

December 2007

Believe!

Contents

- A study on Mary
- A Study on Joseph
- A Study on Jesus

A Christmas Series on learning to do more than believe 'in' the Christmas story by learning to believe 'on' the God who gave us the story.



Mary's Song **LUKE 1:46-55**

46 And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me

blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things

for me—

holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear

him,

from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his

arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in

their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their

thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,

even as he said to our fathers."

Warm Up: What's the thing you were most honored to be chosen for?

46-47: If glorifies means to lift up, or praise, how did Mary's life glorify God? How should our lives do the same?

48: What did Mary believe about herself? We talk a lot about self-esteem. What's appropriate versus inappropriate self-esteem?

49: For what you know about Mary, how did she believe ON her God for her life? Where in your life are you believing ON God?

50-55: Mary spends the rest of her song bragging on God. What things is she bragging about?

What are you proud of God for, and where do you brag about Him?

Application: How can our everyday lives glorify God?

What are some obstacles we have to God receiving glory from our lives?

What can this group pray about that you are trying to believe ON God for in your life?

Commentary

1:46-55. In response to the situation at hand Mary recited a song which praised God's favor on her and her people. "The Magnificat," as the song is called, consists almost entirely of Old Testament allusions and quotations. The same is true of the songs of Zechariah and Simeon (vv. 1:68-79; 2:29-32). Mary's song has similarities to Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10). First, Mary praised God for His special favor on her (Luke 1:46-50). Mary saw herself as part of the godly remnant that had served Yahweh. She called God my Savior (sōtēri mou) showing an intimate acquaintance with Him. She spoke of His faithfulness (v. 48), power (v. 49), holiness (v. 49), and mercy (v. 50). Second, Mary praised God for His special favor on Israel (vv. 51-55). Through the Child that she was to bear, God was being merciful to Abraham and his descendants. Mary was aware that the birth of her Child was a fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham and his people.

Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (2:206). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

46–47. Mary's song, often called the Magnificat because of the first word in the Latin translation, echoes many Old Testament passages, especially Hannah's similar song of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. My soul and my spirit (v. 47) are synonyms here and simply mean "I."

48–55. The theme of Mary's song is the reversal of fortune that God has already set in motion. God will exalt the humble, scatter the proud, bring down rulers, fill the hungry, and send the rich away empty.³⁰ It would appear that the humble and the hungry in this context refer to the righteous in Israel, and the proud, the rulers, and the rich refer primarily to Israel's enemies. Mary's words here, as do Zechariah's especially in the coming verses (see vv. 69–73), have a very nationalistic sound to them. God is helping his servant Israel by remembering his promises to Abraham. This is a very important point for Luke, in the Gospel and in Acts: God has been faithful to his word. (See introduction.) Israel will be restored. However, the restoration of Israel will not be as many envision it, perhaps Mary included. It will become increasingly apparent through the narrative that many in Israel are to be brought down and many outside Israel are to be exalted. There is a great division within Israel, and the faithful remnant in Israel will welcome those non-Israelites who respond to God's Messiah.

The humility of which she speaks is not only a matter of attitude but also refers to poverty and oppression, as Luke will make clear on numerous occasions. This coming reversal is one of Luke's major themes, seen most clearly in the Beatitudes (6:20–26) and the story of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31).

The fact that Mary speaks of God's coming judgment in the past tense (e.g., God has scattered the proud) may be an example of the "prophetic perfect," in which the prophet is so sure of the future that he or she can speak of it as having already happened; or, more likely, Mary is speaking about God's future acts of redemption by calling to mind his past mighty acts.

Black, M. C. (1996). Luke. College Press NIV commentary (Lk 1:46). Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub.

Matthew 2:13-15

The Escape to Egypt

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

“Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Warm Up: What in life has caused you to make your biggest adjustments? What were some of them?

13: Who is the ‘they’ in verse 13 and where did they go? If that visit just happened and this dream happened right after, what emotional state would this family be in?

If you were Joseph wouldn’t you want God to save you where you lived? Why does God ask us to do some things that don’t make sense to us?

“Stay there until I tell you...” what would be the most difficult parts of this command?

14. What is the significance of the timing statements in this verse (so he got up...during the night)? When God asks us to make major life adjustments how do we respond?

15. This is a prophecy from the book of Hosea. How does it help make sense of this story? What other Christmas prophecies can you remember? Why is prophecy important for our faith?

Application: How does God speak to you? How can you learn to listen better?

What keeps us from immediately obeying God like Joseph? What do we need to change?

2:13–14. Earlier suspicions concerning Herod’s evil intentions are now confirmed by angelic forewarnings of his malicious scheme. Once again, the angel of the Lord, by means of a dream, communicates critical information to Joseph designed to counter the imminent danger posed by Herod’s threat. Although seemingly vulnerable and powerless, the infant Jesus is nevertheless continually protected by means of divine intervention (cf. 2:12, 13–15, 19–22).

Angelic instructions call for an immediate move of the family to Egypt, a traditional place of refuge for Israelites facing political hostility in Palestine (1 Kgs 11:40; 2 Kgs 25:26; Jer 41:16–18; 26:21; 41:17; 43:1–7). In this instance the angel’s explanation for the urgency of departure is based upon Herod’s murderous intention. With the barest of details Matthew simply notes that Joseph departs, evidently the same night, for Egypt and remains there until the death of Herod (vv. 14–15). The evangelist seems much more interested in documenting Joseph’s explicit obedience than he is in detailing the family’s journey and stay in Egypt (cf. second-century Apocryphal Gospels).

Chouinard, L. (1997). Matthew. The College Press NIV commentary

(Mt 2:13). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

2:13-15. After the visit of the Magi, Joseph was warned by an angel of the Lord to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt. This warning was given in a dream (the second of Joseph’s four dreams: 1:20; 2:13, 19, 22). The reason was Herod would be searching for the Child to kill Him. Under cover of darkness, Joseph obeyed, and his family left Bethlehem (see map) and journeyed into Egypt. Why Egypt? The Messiah was sent to and returned from Egypt so that the prophet’s words, Out of Egypt I called My Son, might be fulfilled. This is a reference to Hosea 11:1, which does not seem to be a prophecy in the sense of a prediction. Hosea was writing of God’s calling Israel out of Egypt into the Exodus. Matthew, however, gave new understanding to these words. Matthew viewed this experience as Messiah being identified with the nation. There were similarities between the nation and the Son. Israel was God’s chosen “son” by adoption (Ex. 4:22), and Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Son. In both cases the descent into Egypt was to escape danger, and the return was important to the nation’s providential history. While Hosea’s statement was a historical reference to Israel’s deliverance, Matthew related it more fully to the call of the Son, the Messiah, from Egypt. In that sense, as Matthew “heightened” Hosea’s words to a more significant event—the Messiah’s return from Egypt—they were “fulfilled.”

Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (2:22). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Colossians 1:15-20

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Warm Up: What is the oldest thing in your possession? Why, or why isn't it important to you?

15: What can we know about God from this verse, and what do we know about Jesus specifically?

16-17. If this is Jesus, He obviously wasn't born on Christmas. So what are we celebrating this season?

How is this statement about Christ and creation reassuring to believers in a topsy turvy world?

18. Who is in charge of the church? How do we get this turned around sometimes?

"firstborn from among the dead" means what?

"so that in everything he might have the supremacy" is a huge statement. Where is it easy to give Him supremacy? Where is it tough?

19. How is this a Christmas verse?

20. How is this an Easter verse?

Application: What can we give Christ supremacy over in 2008?

What in our past still needs to be reconciled?

How can we put the cross at the center of lives, relationships and careers?

 Commentary

1:15. First, Christ is the image of the invisible God. Besides the obvious meaning of likeness (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), "image" implies representation and manifestation. Like the head of a sovereign imprinted on a coin, so Christ is "the exact representation of [the Father's] being" (Heb. 1:3). As Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Anyone who saw Christ, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, has thereby "seen" God indirectly. For "no one has ever seen God, but God the only Son . . . has made Him known" (John 1:18). Though the word "image" (eikōn) does not always denote a perfect image (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7), the context here demands that understanding. Second, Christ's supremacy is shown in His relationship to Creation. He is the Firstborn over all Creation. Though it is grammatically possible to translate this as "Firstborn in Creation," the context makes this impossible for five reasons: (1) The whole point of the passage (and the book) is to show Christ's superiority over all things. (2) Other statements about Christ in this passage (such as Creator of all [1:16], upholder of Creation [v. 17], etc.) clearly indicate His priority and superiority over Creation. (3) The "Firstborn" cannot be part of Creation if He created "all things." One cannot create himself. (Jehovah's Witnesses wrongly add the word "other" six times in this passage in their New World Translation. Thus they suggest that Christ created all other things after He was created! But the word "other" is not in the Gr.) (4) The "Firstborn" received worship of all the angels (Heb. 1:6), but creatures should not be worshiped (Ex. 20:4-5). (5) The Greek word for "Firstborn" is *prōtotokos*. If Christ were the "first-created," the Greek word would have been *prōtoktisis*. "Firstborn" denotes two things of Christ: He preceded the whole Creation, and He is Sovereign over all Creation. In the Old Testament a firstborn child had not only priority of birth but also the dignity and superiority that went with it (cf. Ex. 13:2-15; Deut. 21:17). When Jesus declared Himself "the First" (ho *prōtos*; Rev. 1:17), He used a word that means "absolutely first." "Firstborn" also implies sovereignty. The description "firstborn" was not a fairly common Old Testament designation of the Messiah-God. "I will also appoint Him My Firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth" (Ps. 89:27). While this regal psalm refers to David, it also designates the Messiah, as seen in Revelation 1:5, where Christ is called "the Firstborn from the dead (cf. Col. 1:18) and the Ruler of the kings of the earth." So "Firstborn" implies both Christ's priority to all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty over all Creation (in rank). **1:16-17.** The third characteristic of Christ is that by Him all things were created. In fact all things were created by Him and for Him and in Him they hold together (He is the constituting or conserving Cause). Christ is not only the One through whom all things came to be, but also the One by whom they continue to exist. Two other New Testament verses parallel this description of Christ: "Through Him all things were made" (John 1:3), and Christ the Son is the One "through whom [the Father] made the universe" (Heb. 1:2). **1:18.** Fourth, Christ is the Head of the body, the church. Besides being the Lord of the universe He is also the church's Head (cf. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). The reference here is to the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). Fifth, Christ is the Beginning (*archē*) and the Firstborn from among the dead (cf. Rev. 1:5). Christ was the first to rise in an immortal body (1 Cor. 15:20), and as such He heads a whole new order as its Sovereign (cf. "Firstborn" in Col. 1:15). Also Christ's resurrection marked His triumph over death (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). He was the "Firstfruits" of those who die (1 Cor. 15:20) since, unlike others, He rose never to die again. He "was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). So He continues to live "on the basis of the power of an indestructible life" (Heb. 7:16). All this is so that in everything He might have the supremacy. Christ is given first place over all Creation. He is preeminent. The same eternal Logos (John 1:1) who "became flesh" (John 1:14) and "humbled Himself" (Phil. 2:8) is now "exalted" by God the Father "to the highest place" and has been given "the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). **1:19.** The sixth description of the exalted Christ is that all God's fullness dwell[s] in Him. Later Paul wrote, "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9). Colossians 1:19 is one of the most powerful descriptions of Christ's deity in the New Testament (cf. Heb. 1:8). "Fullness" (*plērōma*), a key word in Colossians, is used in 1:19 and 2:9. (The verb *plēroō* is used in 1:9, 25; 2:10; and 4:17.) The noun means "completeness" and is used of a wide range of things including God's being (Eph. 3:19), time (Gal. 4:4), and grace in Christ (John 1:16). This full and complete Deity is said to "dwell" (*katoikēsai*, "abide lastingly or permanently") in Christ. **1:20.** The seventh feature of Christ is that He is the Reconciler. Through Christ God will reconcile to Himself all things. The phrase "all things" is limited to good angels and redeemed people since only things on earth and things in heaven are mentioned. Things "under the earth" (Phil. 2:10) are not reconciled. On God's restoring of nature, see comments on Romans 8:19-21; and on the reconciling of sinners, see comments on Romans 5:10-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. It is important to note that people are reconciled to God ("to Himself") not that God is reconciled to people. For mankind has left God and needs to be brought back to Him. In 2 Corinthians 5:19 "reconciliation" was used by Paul in a judicial (vs. an actual) sense in which the whole "world" is made savable through Christ's death. Paul spoke of "the many" (i.e., "those who receive God's abundant provision of grace") being "made righteous" through the Cross (Rom. 5:19). To make peace through His blood means to cause God's enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21) to become, by faith, His friends and His children (cf. Eph. 2:11-19).

Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:672). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Notes/Prayer Concerns:

**WESTBROOK/VENUES
SMALL GROUP**

2005 North Hendricks
Hutchinson, Ks, 67502
Phone: 620-663-4164
E-mail:
admin@westbrookbaptist.org



Priority: While you are in the group, you give the group meeting priority.

Participation: Everyone participates and no one dominates.

Respect: Everyone is given right to their own opinion and all questions are encouraged and respected.

Confidentiality: Everything that is said in this meeting is never to be repeated outside this meeting.

Empty Chair: The group stays open to new people at every meeting.

Support: Permission is given to call on one another in time of need—even in the middle of the night.

Advice Giving: Unsolicited advice is not allowed. We're here to support one another, not to fix one another.

Mission: We agree to do everything in our power to start a new group as our mission.