

A reading from the Gospel of Luke, again in chapter one, now at verse 46, the Song of Mary. And Mary said, my soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And 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 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. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. Let's pray together. Our God, our Heavenly Father, who will help us, we pray, that we may contemplate anew, for some for the first time, a wondrous love that is expressed in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life. Oh, give us grace that this great truth may sink deep into our hearts and that we might live in the comfort of it all our days. We ask it through Christ our Savior. Amen. Celebrating Christmas in song was the idea of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave us five songs in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke. expressing the wonder of what is told in the narrative. As we began a series last week, we looked at Luke's purpose for the writing of his gospel. He acknowledged that others had come before him, inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been fulfilled among us. It seemed good also to me, because he had followed all things carefully, from the beginning. We looked a bit at how he had investigated all things carefully, for he surely was not in the temple when Zechariah saw that angel, nor would he have been with Mary when she met the angel Gabriel. And he didn't learn it from Matthew and Mark who had come before him because they tell us nothing of these particular events. He had followed them. He had investigated them very, very carefully. Just when he doesn't tell us, it certainly fits with the narrative of his life, the little that we know of it in the New Testament, because he was with the Apostle Paul at the end of the third missionary journey when Paul was taking that gift back to Jerusalem that had been raised among all the Gentile churches for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem. As you remember the story, that didn't go so well for Paul. He was quickly arrested. There was a riot that broke out in the city, and he would spend the next two years in Caesarea. During that time, there were various plots and machinations of the Jews to get him released out of the fortress of Caesarea, where he had been taken for safekeeping for himself, as well as to try to figure out what to do with this man who had caused so much trouble in Jerusalem. And the Jews had finally plotted that the change of the governor, that now was the time to get Paul released from Caesarea to be sent back to Jerusalem on the pretext that he would stand trial there. But the Jews never intended to put him on trial. They were gonna kill him on the road. Two years Paul spent there before he played his trump card asked to be transferred to Roman authority by Caesar. When he would leave on his ship and go, the narrative of Acts, again by the wee sections that we find there, tell us Luke was on that ship. So he had been with Paul during those two years. That was a wonderful sabbatical leave, you might say, from traveling all over the Mediterranean world being able to investigate things carefully in Judea. He would have had opportunity to talk to Mary during those days. He would have had opportunity to talk with the people who had first heard these stories and he's passed it on to us. And tonight we look at

the story that Mary told him and of the song that she sang, she magnified the Lord, she rejoiced in the Lord and what a beautiful poetic structure it has. It flows so freely, so freely indeed that it has proved irresistible to composers across all the ages. Mary begins by telling us what God did for her. She looks at her own personal story. Her soul magnified the Lord, her spirit rejoiced in God, her Savior, because he had looked on the humble estate of his servant, and he had done great things for her. And from now on, all generations would call her blessed. He had looked upon the humble estate of his servant. What was her humble estate? We think of her as ever blessed because of what happened, but up till this time, she was from Nazareth. Where is that? Well, no reader of the Old Testament would have known because that place is never mentioned in the Old Testament. It was of no account whatsoever. It never made the press. And even in the days of Jesus, when he began his public ministry and the word began to spread among his disciples, Well, the word went out that the Messiah had come. It was Jesus of Nazareth. And Nathaniel said, Nazareth? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? It was a place of no account. She was engaged to be married. That was a blessing. But to a carpenter, not the richest man in town, and not the richest town around, And the piece that we just heard from Respighi had meditated a great deal upon that poverty. That's not romantic license. We know they were poor because after Jesus was born and it was time to present the offering for her purification, for his dedication, they chose the option of the poor that was given in the law. It was two birds that had been presented. Why, if you were a rich man, you should give an ox. or you could give a lamb or a goat. But if you were poor, you could bring birds. Anybody could go catch birds. And they brought the offering of birds. So she did come from a humble estate. And yet the Lord had looked with favor upon her. And she would become the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. She would give birth to the one who would be the savior of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, from every race, from every status in life. She would be the mother who brought this child into the world. He had looked with favor. upon the humble estate of his servant. But here's the good news. She quickly turns to let you know this is not a one-off. It's not just for her. She tells us his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. This song, probably spoken in Aramaic, which was likely her first language, but recorded by Luke in Greek, would quickly become translated into Latin. From Latin, it would spread to other nations in the world. We just heard it in Italian. We could have had a selection of German cantatas based upon the Magnificat, and we are now reading it in English. It is for people from generation to generation across every nation, tribe, and tongue. God looks upon the humble estate of people, and those who cry to him will find he is ready to come. Maybe you're not from humble estate. Maybe you come from a fine family lineage and from comfortable settings. Maybe if it were time for you to make an offering, you could afford an ox or a sheep or a goat. But my friends, when it comes to salvation, we all stand on the plane of poverty. There is nothing that we can bring. We all stand guilty before the bar of God. and there is none to help us but the Lord Jesus Christ. And God had so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life. Mary tells you, his mercy is for those who fear him. She's not talking about a trembling anxiety before a God we take to be full of wrath. She is talking about a reverence for the God who, acting in love toward the undeserving, that our hearts would be moved to reverence Him, to awe, to stand in awe before Him, to put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Mary wants you to know His

mercy is for all those who fear Him. And then she goes on to let us know. 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. Another way in which Mary was of humble estate was that she was Among the hoi polloi, the next chapter of this gospel you read, there was a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And to pull it off, they had to all go to their own home of birth and register there with the government and pay their tax. and Joseph and Mary are ripped out of their own family setting and sent off to Bethlehem where there'd be no room for them in the inn. And after the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, they would be ripped out of Bethlehem and made refugees to flee to Egypt because Herod now sought to kill the child who had been born. They seem to be pawns in the midst of a world that just ran over people. Mary wants you to know it's not what it seems. This child who was born is going to knock down every kingdom in the world. Sometimes we accused the Jewish people of the first century revealed to us in the New Testament of misunderstanding the nature of the kingdom. They were looking for political deliverance. They were looking for relief from the Romans, but Jesus was bringing a spiritual kingdom. Jesus was coming to free us from our sins. He is coming to free us from our sins. And he's coming to free us from the bondage to Satan. But my friends, he is also coming to level every kingdom in this world. At the end, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever. No earthly kingdom will last. beyond his. He will level them all. He has shown strength with his arm. He takes all those who are mighty in this world and he thrusts them down. And he exalts those of humble estate who come to him and simply cry out to him in their poverty and need. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress. Helpless, helpless, I flee to the cross. All this, Mary says, he has done in faithfulness to his covenant. What is happening now in her life was promised long ago to Abraham. And if she wanted, she could have traced it back further, but she started with Abraham. It was a good place for any Jew to start. God had not only made the promise that in Abraham's seed, there would be blessing for all the world, all the nations. He had sealed that covenant with the pledge of his own life. When Abraham struggled to take hold of that promise, God took him out into the night sky. And he said, now look up unto the stars and count them if you can, because that's how many descendants you will have. And then God said, and I will give you this land to possess. And he said, oh Lord God, how shall I know that I will possess it? And he said, bring me a group of animals, cut them in half. And God passed between the pieces of the animal as he swore an oath that pledged his life to the keeping of that promise. Mary wants you to know he's now keeping that promise when he gave the Lord Jesus. He has shown favor to the humble, to those who will humble themselves before him. The riches of his kingdom will be theirs. That's why this story is translated into every language. That's why composers of every language cannot resist being drawn to this text and to this set, to tell this story again in their own language, for their own people, and that it might go out to the world. We've been able to take a little tour of how it's gone through J.S. Bach and Respighi, Buxtehude. I know it's a new name, but it's one that Bach paid attention to, and we pay attention to Bach. My friends, God is giving himself afresh to every generation, as Mary said, from one generation to another. He can be trusted to do all that he's promised. Don't let this season pass by without making sure that you

receive this gift of God. Thanks be to him, let's pray. Our God, our Heavenly Father, how we pray. that you will indeed open our hearts that the Lord Jesus Christ may there be formed and we be formed into his image. O Lord, our God, be pleased to receive us when we come to you in all humility, acknowledging that there is nothing in our own lives that could commend us to your favor and so much in our lives that commends us to your disfavor. And yet, O Lord, such is your love that you will come to us in mercy, just as you have promised. All this we give thanks for. In Jesus' name, amen.