

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Mary's Song

December 24, 2022
Luke 1:46-56

**BIG IDEA – IF WE TRULY UNDERSTAND CHRISTMAS, WE WILL
RESPOND AS MARY DOES**

Merry Christmas, Two Cities Church. My name is Kyle, and it's my honor, privilege, and joy to be the lead pastor here at Two Cities. One of the things we always say here is that we are a new church that believes very old things. We're a new church (we're six and a half years old), but we believe ancient things. One of the most ancient things we believe is the Christmas story.

It's what Christians have always believed. If you have to leave early, I'm just going to give it to you. What is the Christmas story? It's that we could not save ourselves, so God came to save us. We could not go to God, so God came to us. In the most surprising and shocking way, he came to us through a virgin birth of a teenage girl in a small town named Nazareth.

That's what we're going to talk about, but that's not what we normally talk about, as Americans, at Christmas. I mean, Christmas is kind of a strange time for us. We decorate our houses in ways that if you explained it to somebody... You're like, "Yeah, I cut a tree down outside and bring it inside."

"Why?"

"I hang outdoor lights inside."

"Why?"

"I hang big socks over the fireplace."

"Why?"

"I wear ugly Christmas sweaters."

"Why?"

There are a lot of things we do at Christmas. We take additional time off. We travel. We spend time with friends and family. Maybe what we do at Christmas more than we do any other time of year is sing. I mean, this doesn't happen as much anymore, but there used to be people who would just Christmas carol. How strange is that? They just knock on your door, and you open up, and they're like, "Can we sing you a song?" This is strange.

There's a whole genre of music. It's Christmas music or it's holiday music. There's Christmas music that's about the season, and there's Christmas music that's about the Savior. Christmas music that is about the season is like "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" or "All I Want for Christmas Is You" by Mariah Carey, which could be about the Savior if you were singing it to Jesus. That would be a little weird.

So, there are songs about the season. There are songs about the Savior: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," "O Holy Night," and "What Child Is This." We just love to sing at Christmas. I think it's because that's exactly what the first Christians did at Christmas. If you'll turn to Luke 1, we're going to be in Luke 1:46-56, looking at Mary's Magnificat, or Mary's song at Christmas. In fact, what's interesting is the New Testament starts more like a musical than an average story.

Don't you just love musicals? It's okay, guys. You can admit it. You love musicals too. It's all right. We love it. You go to Tanager, you go to DPAC, or you go to Broadway. We just love musicals. What's interesting is if you go to Genesis 1 and 2, it's written in Hebrew poetry that was meant to be sung, which makes some commentators wonder, "Did God bring the world into existence not just by speaking but maybe by singing?"

At the birth of Christ, there are five songs. Five! There's a song by an old guy named Simeon. So, you old guys, you need to sing. Simeon did. There's a song by a middle-age couple. They actually sing it separately. Zechariah sings a song, and Elizabeth sings a song. There's a song by the angels. *They* sing. This is all at the birth of Christ. These are all separate. They're all songs.

There's a song by a teenage girl named Mary. We're going to do something we've never done in the history of Two Cities Church. We're going to look at a teenager as a role model just for a second. This is not something you normally do. Right? Would you look back at *your* teenage years and go, "Follow me"? Probably not. How many of you would raise your hand and go, "As a teenager, I was ready to raise God"? No, me neither.

What happens with Mary is Mary is the first Christian. Mary is the first person to hear the Christmas message. Mary is the first person to hear the message of Christmas and be changed by it, which is why I'm entitling this message "Have Yourself a Mary Christmas." No, I'm kidding. That's way too cheesy, but maybe you'll remember it now.

Here's the whole point, guys: *when you understand Christmas like Mary did, you should respond like Mary does.* That's where we're going. She's a great model of worship, of joy, of gratitude, and of humility. But I'm getting ahead of myself, because before we can talk about Mary's song, we have to talk about Mary's story and Mary's situation, which was a hard one.

We think Mary is 15, 16, or 17 years old. She's from a really small town. It's called *Nazareth*. You can know how small a town is by looking at the well they had at that time. The well was so small that we know it couldn't hold more than 100 people in that town. Think about 100 people. That's probably fewer people than were in your high school (unless you were homeschooled, and then that would be a pretty big group).

What I'm saying is she grew up in a town that was very, very small. What happens if you're in a small town, you get pregnant out of wedlock, and it's also a very religious town? It's not going to go well for you. So, Mary is a girl who's in an interesting situation. It's interesting because we don't really talk a lot about Mary. When was the last time you heard a sermon on Mary that wasn't at Christmas?

What happens is the Catholics think too highly of her and the Protestants think too lowly of her. If you're here tonight and you're a Catholic... I'm a recovering Catholic. Welcome. You're safe here. You can talk to me afterward. You can call me "Father Kyle" if you want.

The Catholics have too high of a view of Mary. Here's what I mean by that. They think she can answer prayers. They think, in some cases, she was sinless. No, no. In this song we're going to read she says, "God is my Savior," so she needs a Savior. They think she can dispense grace. It's easy to pick on the Catholics. I'm actually going to pick on the Protestants. If you didn't know, that's our tribe/team tradition.

We tend to have too low of a view of Mary. We're told that Mary was uniquely favored by God and uniquely blessed among women. Think about it. God had one choice at one lady who was going to be the mother of his Son. That's a pretty important question. Some of you don't feel comfortable letting anyone else drive your car. God is saying, "Who could I trust to raise my Son?"

Now, I know why we forgot about Mary. We forgot about Mary because we forgot about Mom. We live in a society that doesn't value motherhood, and a society that doesn't value motherhood will soon forget about Mary. Do you know what the most popular

image in all of Christianity is, the most painted image? It doesn't take a lot to think of. It's Jesus on the cross. Do you know what the second most popular image in all of Christian history is? Mary holding baby Jesus. We've remembered the first image; we've forgotten the second image.

Mary is going to get news that is going to make her life better and harder. Have you ever had that happen to you? It's called *getting married* if you don't know that. *Better* was the honeymoon. *Harder* would be the rest of your life. It's called *having a kid*. I love all three of my kids, but they made my life better and made my life harder. It's called *having a meaningful career*. All of these things in your life make your life better and make your life harder.

That's actually what happens in Christianity. Your life is better. "Okay. My past can be forgiven. My present can have purpose. My future can be secure. That sounds better. Okay. I need to die to myself. I need to repent. I need to be willing to serve and sacrifice. I need to put to death the worst parts of me." That's harder.

I want you to see today the way Mary responds. You've already seen it in that video we showed you at the beginning. I know you thought we were showing you an episode of *The Chosen*. That was not what that was. Our team put that together. The song was sung in the original language. That's Aramaic (you heard the song), the language Mary would have sung it in.

01 CHRISTMAS SHOULD CREATE WONDER AND WORSHIP IN OUR HEARTS

You've heard it read. Now we're going to look at it verse by verse. Look with me at verse 46. "***And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord...'***" So, if the purpose is to look at Mary and go, "How she responded at Christmas is how we should respond," the first thing we see Mary does is *worship*. She says, "Magnify the Lord." We often say, "Glorify the Lord."

One of my pet peeves is when we use religious language that people nod and make listening noises to but don't understand what it really means. I think a lot of people are trapped in churches with a bunch of religious language they don't know how to live out. Imagine saying to your son, "You're going to college. Glorify God."

It's like, "Uh, okay. What does that mean? Does that mean I read my Bible a lot? Is that what that means? What does 'glorify God' mean? Does that mean I be a good person? Do I pray a lot? Is that what I do? Does 'glorify God' mean I talk about God a lot? What does 'glorify God' mean?"

Glorify God means you make him look great with your life. Then you might go, "How do I make God look great with my life?" I don't know. You have to figure that out for yourself. It's based on your personality. It's based on the sins you're struggling with. It's based on the suffering you've been through.

It's based on the life stage you're in. It's based on the relationships you have. It's based on the position you occupy. There are a lot of different ways, but the adventure of your life is to actually wake up every day and go, "How could I make the invisible God visible through how I live my life?"

The first thing we're told about you and me and all of humanity is that we're made in God's image. Well, what's the point of an image? If there was an image hanging on the wall of Abraham Lincoln, what would be the point of that image? To remind you of Abraham Lincoln, obviously. That's the only reason that image is there. The image is only there to be a pointer to what it points to.

She says something strange. She says, "Magnify." It's like, "How do you magnify God? I thought God is as big and awesome as he could possibly be. You can't make God any bigger than he is. How do you magnify the greatest being ever?" Here's what Mary is saying. It's not that God is small; it's that he seems small to people. He looks small to people.

Think about your work. If you were honest, God feels really small at your work. You're like, "Nobody talks about him." When do we talk about God? Only when things go badly, obviously. There's no, like, "Oh, it was an amazing day. The weather is awesome, and the leaves are changing. I got up, and I'm healthy. Thank you." No.

It's only when tragedy or tsunami or tornado happens. Then, all of a sudden, God is on the front page again with the question, "Where was God?" Oh, interesting. We only think about God when things go badly. God seems small in people's schools. I don't know where you're headed tonight or tomorrow. God might seem small in your whole Christmas celebration.

In fact, I think what Mary is saying is sometimes God looks smallest at Christmas. I think this is maybe why Christians... We shouldn't get upset about this, but every once in a while, you'll see Christians get upset when people say, "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas."

We just need to grow up and realize that we live in a pluralistic society and no one is trying to hurt our feelings by saying, "Happy Holidays." I think maybe the best part of us, if there is a good part of us in this, is we just feel like, "Come on. Did we forget? Has everybody forgotten that the first word in *Christmas* is *Christ*?"

So, how do you magnify God? You don't magnify God with a magnifying glass. What does a magnifying glass do? It takes small things and makes them look big, and kids use them to kill ants in the summer. This is what we do with magnifying glasses. But what does a telescope do? A telescope takes things that are really big and finally shows you how big they really are. We're supposed to be a telescope. We're supposed to say, "This is how big and great and awesome God is."

So, the first thing we should do at Christmas is we should worship. The second thing we should do at Christmas is just *rejoice*. Look at this. Verse 47: "**...and my spirit...**" So, first she says, "My soul magnifies." Now she says, "**...my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...**" She's not saying her spirit and her soul are different things. It's two different ways to talk about the deepest part of her.

The first thing she says is, "I worship God." The second thing she says is, "I enjoy that God has been my Savior." This is what I try to hit on all the time, especially in cities like Winston-Salem. I just think especially at Christmas, it's a time where a lot of people can be religiously lost. *Religiously lost* means in church but not in Christ. They don't really understand it.

I want to be so clear. There are two ways people think about Christianity. One is wrong and one is right. One way people think about Christianity is "I need to earn it. I need to earn my salvation." Maybe it's "I have to go to services. I have to be a good person. I have to obey the Ten Commandments. I have to read my Bible." It's about "I have to earn my relationship with God."

There are even secular versions of this. "I need to reuse, reduce, recycle, ride my bike, and shop at Whole Foods. If I do those things..." Right? People who do those things think they're a good person. That's why they do those things. It *makes* them a good person. The Bible says, no, we don't earn our salvation; we enjoy our salvation just by realizing we can't save ourselves and God has done everything to save us.

She says, "God is my Savior." Now, everybody has something that's their savior. For some people, it's themselves until they realize they can't save themselves. A lot of people think, "Oh, I know what my savior will be. It'll be that perfect spouse." Then they get married and realize... All of us who are laughing are married. It's like, no, your spouse can't save you.

Sometimes we think kids can save us. Today, the lie most young people are told is "Your job will save you. It will. Just get a really good job. Get a really good degree. Get a really good profession and make a lot of money. Get a lot of time off. That will save you." It's like, no, it won't.

I love my wife. She's a great wife. She's a crummy god. I'm genuinely blown away by how great my kids are. They're well behaved. They're joyful. They're pleasant to be around. Great kids; crummy god. I love what I do. I cannot believe I get to do this for a living. I mean, genuinely. I'm humbled every time I get to be up here. I love what I do. Great career, great calling; crummy god.

What happens here is Mary realizes, "Okay, God has to be my Savior." Look at what happens. She says, "**...for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.**" She uses really personal language about God. Today we want to get really impersonal about God. "God is a force. God is far away. Maybe God existed, but he created us and he's uninvolved."

Here's an interesting thing to ask about your own beliefs and other people's beliefs, if they believe something. This is a very revealing question. You may not want to ask yourself this question. "Why do I believe this? Why would I want to believe this? What's the belief under this belief that would make me choose this belief?" Let me give you an example.

Why would people want to think God is impersonal? Like, why would somebody want that? Why would they want to think God is distant? Why would they want to think God doesn't care and God is uninvolved? Because a God that is distant and impersonal and uninvolved is a God I don't have to be accountable to. I'm not saying that's the only reason people believe that. That's a big reason people believe that.

She has a very personal view of God. She says *this*. This is one of the only references to herself in the whole song. This is the other thing we have to remember at Christmas: "God sees my situation." That's what she says. "God has looked on the humble estate of his servant." Mary is like, "God, you understand that I am 17, I'm a virgin, and I have a really hard conversation with Joseph."

You know, "No, this wasn't from us or anybody else. It came from God." That's going to be a hard conversation. You have a hard conversation with your parents. You have a hard future. Let me just say this. I want you to hear me say this. At Christmas, remember, God sees your situation. Here's what happens at Christmas. Christmas is an amplifier and a magnifier of how the rest of the year was, usually, for people.

What I mean is people whose life went well this year normally especially feel that at Christmas. "Oh, the grandkids are here, and everybody is healthy. We're newly married, and we're in our new home. I got a great job so we can buy..." It just is amplified. Then people feel the exact opposite at Christmas. The first Christmas without Dad. The first

Christmas without Grandma. Or here's a very common one for people: "It's Christmas, and I'm still single, unemployed, underemployed, or infertile."

What we have to remember in that situation is God sees our situation. The Bible says not just our physical, emotional, financial, or relational... Those are all important categories, but God sees our spiritual situation. See, the great hope of Christianity is God saw us and cared enough to get involved. In fact, look at how she talks about God. She uses three attributes I want to show you.

"For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he..." Again, personal language. **"...who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name."** She says two things about God: he's holy and he's mighty. Now, is that good news? Maybe not. If we're sinful and finite and broken and rebellious, why is it good news that God is holy and mighty?

Holy literally means separate from you, above you, different than you, completely unique. I think the average American thinks, "God is a bigger, smarter version of me. I mean, he's bigger because he's omnipresent. So he's big. He's everywhere. Fine, he's bigger than me. And he's smarter than me. Okay, maybe he's a lot smarter." No, no. God is so unbelievably above you it's hard to explain it with words.

02 CHRISTMAS SHOULD REMIND US THAT THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING

Then the good news is he has done things for me. Now why would he do that? Look at the next verse. It says, **"And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."** So, three attributes at Christmas. *Mighty* and *holy*. Those are similar and connected. That's what we might call the *ultimate* nature of God. Then there's that he's *merciful*. That's the *intimate* nature of God. Or, as theologians like to say, the *transcendence* and the *immanence* of God, both together.

Here's the whole idea: it would not be good news if God was holy and mighty if he wasn't also merciful. *Merciful* is God moves toward the mess. *Mercy* is God does not give us what we deserve. We deserve judgment. We deserve wrath. We deserve hell. *Grace* is God gives us what we *don't* deserve. "Here's also forgiveness, and here's also adoption, and here's also heaven." It's like, "Wow!"

The message at Christmas is God sees our situation, and the one who is holy and mighty decides... No one makes him do it. No one can make God do anything. Somehow, in God's

heart, he decides to be merciful and to move toward us in spite of our sin. This is the good news of Christianity: God does not treat us as our sins deserve.

But this isn't good news for everybody, because it says, "Mercy for those who fear him," and then look at what it says. Verses 51-53: ***"He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty."***

This is a 17-year-old girl singing this song. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a pastor and theologian and plotted a plan to take down Hitler, if you know this story about Dietrich Bonhoeffer... Dietrich Bonhoeffer hated what the Nazis were doing so much that he had a good job in Boston or New York teaching, and he left his job in the Northeast to go back to Germany to fight against the Nazis.

Why am I telling you this? Because this guy was radical, and he says of this song he thinks it's the most radical Christian hymn ever written. The guy whom the Nazis end up hanging (that's how Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life ended) said this is radical. I don't know if *you* can see how radical it is. It's radical because it shows you the upside-down, inside-out nature of what happens when Christ comes.

It says God is mighty, but it's not going to go well for the mighty. It says God is mighty and holy, and it's not going to go well for the proud or the rich. Now look. By global standards we're all rich. By *rich* it's talking about the ungodly rich who trust in their riches. Christmas doesn't make sense to the mighty, it doesn't make sense to the ungodly rich, and it doesn't make sense to the prideful.

Isn't that true? Who is the hardest person to reach, I mean, if we could just stereotype it? The arrogant, rich business guy. Good luck. I try to think about it because I know a lot of these guys. I told you before I did ministry at Duke. I love Duke. I really do. I love Duke University. I loved the students there.

They were almost all... There were some people on scholarship, but almost all of them were just arrogant and rich. They were groomed (I know we can't use that word anymore) from elementary school to go to the best schools, to get in this, to be self-sufficient, to be the best of the best of the best. It was so hard to talk to them about Christ because they thought they didn't need him at all.

We're told the people who understand Christmas are the people who are humble and hungry. Those are the two attributes we're told are good. *Humble* doesn't mean you think you're garbage. Self-pity is often just a form of pride. It's a very sophisticated form

of pride. It's something like, "Oh, woe is me. I can't believe life is going badly for someone as great as me." That's self-pity, and it's really a form of pride.

True humility has two components to it: I understand God created me, and I understand Christ had to die for me. I understand I didn't create myself. I don't sustain myself. I'm going to die. I didn't start my life. I have a Creator, and I'm not it. I'm a creature. Then I understand the cross. I understand that I'm so sinful that someone had to die for me, namely God himself. That humbles you.

What we see oftentimes... This is maybe something to pray for. It's that the ungodly rich, the prideful, and the mighty would see themselves, their true spiritual condition, as a need and humble and hungry. It's normally only through some pain in our lives we come to that realization.

Well, she sings this song. She sings of all of this. If you look very carefully, what she says is judgment and salvation happen at the same time. This is a deep theological thought here. Basically, when God comes, he doesn't just come to save, and he doesn't just come to judge. When he comes, he comes to save and to judge. I'll show you this.

When he comes to save Noah and his family, how does he save Noah and his family? By judging everybody else. The most famous story in the Old Testament is the story of Israel and their exodus. We're like, "Oh, it's so awesome. Moses splits the Red Sea, and they head through the Red Sea, and, man, Israel is saved." Yeah, do you remember what happens right after that? All of the Egyptians are judged. It's a key part of the story.

How can they be safe after they get on the other side of the Red Sea? How can they know they're not going to get in trouble again? Because God judged somebody in their place. Oh, now you get to the New Testament. Oh, Jesus was judged on the cross in our place. He was judged so *that* we could be saved. This is the message of Christmas. When God comes, he comes to judge and to save, and he saves those who are humble and hungry and see that the only thing they bring to their salvation is their sin.

Let me tell you, every year, what we see in our church is the people who end up stepping up and getting baptized and coming to Christ... It's usually people who had some wake-up call in their life. That's what God does. God uses a megaphone. Maybe that's what you need to pray for the people you love this year. It was an illness and injury. It was a rebellious teenage son. It was a financial crisis. It was strife in their marriage. It was problems at work. God used it to say, "You need to be more humble, and you're a lot more hungry than you're willing to admit."

Then look at how she finishes the song. Verse 54: "***He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring***"

forever." There's so much Bible in this. She's talking about Israel. She's talking all the way back to Genesis 12. That's the very beginning of the Bible, basically. She's talking about Abraham.

03 CHRISTMAS SHOULD REMIND US THAT GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

How can she be so confident in the midst of such life-changing news? Because she knows her Bible very, very well. It's unbelievable how well this 17-year-old peasant, who is illiterate, knows her Bible. Everybody was illiterate back then. The idea that you'd have your own Bible in your own language that you could afford and are able to read is about 300 years old. Now, today, the average American Christian...

I read one place the average American Christian has seven Bibles in their home for every Christian in the home, and we don't know our Bibles as well as Mary did. We have it on our phones and on our apps, and we don't know it. Mary quotes or references at least 15 different passages of Scripture in these 10 verses. Mary quotes from at least five different books of the Bible.

Here's what happens with Mary. Mary gets bumped, and what comes out of Mary is Scripture. What happens when *you* get bumped? What comes out of *you*? Anger? You know, quoting Oprah on self-help, or whatever podcast? "This is what they say we should do when these things happen. This is what Dr. Phil says." Whatever you've been putting in you is going to come out of you when you're bumped.

It's very, very shocking to people what comes out of them. They don't know... You don't know what's in you until you're bumped. Then it comes out of you. For most people, it's not a pleasant experience. You often talk to people in their early years of marriage, and they'll say something like, "I was not angry until I got married."

The theologically correct answer is, actually, you created a life in which you were never able to be bumped is what happened. We're wealthy Americans. You can create enough space and have your own room. You're always in a climate-controlled environment. Do you know how new *that* is? Some of you haven't sweated in years. That's another sermon.

You're always well fed. We have so much peace...you can't understand it...compared to how people lived before us. We're almost never bumped. That's why suffering is the main thing that bumps us in our lives. It's the only way to know ourselves. I mean, there are two ways to know yourself, because we don't know ourselves. If you knew yourself, you wouldn't need psychology, anthropology, counseling, and therapy.

Why do you go to counseling and therapy? It's like, "I don't know myself. I don't know how this is affecting me. I don't know what's going on with me." Of course. The only way to know yourself is in community if people will give you honest, immediate feedback, and most people are like, "I don't want that." The only other way to get to know yourself is to go through suffering. That's the only other way.

That's why they say suffering introduces a man to himself. We don't like what we see. For Mary, she's full of Scripture, so when she gets bumped, that's what comes out. What's really interesting to me is that she has a very God-centered view of life. She mentions herself one time, basically to say, "God, thanks for seeing me." It makes me think that when hard things happen in people's lives, they tend to respond one of three ways.

The first way is the victim mentality. If you're under 40, that's normally how you respond. I'm not saying there aren't real victims. Of course there are. The victim mentality, though, or what used to be called the *martyr mentality*, is people act, when something bad happens to them, like they're just a passive recipient of it who can't control how they're responding.

"This is how everybody responds who has a difficult marriage, isn't it? This is how everybody responds who has a bad boss, right? This is how everybody responds who gets sick." It's like, "No, it's not how everybody responds." For sure, it's not how everybody responds. People go through a lot of hard things and respond a lot of different ways.

You may ask *this*: Why is it so popular to play the victim card today? I've had to think about this a lot. Why is it so popular? Because there's an unearned virtue connected to playing the victim card. Let me explain. Say you have a normal marriage. It's just a normal marriage, but the wife... It could be the husband, but let's just say the wife in this situation.

The wife tells all of her friends just how hard their marriage is all the time. "Oh, Bob. Bob doesn't take me out on dates, Bob doesn't share his emotions with me, Bob hangs out with his friends a lot, Bob works all the time." She tells her friends this. What do her friends start to say to her? "Sally, I don't know how you do it. You are a saint. I don't think I could put up with what you're putting up with."

Immediately, a person gets to have virtue by playing a victim. People can do it about their work. They can do it about any of their... That's if you're under 40. If you're over 40, you tend to play the victor card. You act like you can do things even when you can't. You trust way too much in yourself, and you're not willing to show any weaknesses.

By the way, this is why anybody who's over 50, if they're going to counseling, will never tell you and anybody under 40, if they're going to counseling, will tell everybody. "Off to my therapy session again." It's a total different mindset in how to think about the world.

I saw the victor mentality recently from a guy... He's an ultramarathon runner, and his legs are falling apart. They did an interview with him. He got some really bad news about how his knees are. He's not going to be able to run like he was. He would run these ultramarathons. The guy who was interviewing him was trying to be like, "Hey, man. This has got to be hard." He was just being honest.

"This has got to be hard. This is your whole life, and you're not going to be able to run anymore. How does that make you feel?" The guy immediately goes, "I'll be fine. I knew this day would come. The reason this happened is because I ran so hard. I did what other people weren't willing to do. I'll learn how to swim, and I'll compete at the highest levels of swimming now."

I don't know this guy. I was watching this online, but I'm like, "I don't believe him." I don't think he believes himself. I don't think the person who was interviewing him believes him. What's the right answer? The honest answer is, "Yeah, this is going to be really, really hard. Maybe I ran too hard. Maybe I put too many eggs in one basket. Yeah, I'll learn how to swim, but it's still really hard."

Well, Mary doesn't do the victor mindset, and she doesn't do the victim mindset. She does the third way. She says, "I need a bigger vision of God that changes how I view myself." That's what Mary does. She has a vision of God as mighty, holy, and merciful, who sees her situation, so then she can respond with faith, with gratitude, and with grace.

Look at what has to happen. Look at how it ends in verse 56. **"And Mary remained with her..."** Who's *her*? Elizabeth, her older cousin, who was six months pregnant with John the Baptist. I didn't tell you this. The story starts with Mary going to hang out with Elizabeth. Why? Because pregnant women love to hang out with each other. It's what they do. They talk about what it's like to be pregnant. They share their birth stories. For women, birth stories are the same as what war stories are to men. "It was painful. It lasted many hours." I mean, all that kind of stuff. Same thing.

So, they're together. They're having this conversation. Look at what happens here. **"And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home."** Why three months? Because Elizabeth was six months pregnant. So, she waited for John the Baptist to be born. Why did she do that? We don't know all of the answers. One thing we think is

maybe Mary needed to see another person trust God. If she could see Elizabeth trust God, maybe that would encourage her in the future.

Isn't that what we all need? If you're a parent, what you're trying to be to your kids is Elizabeth. "Ever so failingly, I'm going to try to trust God in front of you. I'm going to repent. I'm going to grow. I'm going to be a perfect example of an imperfect person, but I'm going to try to trust God so that hopefully, in years to come, when things happen to you, you'll say something like, 'I remember when Mom and Dad trusted God in this area. Maybe I could do the same.'"

So, she waits, but then it says... If you look at the very end, it just says she had to go home. It's like, "Oh, here's how it ends." Christmas has to end. We have moments. We have mountaintops. We have milestones that happen in our lives. For Mary it's getting to talk to Elizabeth. It's getting this vision from God. It's singing this song, and then she has to go home.

This happens to all of us. Christmas has to end. It's going to end in two days. It gets really awkward. You're taking the Christmas tree down. You're like, "It's all over." You're taking the lights down. Everybody at work is depressed from January 2 to April 1. Right? It's like, "What do we do now? We celebrated all of our holidays. It was Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and now nothing."

What does Mary do? Mary goes home, and here's what she realized. I hope you'll realize the same thing. Mary had a deep insight: "Theology can change my biography." Theology (how I understand God) can change biography (how I understand myself and my future).

Mary has a whole life ahead of her. Mary, by the way, is going to be the only human who gets to be both at the birth of Jesus and the death of Jesus. In between there is 33 years...33 years of having to continually say to God, "I know you see my situation, and I'm going to trust you."

Now, it's interesting because Mary is unique. We talked about that. We probably don't realize just how unique she is. Mary gets to carry Jesus in the womb. The Bible says every Christian can carry Christ in the heart, and it is better to have Christ in the heart than to have him in the womb.

One person for nine months one time had Christ in the womb, but if Christ is in the womb, he leaves. If Christ is in the heart, he never leaves, and Christ can be in the heart of any person who would say, "I'm humble and I'm hungry enough. I'm here to admit I can't save myself. All I bring to my salvation is my sin." See, I told you at the beginning Mary was the first person changed by the Christmas message, but you can be the next one. Let's pray together.

Lord, in a room like this we just take a moment, and we need to respond.

We're going to sing in a minute. There are different ways to respond to the Christmas message. One of the biggest ways the people early on in the New Testament responded was with singing, so we're going to sing "Jesus, Be the Center." For some of you, as we sing this, you're going to sing, and it's going to be actual, and you're going to feel it, and you're going to say, "Jesus is the center of my life, and this is really what I'm living for."

For others of you, you're going to need to sing this song not because you feel it, but you're going to need to sing this song *until* you feel it. It needs to be a prayer for you. It needs to be a prayer of surrender. It needs to be a prayer that can say what Mary says. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Lord, would you give us the grace at Christmas to realize the great message of Christmas is we cannot save ourselves, so you came to save us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray, amen.