit rejoices in God my Savior or literally overjoyed or to put it even more literally an out loud kind of joy this is incredible when you think about it C.S.

Lewis said it was being surprised by joy that's an interesting way of putting it and he asked this question how long has it been since you were surprised by joy just bursting out from inside of you many of us it may perhaps has been a long time and so worship is intense in its response someone has said shallow observance of the birth of Christ is distasteful to God and most of what goes on at the Christmas season breaks his heart God put it this way in Isaiah chapter 29 verse 13 these people he said draw near me with their mouths and honor me with their lips but have removed their hearts far from me and their fear toward me is taught by the commandment of men or maybe we could put it this way maybe a holiday translation of that might go like this they talk about me they put things about me in their

[23:13] Christmas cards they place nativity scenes in their yards and in their homes they sing my carols they even speak of quote the Savior's birth but I do not have their hearts and that is really all I want for Christmas I put words in God's mouth now let me give you two more things this morning to consider about true worship which is the real spirit of Christmas it is internal in its reality intense in its response and true worship is invincible in its resolve invincible in its resolve we need to understand this about true worship because our worship is hit and miss quite often it's here then it's gone we feel it and experience it and then it's nowhere to be found it seems and a lot of it is because we have misunderstood understood what real worship is and true worship is invincible in its resolve again the word magnifies helps us understand this when Mary used the word magnify again as she was inspired by the Holy

Spirit the word itself in the Greek language is a in a certain tense it's a verb certain tense and this is important I think in our study of scripture commentaries will sometimes bring this out if you know most of us aren't real familiar with the Greek language and how that works but it's a verb and a certain tense of the verb it is a present tense and say well what does that mean among other things it carries this idea that it is an action because all verbs are action it's an action that is continuous and that's what Mary said my soul magnifies the Lord that's why I translated it a moment ago my soul is enlarged and enlarging it's a continuous action it goes on and on and worship is not just attached to one specific event or some certain special moment though there are special moments and there are special events of worship but worship true worship is an ongoing thing there may be varying intensifications of it in terms of of emotion and feeling and and experience and that's all up to

God how he works that out but true worship is not an up and down or really a hit and miss thing a here today and gone tomorrow maybe here the next day it's an ongoing thing it cannot be stopped and ever changing circumstances of life and we all have those don't we I mean the circumstances of life are always changing and there are ups and downs in life some big ups and some big downs and then a whole lot in between and I am saying to you that ever changing circumstances of life do not have any impact on true worship they do not it's hard for us to understand that and see that but true worship is invincible it cannot be stopped by circumstances and this is something I think God wants us all to learn about true worship

I mean just think about Mary I mean when she is composing this psalm and singing it in a sense to the Lord she is pregnant and she has no husband think of that that she would be pregnant out of wedlock in a sense and the scandal of it I know we can't prove it necessarily from scripture I think there are some intimations in scripture about this and yet I really believe there were people in her own town who knew that she was pregnant and yet not Mary now think of that would that have any kind of damper on your worship now you might say well but Mary knows the truth and she knows that she is carrying the very son of God and so forth and yet

I don't think that just totally removed little snide comments that might be directed toward her and little things I think it's one reason why when Joseph well all of Israel was commanded to take this census by Caesar Augustus and they were to travel and be counted in the place of their birth their hometown and for Joseph that was Bethlehem I think it was that for Mary as well but historians tell us that Mary was not required to go and yet Joseph took Mary with her could it be that she needed to get out of town that he was protecting her what I'm trying to suggest to you albeit embellishing it some things maybe we don't know I'm trying to suggest to you that true worship is invincible and circumstances cannot destroy it and not just simply the thing about her birth but just think of who she is and the poverty of her life and the hardship of her life traveling and having a child and possibly some stable or maybe it was even a cave or who knows where exactly it was see her worship was invincible and ours ought to be too because circumstances cannot change it true worship is to become a way of life for God's people certainly expressed in many different ways it doesn't have to happen just here we call this a worship service but really worship is ongoing and it should be such a part of our life an ongoing part of our life and just flows from a soul our soul that cannot and it cannot be interrupted and cannot be destroyed or changed by circumstances and you're probably asking why is that

[30 : 32] I mean how can you say that because worship is to be fixed on something that cannot change what would that be well let me name a few God never changes is the one true God Yahweh God your God is he yours you belong to him he never changes Jesus never changes the same yesterday today and forever he never changes our salvation we have in him never changes although the knowledge of it gets fuller our gratitude because of it gets greater and yet our salvation does not change God's promises do not change God's love never changes never changes so ask yourself why should my worship change why should it rise and fall why should it ebb and flow true worship does not it does not now the emotional expressions of it are varying and sometimes the worship is very private and inside and not expressed with emotion sometimes it takes place in private sometimes corporately and so the emotion and the activity in regard to the expression of worship does change but our worship of the

Lord true worship does not change and so you know if you've bought into the idea that worship can only happen you know on Sundays when we meet here corporately and when the atmosphere is just right and when the mood is just right and when the music is just right and when the preaching is

just right you know what I'm talking about if you think that's what it takes for you to worship then you're kidding yourself and it certainly wasn't the case with marriage worship is a constant praise that comes from deep within the soul and spirit because that which is spiritually true is unchanging it's unchanging and spiritual truth is the stuff of which worship is made so the true spirit of Christmas what is it it's worship internal in its reality intense in its response invincible in its resolve and finally it is humble humble you want the alliterative point it's ignoble in its rationality how about we just stick with humble verse 48 would you look at that again for he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant

I'll tell you that what a humble state truly humble for he has regarded the lowly state that is the humble condition of his maidservant you know we have the tendency I think and it's natural we're honest about it but we have the tendency to evaluate God's choosing of Mary based upon some goodness in her or something unique about her or some merit about her life we kind of do that have a tendency to do that with a lot of the major characters of the Bible you know to think that somehow Mary was special or that maybe Mary was even sinless as

Catholicism teaches or at the very least that she was deserving more deserving than any other woman of her day now don't misunderstand me I believe Mary was a godly woman a chaste godly woman who loved the Lord I'm not minimizing that at all but really there was nothing particularly special about her at least in her relation to other women of her day just a common woman now she was of the house and lineage of David and in that sense they gave her some kind of you know certainly a royal pedigree in a sense but many other women of her day had that same pedigree so what was special about her nothing and really that fact is what further fueled her worship because she was nothing and so it was just so unbelievable to her really and it would be to you and to me unbelievable that God would choose her to be the mother of Jesus just beyond her thinking beyond her comprehension and she was just a humble common girl and so when Mary said for he has regarded the lowly state that's what

I wanted you to focus on there the lowly state of his maidservant she used a term there that meant that she was in a humiliated state of being that's what the word means that is again she was a nobody that's how she saw herself in relation to this grand glorious thing that she had been told and the grand and glorious thing that God was going to do in her and through her life that would impact the world she was just a nobody she was a nobody in every measurable way socially economically culturally intellectually she was a nobody she was a common handmaid she was just the wife of a common village carpenter and Joseph her husband to be he was a nobody he made plows and chairs and tables for a living the most unlikely family for the king of kings to be born into wouldn't you agree what an incredibly humble way for the lord of glory to come into this world but you see here's the point her unworthiness is all that Mary could think about and but that's the way it is really for those who have discovered the true spirit of Christmas or what true worship is someone has said that true spiritual or the essence true spirituality is that you don't think you have it we could get so prideful on so many different points in fact at every turn in our life there's always some source of pride and even this thing of being spiritual and holy can be a point of pride that was not the case with

[38:38] Mary and so this is what you and I must learn about worship humility is at the heart of true worship a constant sense of unworthiness an ever present sense of personal sinfulness an awareness that that you and I lack we lack any qualification for anything from the hand of God any blessing any goodness any gift from God we don't qualify for it in ourselves see if Mary said she was exalted above all women and she was it must have been because she was the lowest at the very lowest if you look at verse 48 and following there again what did

Mary say if he for he has regarded the lowly state of his maidservant for behold look henceforth! all generations will call me blessed for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name and his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation one of my favorite passages in Isaiah is Isaiah 57 in verse 15 where God says through the prophet Isaiah he said with us says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity whose name is holy I dwell this is God speaking I dwell in the high and holy place what an incredible verse I tell you he's up there God is he's up there way up there he dwells in the highest and holiest place he is the highest as Mary said and holy is his name and that's beyond me isn't it beyond you beyond us it's above us and I like Mary am in the lowly place and so the question is does he dwell in the lowly places too well the prophet went on to say not only is he the one that inhabits the high and holy place dwells there but with him

also who has a contrite and humble spirit he dwells with those who are humble to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones and that's pretty much what Mary said too she said his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation to generation our generation to so what is the true spirit of Christmas what is it worship worship what is true worship just this it is a deep heartfelt inner expression of intense gratitude and joy that bursts forth habitually and indestructibly from a humble soul who knows its utter unworthiness there it is that's worship and that's the true spirit of Christmas
Thank you.