

Through Mary

What God Said About Christmas:

Luke 1:46-55
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Harold got a new job. Since it required him to work really late and he was concerned about the neighborhood, he decided to get his wife a watch dog. Harold went to the pet store and asked for a Doberman. The owner replied, "If you want a guard dog, I have the perfect candidate. He disappeared and brought back a little poodle. "This small thing," exclaimed Harold, "You got to be kidding!" The owner wagged his head and said, "No, this dog is special. He knows karate." Harold laughed, "I don't believe you!" The owner put the dog on the floor and said, "Karate the sign!" He pointed at a dog food sign, and the poodle shredded it with his paws. The owner, pointing to a chair in the corner, said, "Karate the chair;" and the dog hacked it into pieces. Impressed, Harold paid for the dog and took it home. His wife was not impressed. She yelled at him: "How stupid can you get? That little poodle a watch dog! No way!" Harold protested, "But he knows karate." "Karate," she yells, "karate my foot!"

Ouch! That joke certainly speaks of how we can be injured by the unexpected and unconventional. You know that Christmas was unexpected and unconventional. You need not worry about your foot, but missing or misidentifying God's work is serious. How tragic it was for people in the days of Noah to miss what God was doing, unconventional and unexpected, to rescue humanity! That sad story continued with Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Esther and so many others. God worked in unconventional and unexpected ways; and many people missed the very visitation and

salvation of God. Could that be happening today? What do you think God is doing right now? Could God be working among us, could God be with us right now, and we miss his gracious presence? How can we identify God's presence? We can learn much from the Christmas story and what God actually said about it.

Think about this. Who was Mary that you should listen to her? Scholars believe she was about 16 years old when the words that we read flowed from her lips. She was a Jewish peasant. No education or accomplishment commended her. How could anyone predict that God would speak to the world through her, much less choose to live in her womb?

Could we be undone by our expectations of worldly credentials? Do we not understand what God said about Christmas? Listen to Mary's words:

Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and now generation after generation will call me blessed. For he, the Mighty One, is holy, and he has done great things for me. (Luke 1:46-49, NLT)

Although these words are all Mary's, they are God's as well. They witness to a joy that comes with God's presence and personal favor. God takes notice of us individually, and he does wonderful things for "me," for individuals.

As a youth, I felt the absence of God. I read the Scriptures and longed for the experience to which they testified. As part of a pastor's family, we hosted in our home missionaries, evangelists and people with amazing testimonies. I coveted their experience of God. They knew the personal favor of God. I didn't. I saw my parents' confidence in Jesus' love and heard their testimony of his works, and I hungered for such a confidence and testimony. I didn't want to just believe; I wanted to know what they knew. I cried out to Jesus to forgive me. I ask Jesus to baptize me with his Spirit. I knelt at the communion railing with every invitation to receive Christ. At campfires I publicly dedicated my life to Jesus. Month after month, even year after

year, I sought what Mary testified to and what God spoke through her; yet nothing happened that I could see. God was working, however. A plan was unfolding that included me. In February of 1970, something happened on a college campus distant from where I lived. God's Spirit showed up at the college chapel service so that they had to suspend classes for two weeks while people worshiped continually and repented. The work of God was so profound that students were invited to speak at churches and other colleges. Wherever they went, God's Spirit descended upon the people; and there were deep tears of repentance, and great joy and fulfillment. Some four months later, two college students shared their story at Red Rock Camp (a camp I've attended annually since I was a baby). I didn't remember their story, and for many years I didn't even connect any of this. One night that week of camp when we senior high boys gathered for devotions and a youth was playing the guitar, we all began to shake. Something was coming over us. Some young men began to weep. I felt such love swell within me. I knew God was making a home in my life. I knew I was being filled with the same presence that had stopped Paul's preaching in Cornelius's house and that had stunned many residents of Jerusalem on Pentecost. At that moment I could echo Mary's words: ***"Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior!"*** I knew I was blessed and that God was doing mighty things for me. What I didn't know until much later is that the same thing was happening in the girls' cabins and also among the adults.

Why should this surprise us? Isn't this the sign of Christmas? Isn't this the statement God made with Christmas? Isn't this what God said through Mary? God notices us individually. God notices our humble estate. God said more through Mary:

His mercy goes on from generation to generation, to all who fear him. (Luke 1:50, NLT)

If God's mercy continues throughout the generations, why should our experiences be any less dramatic, any less powerful, any less effective, any less fruitful, and any less fulfilling than that of previous generations? *God's love for you and me is not a degree cooler than it was for 16-year-old Mary.* You know that future generations will share our same struggle and consider us the primitive ones who lived in simpler times like Mary. Listen to God through Mary:

His mighty arm does tremendous things! How he scatters the proud and haughty ones! He has taken princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. (Luke 1:51-53, NLT)

Do you hear what God is saying about Christmas? Position means little. Power means little. Riches mean little. God dethrones the proud, powerful and rich, and he exalts the humble. God reshapes the world through the humble believer.

If you open your Bible to the exact middle, so that half the Bible's verses are on the pages before your verse, and half are after, you are at Psalm 118:8. It says:

It is better to trust the LORD than to put confidence in people. It is better to trust the LORD than to put confidence in princes. (Psalm 118:8-9, NLT)

You might see the work of powerful people in the circumstances of the day; however, God is powerfully at work in the affairs of our day. God is not caught by surprise, and he notices those who humbly seek him.

God spoke one more truth about Christmas through Mary:

How he has helped his servant Israel! He has not forgotten his promise to be merciful. For he promised our ancestors — Abraham and his children — to be merciful to them forever. (Luke 1:54-55, NLT)

God told us that he is keeping his promises. Christmas shows us that God will spare nothing to keep his promise to you. Look at the Bible and see what God has promised. He is working today to keep them. Have you put your trust in them? God put them there for you.