

# “Mary's Psalm”

Luke 1:39-56

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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The story broke in the summer of 2007. Maybe you remember. It was big news for a while. It even made the cover of "Time" magazine. And I remember buying a copy of "Time," opening it up and reading the story. It was titled, "Mother Teresa's Crisis of Faith."

"On Dec. 11, 1979," the story began, "Mother Teresa, the 'Saint of the Gutters,' went to Oslo. Dressed in her signature blue-bordered sari and shod in sandals despite below-zero temperatures, she received the ultimate worldly accolade, the Nobel Peace Prize.

In her acceptance speech, Teresa ... delivered the kind of message the world had come to expect from her. Christmas, she said, should remind the world 'that joy is real' because Christ is everywhere. He is in our hearts, in the poor we meet, in the smile we give and the smile we receive."

Yet days later, in a letter to a friend, Teresa spoke differently. "Jesus," she told her friend has a very special love for you. But as for me, the silence and emptiness in my soul is so great. I look and cannot see, listen and cannot hear. I have begun to doubt that God is with me. Pray for me."

Those two statements, "Time" magazine wrote, "are extravagantly dissonant." And they are. Ever had it happen to you? Ever had a sense that God was close to you one day. Then, a few days later felt like God was miles away? If you have then maybe you can understand Mary. Maybe you can understand how she might have felt a few days after the angel left her.

The angel had been right there, spoken to her. She'd heard him. He called her "highly favored," assured her God would overshadow her and make her the mother of the Messiah. And it had been easy to believe it when he was standing right there in front of her. It had been easy to say "I'm the Lord's servant. Let it be to me according to His word."

But now he was gone. And Mary was alone. And it wasn't easy to keep on

believing. It was easier to doubt

Doubt perhaps that she could do this after all. Doubt that her courage was up to it. Doubt that she could face her family, and friends, and fiancée with a story about an angel and a vision and a message from God. Did Mary wonder do you think if she had really seen it? Did she wonder if maybe she had only imagined it? Could she really have a child inside her?

Sometimes the distance between faith and doubt grows pretty small, doesn't it? And you measure it in months or weeks, but days or even hours. So Luke, always the good historian, starts the second episode in his story about Mary by saying, "At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea."

She went there, he says, to see Elizabeth. And maybe you've had the pleasure of having an Elizabeth in your life. Someone older than you, wiser, a mentor, somebody you knew you could turn to with questions or doubts? If you've ever had someone in your life like that, you can probably understand why Mary with her doubts hurried to see Elizabeth. It wasn't just because they were relatives. It was because Elizabeth was Mary's counselor, and probably had been for years.

Because of the difference in their ages, Elizabeth probably met Mary when she was a baby or a young girl. She probably visited her in Nazareth. And Mary had probably visited Elizabeth too. She knew the way to the house in the hill country. The journey would take her three or four days. And every day, along the way, Mary's doubts probably returned to her.

It was that way for Mother Theresa. Her letters reveal that it was in 1946 that she first saw Jesus in a vision. She heard him speak to her, ask her to serve Him and "the poorest of the poor." And in response she left her home in Albania to join a convent in India.

"I came to India," she writes, "with a desire to love Jesus as he had never been loved before, a desire to serve him as he had never been served before." But within days of starting to work in the slums of Calcutta, she started to feel alone. Here there was no vision, no voice. She wrote, "The darkness now is such that I don't see him anymore. I can no longer hear his voice. I'm alone."

And I suspect Mary would have understood Mother Teresa. For she too had a vision. And in her vision, an angel was there. But now she couldn't see him anymore. He spoke to her. But now Mary could no longer hear his voice. She

was alone, alone and on the road to see her cousin who would say ... what? What would Elizabeth say when Mary told her the story? Would she think Mary was joking? Would she laugh it all off?

And then she was there walking through the door to the house. And Mary called out to her cousin. And "when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting," Luke says the baby leaped in her womb ..." And at the same moment, "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you'll bear! And why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promise to her!'"

And that last line that always gets to me. I'm sure it got to Mary too, because it told her exactly what she needed to hear, exactly what we all need to hear when our doubt starts to grow larger than our faith. Doubt that we really heard God speak to us. Doubt that He was really calling us. Doubts that we're really going to be able to do what we've been asked to do.

But whenever those questions cross our minds, this is the story we need to remember. Because this is the part of Mary's life and legacy that can help us remember the truth. Listen. Faith is not the absence of doubt. Faith is the strength that faces doubt and decides to keep trusting the promises of God. "Blessed," says Elizabeth, "blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

That's all that Mary needs to hear. It takes only that much of the Holy Spirit's wind spoken through Elizabeth's words to fan Mary's faith back alive. And suddenly her mind shifts back from her doubts to God's promises. They all start coming back to her. Piling up in her mind, pouring out of her mouth. Past promises, promises God's kept. Present promises, promises God's fulfilling now. Future promises, promises that are going to prove true throughout all generations.

And together all the promises blend together into a Psalm of trust, Mary's Psalm. And the word that gets used in the Psalm more than any other? It's the word that "has." God has been mindful. He has done great things. He has performed mighty deeds. He has scattered the proud. He has brought down rulers. He has lifted the humble. He has filled the hungry. He has sent the rich away. He has helped his Israel.

Nine times in nine verses, Mary uses the word "has." Why? Because "has" is a word that talks about trust. It's a word that talks about the basis of trust. It tells you why God can be trusted. Oswald Chambers perhaps said it best. "Whatever God has done once, He can do again. Whatever He has done in the past, He can do in the present. Whatever He has done for others, He can do for you."

God can be trusted. He has kept His promises in the past. He can be trusted to keep His promises in the present and the future. That's the message of Mary's Psalm. So even when we doubt, or especially when we doubt, that's what we need to remember. And when she remembers that.

"My soul" says Mary, "magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

"I gave birth," Paul Tripp says, "to a son who just doesn't get gifts. My wife and I would go out when he was a boy, buy what we thought was a perfect gift, wrap it up in a big box with that fantastic Christmas paper they sell in the store, take it home, hide it and wait.

And on Christmas morning, we'd put it under the tree and wait for our son to wake up. He'd run down the stairs, spot the big box, open it first, and end up playing for hours ... with the box! But every time he did, it reminded me of something. As God's children, you and I have been given a gift too.

It's a gift of such grandeur that it's hard to wrap human vocabulary around it to explain it. It truly is the perfect gift and it's perfect in every possible way. It's a gift we need and could never give ourselves. But it's a gift God wanted to give us, a gift He promised to give us.

And He kept his promise, Paul says, But I'm convinced, he writes, that many of us are still playing with the box and not the gift. For the box is the baby and the gift is his whole life and the promises He made to us. For He is not only Immanuel, God who came to be with us as a baby. He is our Savior who lived and died and rose ago in order to promise us and say, 'Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

Do you believe that promise. If you do keep on trusting it. And trust it through your doubts. Remember, Mary did. Let's pray ...