

December 23, 2012

A SEASON FOR BEING GIDDY FOR GOD

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(Adapted from Giddy from God)

Luke 1:46b - 55

⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

In my observation, there's something about the Christmas season that gets us all acting a bit atypical. Of course, this is manifest in things like nationwide stampedes at the local Toys-R-Us or Wal-Mart's to get a grab at the limited supply of LeapFrog Leappad 2, Doc McStuffins Checkup Doll or Hasbro Furby. But I think where you can really see something happening is with children around Christmas-time. Do you know what I'm talking about? Children seem to get a bit more goofy around this time of year. Their energy level seems to amp up. They are more excited. The cause? I would wager a guess that it has something to do with the excitement and anticipation of this time of year. Children themselves may not be able to explain it, but they know that Santa Clause is coming to town, and that something great is coming down the pipe, and they are so excited!

What would make you so excited? What would make you crazy with joy? What would cause you to celebrate wildly and without inhibition? Maybe it would be the news of healing in the face of sickness. Maybe it would be reports of the end of fighting and war. Perhaps it would be the message that all your money worries, or business worries, had been sorted out and you could relax. Perhaps it would be the telephone call saying that you had been hired for that job you've been longing for and looking for for months or years.

Whatever the great news, you'd likely do things you wouldn't normally do. We all

would! You might shout and throw your hat in the air, you might dance round and round with a friend, you might call everyone you can think of and invite them to a party. Or you might even sing a song, one where you clap your hands or stomp your feet. And this is exactly what Mary was doing in the Gospel lesson we heard this morning.

Mary has just been told that she is going to bear a child, but not just any child; she is to give birth to the Son of God! Mary's response is this great song of praise! This is her joyful celebration in anticipation of her coming child, the coming Messiah! Mary's song of praise is the gospel before the gospel; it is her shout of triumph months before the humble birth in Bethlehem, and decades before Calvary and Easter. And what makes her song so powerful is the fact that it's all about God. Mary's Magnificat, as it is called, is about God and the new things God is doing; it's about revolution. This song of praise is about the great effects of the Lord's coming for all God's people. All of this great joy is because of Jesus, who has only just been conceived, but who has made Elizabeth's baby leap for joy in her womb, and has made Mary giddy with hope and excitement and triumph.

With all the joy and excitement that Mary is feeling in this moment, it is no surprise really that she bursts out in a song of praise to God. But the words of her song are a bit startling. She praises God because the thoughts of the proud have been scattered. She praises God who has brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly, who has sent the rich away empty, but filled the hungry with good things. As some of the more privileged people in this world, these words may make us feel a little squeamish. Indeed, these are revolutionary words, and yet Mary captures exactly what makes God so great, even as she is an example herself. Jesus came to give hope to the poor. Jesus came to heal the sick. Jesus came to defy the powers of this world and to establish the reign of God. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost! Jesus came for all! Jesus came for us!

How very blessed we are to be recipients of this great gift! We could be first in the line for the Amazon Kindle Fire HD 7 or 8.9, or the Razor PowerWing Caster Scooter this Christmas season, but such gifts are nothing compared to the gift of the Jesus. As Christians, we know that the most wonderful gift cannot be found in a store, or under a tree, or in Santa's sleigh. The greatest gift of all is God's grace and love shown in the Messiah, who came among us, who healed the sick, who ministered to the poor and lost, who redeemed us through his sacrifice on the cross and defeated death in his resurrection and whose birth we celebrate at this time of year. No wonder Elizabeth's baby jumped in her womb. No wonder these women were so excited! No wonder Mary lifted such a joyful song of praise.

You see, Mary and Elizabeth knew this baby that was to be born was the fulfillment of a shared dream, Israel's dream; a dream that one day all that the prophets had said would come true, a dream that one day Israel's God would do what he had said from very early on and bless all nations through Abraham's family. But for that to happen, the powers that kept the world in oppression had to be toppled. People would not normally lift praise and thanksgiving to God if they were poor, hungry, enslaved, or otherwise miserable. We probably know that to be true in our own lives. It's certainly hard to praise God when things seem to be in a shambles. "Thanks for nothing," we'd like to say. God knew that things needed to change to give people hope; that God would have to win a victory over the bullies, the power brokers, and the forces of evil. And that is exactly what God did in Jesus Christ, and Mary and Elizabeth knew that this precious gift was on its way, that the Savior was coming. They saw hope, mercy, fulfillment, reversal, revolution, victory over evil, redemption. They saw God coming to the rescue at last, and they knew that this gift was contained in the boy growing in Mary's womb; the Son of the Most High God, the Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us.

So what were Mary and Elizabeth to do but celebrate? How could they help but express their great excitement, and break out in song as Mary did, praising God for the great gift that was soon to come? And what about us? Are we lifting such excited praise this Christmas season, and if we are, is it because of Emmanuel, because God is with us? You see, we can get very excited this season of the year; anticipating lots of yummy food, new toys, and great gifts. But if that is all we celebrate, if that is all that gets us excited or giddy, then we have forgotten the greatest gift of all! We are blessed because of God. We are free because of God. We are redeemed and forgiven because of God. We are loved because of God. These are gifts that God has given to us freely, without cost or obligation. And it all came packaged in a baby named Jesus, whose birth we celebrate each Christmas. And celebrating is exactly what we should be doing! Like Mary, we should be sharing the news with our friends. Like Mary, we should be lifting a song of praise to God, and singing loud enough so that the entire world can hear. We have Good News to celebrate, and we have Good News to share, not only in the coming weeks and on Christmas Day, but each and every day of the year! Indeed, we have a great song to sing!

An inner city pastor one day met a young boy in front of the sanctuary carrying a rusty cage in which several birds fluttered nervously. The pastor inquired, "Son, where did you get those birds?"

The boy replied, "I trapped them out in the field."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"I'm going to play with them, and then I guess I'll just feed them to an old cat we have at home." When the minister offered to buy them, the lad exclaimed, "Mister, you don't want them, they're just little old wild birds and can't sing very well."

The pastor replied, "I'll give you \$2 for the cage and the birds."

"Okay, it's a deal, but you're making a bad bargain." The exchange was made and the boy went away whistling, happy with his shiny coins. The pastor walked around to the back of the church property, opened the door of the small wire coop, and let the struggling creatures soar into the blue.

The next Sunday he took the empty cage into the pulpit and used it to illustrate his sermon about Christ's coming to seek and to save the lost -- paying for them with his own precious blood. "That boy told me the birds were not songsters," said the minister. "but when I released them and they winged their way heavenward, it seemed to me they were singing, 'Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!'" This is Advent. And the message of these times is the song of those wild birds. It's the song of Mary: Redeemed! It's the song sung in every carol this season. It's the assurance Mary and Joseph received: Redeemed! It's the Word the shepherds heard and the star the Wisemen followed: Redeemed!

We can celebrate Christmas Trees, and banquets, and gifts this Christmas season, but such celebration is really empty. The greatest thing we have to celebrate this time of year or any other is God in Jesus Christ, who has come among us and redeemed us, who has walked on this earth and made a new way for us, who has defeated death and offered eternal life! When we have this hope in our hearts, we will sing as those birds released from the cage, "Redeemed, Redeemed, Redeemed!" and we will celebrate as Mary celebrated, lifting these songs of praise to God.

So let us not forget in this busy season of the year that it is God we celebrate! We celebrate our God who is faithful in fulfilling his promises; God who has taken the initiative and who continues to take the initiative; God who in Jesus Christ has come to us as Lord, as Savior, as the Powerful, Holy, and Merciful One; God who is still at work in this world establishing his Kingdom of peace, of justice, and of love. These are the things we have to be giddy about! This is why we celebrate

each year! But may our celebration go on throughout the year, just as God's work continues! Let our songs be heard year-round and down through the ages just as Mary's was! Let us share the Good News with all we meet! Christ is born! The Messiah is here! God is with us!

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