

[SLIDE 1]

Today is the first Sunday of Advent – a season of waiting & anticipating the birth of Jesus; a season of hope, love, joy, and peace: preparing to celebrate God’s coming. It’s sorta like Lent for Christmas. We like to celebrate Christmas, but, just as Easter isn’t really Easter without Lent, Christmas isn’t really Christmas without Advent.

We all have something which stirs up the Christmas spirit and gets us excited. One of those things for me is certain Christmas music. But, I’m a bit picky about this; “Jingle Bells” and “Rockin around the Christmas Tree” don’t cut it. There’s one song which never fails to stir up the Spirit of Christ in me: “O Come O Come Emmanuel.” The quintessential Advent song. If I don’t sing this, Advent just doesn’t happen for me. Listen:

*Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel!*

Nothing says “Christmas!” quite like a nation of captured people mourning in lonely exile, right?

You probably have a favorite Christmas/Advent song too. Turns out Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke, did too. As we celebrate Advent over the next four weeks, we’ll be looking at four songs in the narrative of Jesus’ birth as recorded in Luke’s Gospel – songs of revolution. The first song is one you’ve heard before, probably the most revolutionary one of all (and, of course, Jason asks the intern preach). Let’s listen together as Mary’s sings in Luke 1:46-55:

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*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with
favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those
who fear him from generation to generation.*

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*He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the
hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in
remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and
to his descendants forever*

[PRAY]

Mary’s song, also known as the Magnificat; what’s she singing about? She’s just arrived at her relative Elizabeth’s house after being visited by the angel Gabriel who’s told her of God’s awesome work through the baby now growing in her womb. Elizabeth is also miraculously pregnant. Her own baby leaps for joy when Mary arrives. Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, begins

shouting praises to God for Mary and her baby. Mary too breaks out in joyous song. Is this how your family gatherings at Christmas usually go? ...Didn't think so. Something big is happening and it makes me want to sing along.

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Mary sings of God's mercy, and remembrance of promises made to her ancestors, all the way back to Abraham. A long time coming. There's some history we need to know here if we want to sing Mary's song... and we definitely want to sing Mary's song. So, let's put ourselves in Mary's story, the story of God's chosen people Israel, which has become our story too.

Mary grounds her song in God's promises to Abraham in the book of Genesis. God chose Abram to be the founder of a great nation, one that would be chosen and blessed by God to be the channel of God's blessing for all the earth. God would be their God; they, God's people. They would be a holy people because the Holy One would be present at the center of their lives. But Israel struggled to be God's people. Eventually, prophets arose and cried out for Israel to return to God. When they refused to listen, their promised land was pillaged and their nation was captured. Israel "mourned in lonely exile" and wondered if God's promises were still true. In this darkness, new prophets rose up and proclaimed the coming light. God desired redemption. God was still faithful to the promises. Israel would be restored and God would permanently reside among the people. Everything would be set right. God's presence in Israel would be a signal of God's intention to renew all creation. Hope. Israel rescued from exile; the world made new. It happened... mostly. Israel was delivered from exile but they still struggled to be faithful and God seemed to be moving slower than expected. The Old Testament ends with Malachi prophesying about a time when Israel would be God's "treasured possession," when "the sun of righteousness [would] rise with healing in its wings." After this prophecy, Israel waited 400 years for God to fulfill their hope for salvation.

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Mary's song embodies Israel's hope hundreds of years in the making. Notice her words: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in," who? In "God my Savior." She calls God "Savior"; she was hoping for salvation. We talk of Jesus & salvation a lot don't we? Does our talk about salvation sound like Mary's? Do we talk of bringing down oppressive rulers, lifting up the poor and powerless, satisfying the needs of the hungry, or sending the rich away empty handed? Not so much. We like to talk about sins being forgiven, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and how that event made us right with God, bringing eternal life. We sing about salvation and justification – the teaching of how our relationship to God as sinners is made right – as if they were the same. In other words, salvation just takes care of my sin and your sin and gives us eternal life. This doctrine is essential to God's work of salvation, but our picture of salvation is woefully incomplete if all we see is justification, our individual reconciliation with God. It's like saying that all you really need to know about a car is the steering wheel. Salvation is SO much

bigger – big enough for the redemption and restoration of all people, places, and created things. We need a bigger vision of salvation and Mary’s song gives us a glimpse.

Mary’s salvation song was rooted in God’s promised presence with the people of Israel, a presence the prophets spoke of being renewed in a special way. When Mary walked through Elizabeth’s door, they both knew: God is coming, the time is now, and salvation is here! All she could do was sing. But what does she sing about?

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In a word: reversal. For Mary, salvation is a great reversal in two dimensions – personal and social. In Jesus, God would set everything right by turning it all upside down – sounds like a revolution. Mary describes herself as God’s humble, lowly servant. She had very little power as a young virgin in the world she inhabited. Vulnerable, poor, and no children to bring her honor or status. When Mary says she’s “lowly,” she’s not just making a pretty metaphor – she is actually low. It’s ridiculous, completely preposterous, for someone like her to even *imagine* singing a song like this. But God had remembered her – the lowly, humble servant. God was coming through *her* baby boy. Salvation was coming through *her* child. The “Mighty One” of Israel, the Creator King, has done great, wonderful things for whom? For Mary. Holy God, ruler of all, looked upon Mary with loving care. She sings recognizing God’s work in her as infinite grace. This first dimension of salvation’s great reversal was as personal as personal gets. The world refused to see her, God did! And Mary’s life changed forever. Her personal hope in God’s salvation was being realized right then and there. God was here... IN HER!

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But it doesn’t stop there. The great reversal of salvation goes beyond Mary and fills the whole earth. When God’s mercy is shown in salvation, the proud are scattered, the mighty are humbled, the rich are sent away empty-handed. Reversal; the powerless exalted, the hungry satisfied. What God is doing in and for Mary, God will do in and for the world. Salvation will tear down sinful structures of injustice that cause all people to suffer. She sings for a world where the powerless aren’t oppressed, the poor don’t go hungry. It’s coming. For Mary, God’s approaching salvation in Jesus had personal consequences, but it also had social consequences. God’s saving Mary, and God’s saving Israel, but that’s not all – in Jesus, God is taking it all back; all would be restored, all would be made new, salvation would be for all creation!

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Are you catching a glimpse of Mary’s hope for salvation? It’s a complete restoration to wholeness and peace. Physical, spiritual, and social healing comes personally to all the world has forgotten. Community is restored as all people humble themselves before God. Sin is forgiven and lives are transformed in the newness of God’s presence. Persons and communities are liberated from evil, oppressive structures. All are invited to know God and join in the work of the

present-yet-future kingdom. Reconciliation between God and humanity overflows into reconciliation between neighbors; love for God and love for neighbor, the beloved community. Peace and justice rule the day as God's original intent for creation is restored and God's image is reflected in community once again. This is Mary's song; this is Mary's hope. When her Savior comes, all creation is made new!

Mary sings unable to contain her joy at the hope of God's salvation being fulfilled in her and the world. As an Israelite, she had been waiting hundreds of years for God's arrival. When God came again salvation would break forth, people and societies overturned. All creation renewed as a community flourishing under God's peace. This is Mary's hope, but is it our hope? Is it your hope?

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Mary holds up a mirror to us and our world: what stands in need of reversal this morning? How is God overturning us? How is God overturning the world? Mary surrendered to God as a humble, lowly servant and God lifted her up. But, we struggle to surrender to God like that. We want God to lift us up, to fulfill our needs, but we struggle with placing our hope in the wrong things: ourselves, others, or objects. At the core of our beings, we struggle with certain personal tendencies towards sin. The outward sinful behaviors tearing us apart, breaking down our community, and eroding our relationships are mere symptoms of this core sin tendency. Like Mary, God will lift us up! But I wonder if our core sin is keeping us from offering our whole selves to God this morning like Mary did. We all have something inside of us that stands in need of salvation, in need of a great reversal, this morning. What's denying God's work of salvation in you?

Maybe something comes to mind right away, but if not, I want to offer a guide. It's a tool known as the Enneagram and I offer it simply as a model to assist in identifying your core sin tendency. However, the Enneagram won't heal you – that belongs to God's gracious work of salvation in you and to you through your faith community. So, the Enneagram identifies 9 types of people based on their core needs and their corresponding core sin tendencies:

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- Ones need to be perfect and are tempted with self-righteous anger
- Twos need to be loved and needed and show pride with how they use others to satisfy these needs
- Threes need success and are tempted to be deceitful in order to avoid failure
- Fours need to be special and are tempted towards envy, escapism, and loss of integrity
- Fives need knowledge and are tempted by greed, stinginess, and critical detachment
- Sixes need security and are tempted by fear, self-doubt, and cowardice
- Sevens avoid pain and are tempted by gluttony and intemperance

- Eights need power, self-reliance, and something to criticize and are tempted to lust, arrogance, and the desire to control and possess
- Nines need emotional peace and avoid initiative and are tempted by laziness, comfortable illusions, and being overly accommodating¹

Is one of these types resonating with you? In Mary's song we hear of God's desire for the reversal and healing of our core sins, so that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ for the sake of the world.

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We can't forget the rest of Mary's song though. God's work of salvation did not stop with Mary and it does not stop with us. The same sin that God is reversing in us is being reversed in the world. Why? Because it's all the same. We're conveniently deceived when we fail to see the connection between our personal sin and oppressive structures of sin in our world. What do I mean? Here's one example. The sex industry – pornography – in the US generates about \$12 billion annually, \$57 billion globally. In August 2006, a survey reported 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women were addicted to pornography.² Viewing pornography dehumanizes you, it objectifies the human beings on the screen, and it destroys intimacy in your relationships. It's a horrible addiction, but it's just a personal thing right? No. Here's the other side of our personal obsessions with sex: 1.2 million children are trafficked for sex every year at an average age of 12-14 years old. Nearly 30 million children – the population of 20 Philadelphia's – have lost their childhood through sexual exploitation in the past 30 years.³ This is just one example of the suffering that comes when the sin in us is reproduced in global structures of sin and evil.

How big is your hope for salvation this morning? Is it as big as Mary's? Does it include a vision for a renewed family, for restoration of our community? Do you long to walk down peaceful streets in Philadelphia? Are you waiting in expectant anticipation for life together in community across all boundaries of race, class, age, and gender? Is the end of extreme poverty in our world beyond your vision? Will you dare to believe God's promise that children are too valuable to be sold as sex slaves? Can we dream of a life that is lived in mutual care and respect for the land and animals which sustain us? God is coming with salvation, with healing, with reversal, for the whole world. Do we believe it this morning?

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Yes, it's daunting work, it will require our complete surrender, a coordinated effort of the entire Body of Christ, and we may never see it complete, but this is our vision – this is God's vision; a

¹ David Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004), 69-70.

² <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/01/06/updated-pornography-statistics/>

³ <http://www.crisisaid.org/ICAPDF/Trafficking/traffickstats.pdf>

vision of hope for all creation. Will we sing Mary's revolutionary song of hope in God's community-restoring, world-renewing, peace-creating work of salvation coming to life in Jesus Christ? What needs reversal in our own hearts? How is God convicting us to join the work of reversal in this community and beyond? I don't know where you've placed your hope this morning, but I want you to know that the cause of Jesus Christ is the only cause that has a future today. Hope in anything else is no hope at all.

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Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by your drawing nigh, Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight. Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind; Oh, bid our sad divisions cease, And be yourself our King of Peace. Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free! Born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring!