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*A Different Kind of Joy*  
*Luke 1:39-55*

*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[e]</sup> a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."*

<sup>46</sup> *And Mary<sup>[f]</sup> said,*

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,*

<sup>47</sup> *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

<sup>48</sup> *for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.*

*Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,*

<sup>49</sup> *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*

*and holy is his name;*

<sup>50</sup> *indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him*

*from generation to generation.*

<sup>51</sup> *He has shown strength with his arm;*

*he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

<sup>52</sup> *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones*

*and lifted up the lowly;*

<sup>53</sup> *he has filled the hungry with good things*

*and sent the rich away empty.*

<sup>54</sup> *He has come to the aid of his child Israel,*

*in remembrance of his mercy,*

<sup>55</sup> *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,*

*to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

What did YOU hear in Mary's song?

This is known as **Mary's Magnificat** (*Magnificat means Joy or Rejoice*)

And we hear that all generations will call her **blessed**.

And we might think of all the places we see that word today---on home décor, blankets, signs, and social media posts #blessed...

But isn't this a *different kind of blessing*?

Isn't this a *different kind of joy*?

Not everything was #blessed for Mary, or Joseph, or the newborn Savior!

I think we forget *how difficult the circumstances* around Jesus birth really were....

I think we forget how hard it was for *Joseph* whose fiance was with child, but not his own ...how he could have divorced her, she could have been stoned, how scandalous it would have been for their families—*Mary*--a young engaged pregnant virgin,

claiming that it was all by the power of God's Holy Spirit...

not to mention how crazy it would have been for them to be *traveling* at Jesus' birth, no room for them to stay inside,

given only a lowly *manger* for their baby's bed...

Today we think of Christmas as a *picturesque holiday*

where we are *surrounded* by friends and family,

but Mary and Joseph were miles away from theirs,

and the newborn Savior was in a barn!

Today we emphasize the *décor, and gifts and food*,

But it was probably a couple years later that the wise men came bearing their gifts, and our Savior was born IN a feeding trough,

NOT surrounded by food and gifts like we are today.

The truth is we've *made Christmas into something so different*.

We know that over 2000 years ago, Jesus' birth

*changed the course* of human history,

But, that was something *far more revolutionary*

than the kind of Christmas the world celebrates!

I mean, what we are really celebrating?

We celebrate the *birth of a SAVIOR—Jesus—*

Who is Emmanuel, God With Us.

A Savior who will *set* people *free*.

Who will bring *justice and peace*.

Who will *exalt the humble* and bring down the proud.

This is what Mary's song is all about--  
 She is blessed because she knows his birth is the fulfillment  
 of the prophecies about the Messiah, the Savior of the world,  
 coming to make things right, but also turn things upside down!

In fact, the prophet Isaiah tells of a Savior who will **change the world**,  
 and when Jesus' first preaches in the temple in Luke 4,  
 he reads from Isaiah's prophecy:  
 Listen to those words of promise from Isaiah 61:

*"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;  
 he has sent me to bring **good news** to the oppressed,  
 to bind up the **brokenhearted**,  
 to proclaim **liberty** to the captives, and **release** to the prisoners;  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's **favor**, and the day of vengeance of our God;  
 to **comfort** all who mourn; to **provide** for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a  
 garland instead of ashes, the oil of **gladness** instead of mourning,  
 the mantle of **praise** instead of a faint spirit."* Isaiah 61

Now listen to Mary's song:

*"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...  
 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.  
 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...."*

Did you **hear anything** about cookies, gifts, trees, presents, or family?  
 That's because the birth of Jesus is far more amazing, and revolutionary!  
 Because it's all about **compassion, mercy, and grace**,  
 Right in the middle of our fallen, broken world!

The birth of the world's Savior,  
 Is about someone coming to **set us free**, from sin.  
 It's about God making **things right**, in a world where so much is wrong.  
 It's about Jesus, **bringing us joy**, in the midst of pain.

That is Christmas.

That's what we really celebrate.

And it's far *different* from our Christmas movies or Christmas cards.

It's far different from Santa and presents under the tree,  
or commercials where people receive a shiny new car with a great big bow!

That's what *WE'VE made* Christmas.

What Jesus brings is *different*, don't you think?

When Mary left her family to go stay with her very old pregnant  
Aunt *Elizabeth*—

The two women *didn't get together* to bake cookies, or decorate the home,  
They gathered for *encouragement*, and support,  
And to *give praise* to God for  
the blessing and gift of their unborn sons!

They came to *celebrate the joy*—in the *midst* of chaos and confusion.  
They came to *praise God*, in the midst of crazy circumstances,  
Because they believed, against all the odds,  
that a newborn Savior—was coming into the world,  
to *FREE us, and CHANGE us, and SAVE us* from sin.

Mary's song can *INSPIRE us* to do something different this Advent,  
something *truly worthy of Christmas*—

We can *celebrate the joy*, of who Jesus is, and what Jesus does for us.  
What does that mean to you?

We can *praise God* for the mighty things he has done,  
and all the things that Jesus *will do* when he returns.

How can you do that in *your life? Today? This week?*  
How can you *celebrate the joy* that Jesus brings into our WORLD?  
How can you celebrate the joy that Jesus brings *to YOU?*

And you know what's great—

*we don't have to* be surrounded by friends or family to do that!

You don't need a tree, or lights, or any gifts!

All you need is *an open heart*.

These words about the *powerful, and revolutionary* Savior  
Who lifts up all who are lowly....

It reminds me one of my favorite sayings:

*God is good, all the time.*

*And all the time, God is good.*

Maybe we could *say that every day* this Advent!

Mary's words remind us that God is Good all the time,

Because *God keeps promises*...

And God brings goodness out of the pain of our lives.

Rev. Katherine Willis Pershey says,

*In these Advent weeks, we prepare to hear the wild and glorious story again: ...*

*this baby King's mother tells us what the **incarnation** means:*

*things are going to **change**.*

*Oppression will give way to **justice**.*

*Tears will flow into rivers of **laughter**.*

*The high and mighty will be **humbled**,*

*and a poor, unmarried mother will give birth to a **Savior**.*

<http://kewp.blogspot.com/2005/12/through-lens-of-magnificat-sermon.html>

Wow.

Mary's song is about *finding God, and finding joy*,

in the *midst* of the world's pain.

It's about finding God's mercy, grace, and help—

for everyone who *needs* that mercy, grace and help.

And that *includes every single one of us!*

So, what if we really *HEARD Mary's words this Advent?*

And *believed* them?

What would that mean in *your heart?*

What does it mean to you that God *does great things*,

That God has mercy,

lifts up the lowly,

fills the hungry,

and helps all who follow.

Some of my *favorite* verses in the Bible are *about finding God, and finding joy*,  
*Right in the* midst of suffering.

That's why I love verses in *Isaiah 43*, *Psalms 42*, *Lamentations 3*...  
and in the little known Old Testament prophet named **Habakkuk**, chapter 3:17-18.  
Do you know these beautiful words?

*Though the fig tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the pen  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> yet I will **rejoice** in the Lord,  
I will be **joyful** in God my Savior.*

And what about **1 Peter 1:3-8**?

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a **new birth into a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.....*

**6** *In this you **rejoice**, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials,*

**7** *so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in **praise and glory** and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

**8** *Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and **rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy**,*

Our passage today in **Isaiah 35** is full of joy and rejoicing—

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;*

*the desert shall rejoice and blossom;*

*like the crocus <sup>2</sup> it shall blossom abundantly*

*and rejoice with joy and shouting ...*

**3** *Strengthen the weak hands*

*and make firm the feeble knees.*

**4** *Say to those who are of a fearful heart,*

*“Be strong, do not fear!...”*

**5** *Then the eyes of the **blind** shall be opened,*

*and the ears of the **deaf** shall be opened;*

**6** *then the **lame** shall leap like a deer,*

*and the tongue of the **speechless** sing for joy.*

*For **waters shall break forth in the wilderness  
and streams in the desert;***

In my *Streams in the Desert NIV Bible* on December 14<sup>th</sup> is a beautiful reflection these verses:

*It is said that springs of sweet, fresh water pool up  
amid the saltiness of the oceans,  
and the fairest Alpine flowers bloom in the wildest and most rugged mountain  
passes, and that the most magnificent psalms arose from the most profound  
agonies of the soul...  
therefore, amidst a multitude of trials, souls who love God will discover reasons  
for boundless, leaping joy..and during the most difficult hour that could ever enter  
a human life, it will be possible to bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus  
Christ”* L.B. Cowman, NIV Streams in the Desert Bible pg. 1450.

I love that.

Amidst a multitude of trials (AKA our lives!)  
souls who love God will *discover reasons for leaping joy*,  
and will find opportunity to *bless God!*

We all have reasons to *love God, and celebrate God’s goodness*, don’t we?  
We just lose sight of it sometimes, in the pain of life.  
We all have reasons to *bless and thank God* for all that we have received, right?  
Loving and blessing God can bring us joy.  
Especially at Advent.

No matter what we are walking through, *we can look for God in our midst*.  
we can take time to see the sunrise or sunset,  
we can listen to children laughing at church,  
we can soak up beautiful music.  
We can find the sights and sounds that remind us of God’s goodness and love.  
Not to deny our pain, but to help us *make it through*.  
*How can YOU do that this week?*

Finding God’s goodness—*isn’t that what Christmas is all about?*  
*Joy*, in the midst of a *broken* world?  
Isn’t that what we really *celebrate*?  
Isn’t that what we really *need*?

I love the trees, and lights, the gifts and food,  
Friends and family,  
But what I really *need*—

what I really want to *celebrate*,  
is the fact that my *Savior brings joy* into the darkest night.

Because Christmas is not all lights and beauty.  
It's also has *darkness*.  
Which makes sense, given the *real story* behind Jesus' birth.  
John says Jesus came as a light shining in the *darkness*.  
That's the *reality* of Christmas, when you get right down to it.

Because no gift we receive, no party we attend,  
Can truly satisfy the deepest longing of our souls,  
the *salvation and joy* that we really need at Christmas.

Our world says that joy comes from being surrounded by friends and family.  
But many of us will *not see* those we love the most.  
Our world says that joy comes from opening gifts and eating together,  
But many of us will *shed tears*, that gifts and food cannot cure.

And you know what?  
The one who was born in Bethlehem came into *that world*,  
And that reality.  
He came, as a *light, shining* in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome Him.  
He came to bring *light and life* to a world that needs light and life.

What if we look for that light and life this Christmas?  
What if we count our blessings?  
What if we say this and believe it: *God is good, all the time!*

Friends, hear the *Good News of the Gospel*:  
In the midst of darkness, a Savior is born,  
And we celebrate *that joy at Christmas*,  
And we bless God for promises fulfilled.

That is the *Good News* of the Gospel.  
And all God's people said, Amen.