

The Advent of a King

The Magnificat (Luke 1:39-56)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on December 12, 2021

Introduction

- ❖ I love the fact that we observe Advent in this church. Every year, we mark off the four Sundays leading up to Christmas and celebrate the coming of the Christ child. That usually comes in the form of weekly readings and the lighting of an Advent wreath. We usually have a dedicated Advent sermon series. And four Sundays of Advent means four opportunities to sing plenty of good Christmas songs.
 - We usually sing about the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. About shepherds watching their flocks by night when angels appeared singing, “Glory to God in the highest.” About a silent night, a holy night, when Christ was born. We usually sing about joy to the world, peace on earth, and goodwill toward men.
 - But I wonder why we’ve never sung a Christmas carol about the proud bring scattered? About the mighty being thrown down? About the rich being stripped of good things and sent away empty? **When was the last time you sang a song during Advent about the inversion of civil society – about the reordering of our social fabric?**

- ❖ **It sounds out of place to be singing of such things during Christmas. But that was the theme of the first Christmas hymn ever sung – Mary’s Magnificat.** The hymn begins in v46 with, “*My soul magnifies the Lord.*” That’s why it’s been traditionally called the Magnificat, which comes from the Latin for magnify. Now, stylistically, it’s like any psalm that you might find in the OT. And as for content, like any Christmas hymn, it’s set in the context of the promised Christ child who is soon to come.
 - **But the big difference is the theme of this song – about a Great Inversion in our social fabric.** Where things that are down are turned up and things that are up are knocked down. Which can be quite confusing and disorienting. You don’t know what’s upside down or right side up anymore.

- ❖ **There’s a term for that confusion in aviation. It’s called spatial disorientation.** It’s where a pilot could be flying a plane upside down without even knowing it. It’s can happen when flying at night or in bad weather where there is no visible horizon or other marker helping the pilot gauge what’s up or down. Thankfully, there are instruments now to tell you if you’re flying upside down. But there have been tragic cases where pilots – under the assumption that they were flying right side up – have made controlled descents straight into the ground.
 - It’s a tragedy. And it’s a modern parable of the human experience. **Humanity is flying at high-speeds, navigating through life, progressing forward. But all the while, unaware that we are upside down.** We’re headed for a crash. And it’ll be a complete shock for many when it happens.

- ❖ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke through prophets warning that we are flying upside down. But humanity, as a whole, has rejected their message. **Because the kind of life that God’s Word calls us to live feels, to us, upside down.** It contradicts our values. It challenges our presuppositions, our view of reality. **So we reject it and continue flying upside down, unawares.**

- ❖ When all along what the Bible teaches really is right side up. It teaches us how to live based on how the world really is. **But when you have spatial disorientation – or in this case, spiritual disorientation – you’re convinced that *you* are right side up. So the Word of God and what it teaches makes no sense.** It seems contradictory. It seems backwards.
 - But that’s why the Son of of God was sent into the world. The Word became flesh (Jn 1:14). Jesus embodied God’s truth. **He proclaimed good news of a great inversion, a reversal, where down things are turned up and up things are knocked down.**
 - Blessed are *not* the rich but you who are poor. Blessed are *not* the full but you who are hungry. Blessed are *not* you who are well but you who weep (Lk 6:20-21). The blessed ones in this world are the weak, the small, and the lowly. That’s what Jesus taught. Does that make any sense to you?

- ❖ **It doesn’t make sense for a lot of people. Sure, Christianity may hold sentimental value. But it’s not realistic.** That’s not how the world works. On a practical level, being poor and hungry are burdens. They’re afflictions. Not blessings. In the end, to many in this world, the Bible’s teachings sound strange. Backwards. Upside down.
 - But here’s my point – **What if the Bible is actually presenting life right side up and we’re the ones flying upside down, unawares?** What if Jesus didn’t come teaching an alien concept, a foreign reality, a completely novel outlook on life. What if his teaching – about God, about what it means to be human, about who is truly blessed in this world – all corresponds to true reality?
 - **What if the Bible *is* presenting life right side up? Well, I guess to see it and believe it, we need to be flipped around.** We need to be converted or, more like, inverted. Well, thank God that’s exactly what Jesus came on earth to do. He brought a Great Inversion.

- ❖ As we listen to Mary’s Magnificat, we’ll hear a song that extols God’s grace and power because of the inversion in our social fabric brought about by this baby in Mary’s womb. Let me show you three particular inversions in our text – three ways that this baby boy has turned everything we know about reality right side up.

The Meek and Lowly are Looked Upon as Blessed

- ❖ The first inversion in Mary’s song can be summarized like this: **Because of her baby, the meek and lowly are looked upon as blessed.** Listen to how she says it in vv46-48. “⁴⁶*My soul magnifies the Lord,* ⁴⁷*and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,* ⁴⁸*for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.*”
 - **Now throughout church history and within various Christian traditions, she’s known as the Blessed Mother Mary.** It’s common enough that we easily take for granted how strange that title sounds considering the circumstances she found herself in. So far removed from her context, we easily call her blessed. But her contemporaries would have seen it very differently.

- ❖ Let's recall the context, which we introduced last week. Back in v28, the angel Gabriel that she will conceive a son, the Son of the Most High, and she will call him Jesus. Now this is a surprise to her since she's still a virgin. She's betrothed to marry Joseph of Nazareth, but they have yet to be intimate. So how can she conceive?
 - **The angel goes on to explain that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, and by a miraculous conception, she will be with child and he will be called holy – the Son of God (1:35).** And then Gabriel tells Mary that her relative Elizabeth in her old age has also miraculously conceived. And she's in her sixth month. Suggesting that you can go and see for yourself and learn that nothing is impossible with God.

- ❖ Our passage takes place right after that. Mary visits Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. **There's this powerful moment where the prenatal John hears the voice of Mary – the mother of his Lord – and leaps for joy in his own mother's womb.** Look with me at v44, *“For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”*
 - Remember, Elizabeth is over six months pregnant by this point. I'm sure by now she has already felt her baby move and kick in her womb. But this was different. She could sense her baby leaping for joy. For joy! **This fetus was expressing emotion.** Which, by the way, would make no sense if the Bible viewed the unborn fetus as a non-person. Non-persons don't have emotions. They don't leap for joy.
 - But unborn John does. And it's because, as we were told by Gabriel back in chapter 1:15, that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. In Scripture, the Holy Spirit never fills non-persons. He only fills people. **So the unborn John was a human person in his mother's womb.** And that would be true for everyone else. The unborn are human persons in their mother's womb and deserving of our love and protection.

- ❖ Now this unborn John supernaturally recognized and responded to the presence of another unborn fetus – another person, his Lord Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate. **John's leaping serves to foreshadow his future role – as the first one to recognize and respond to Jesus as the Messiah when he finally begins his public ministry thirty years later (Jn 1:29).**
 - So now with her baby giving testimony to the identity of the Lord while in utero, Elizabeth supernaturally sees and believes as well. We're told in v41 that she is also filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaims, *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”* (v42)

- ❖ Remember who she's talking to. This is little Mary, the soon-to-be unmarried, teen mom. In a few months, when her baby bump begins to show, she'll be the subject of village gossip. She'll become a town scandal. **You're telling me this social pariah will be considered blessed among women?**
 - We saw last week how Mary is not from a well-to-do family. And she's not betrothed to a wealthy man. They are a poor couple from a lowly village in the backwaters of Galilee, which was already a lowly region of ancient Palestine.

- ❖ **So Mary is a nobody from Nazareth who is about to become a somebody – but for all the wrong reasons.** She’s about to become a scandal. That’s how she would be perceived in the eyes of the world. But the world’s eyes have been affected by spiritual disorientation. Which is why it’s shocking to call someone in Mary’s shoes “*blessed among women.*”
 - Perhaps you haven’t given much thought to how Mary is blessed. Most of you are probably like me. You grew up in a Protestant evangelical tradition that gave little regard to Mary. We don’t show her the honor she’s due.

- ❖ Consider how blessed she is to be the mother of Christ. **The Lord Jesus’s face will for all eternity bear a striking resemblance to Mary.** There will not be another human being in all of human history who will share such a close resemblance to the Son of God. What an honor!
 - And look at what Elizabeth says about Mary in v45, “*And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.*” Mary is blessed to serve as a model of courageous faith for all believers in every generation to come. That’s a huge honor we shouldn’t downplay or overlook.
 - But those who were raised **Catholic** should take note of what Mary says in v47. She says her spirit rejoices in God *her Savior*. That’s not what you would expect sinless people who had immaculate conceptions to say. They don’t need a Savior. Only sinners do. So it’s telling that Mary has a Savior. She’s special. But she’s not perfect. Like us, she’s a sinner in need of a gracious Savior.

- ❖ But the fact that Mary is one of us means her song is a song any believer can sing. **This is the song of every Christian.** On one hand, I’m a meek and lowly sinner like Mary in need of a Savior. But at the same time, the Bible says I’m blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). This is the Christian’s song. It’s Mary’s song.
 - Notice the wonder and amazement in her voice. I’m a nobody. I’m meek and lowly. And yet God has taken notice of me, and blessed me, and exalted me to this position of tremendous honor. To be the mother of the Lord. My soul magnifies! My spirit rejoices! **Do you hear the surprise in her voice?**

- ❖ Friends, if *you* being a Christian makes perfect sense to you, if there are no surprises, no amazement that God would save *you* – if you say to yourself, “*Of course I’m a Christian. I was born into a Christian family. I believe all the right things. I do my best to obey God’s Word. I’m certainly not perfect but I certainly try.*” – if that’s your thinking, if it’s just plainly obvious that *you* of all people would be a Christian, then you have yet to grasp the gospel.
 - Your Christianity amounts to mere religion – where those who have the right parents, the right upbringing, the right beliefs and behavior are obviously saved. **That kind of faith is a religion that the world would consider right side up.** “*Of course you’re a Christian. You grew up in church. You talk like a Christian. You act like one. You even look like one. Of course.*”

- ❖ **But whenever the world is confronted with the real gospel, it gets confused.** Because everything in the real gospel looks upside down. Looking at Mary – this poor, peasant girl from no-good Nazareth (Jn 1:46) soon to be surrounded by scandal and shame – the world would take one look and say, *“She’s cursed. Her life is ruined.”*
 - But the Bible says, *“No, generations will call her blessed.”* Because of this Great Inversion, God doesn’t look upon the regarded – upon those with a strong case for why they should be saved.
 - **God’s eyes are instead on the disregarded, the meek and lowly, those who are amazed that God would look upon them in their humble estate.** His eyes are ones who say to themselves, *“Never in a million years would I be a Christian – but for the grace of God.”* That’s the attitude of a Christian.

The Rich and Mighty are Brought Low and Scattered

- ❖ And that’s the theme of this song. Let’s keep listening to it because if it’s going to be your song, then you need to be prepared for how revolutionary Christianity is. The gospel turns everything on its head. Let’s consider the second inversion Jesus brings. **Because of Mary’s baby, the rich and mighty are brought low and scattered.** In other words, those who are on top will be shocked to discover themselves on the bottom. Mary’s song is not a sentimental Christmas carol. It’s not a song full of Christmas cheer.
 - Look starting in v51. *“⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”*
- ❖ Mary sang in v49 that God is mighty and has done great things. But then she gives a warning in vv51-53 not to make the common mistake of thinking that, because God is great, he’s partial towards the great. **Don’t think, because God is mighty, that he favors the mighty.**
 - Quite the contrary. It says he scatters those who are *“proud in the thoughts of their hearts.”* And what’s their pride rooted in? Their might and their money. They’re sitting on thrones with full purses and full stomachs. They have every human reason to consider themselves blessed. They have it all together. **But behold, this baby in Mary’s womb is bringing a kingdom in which the rich and mighty will be brought low and scattered.**
- ❖ There’s a great illustration of this later on in Luke’s Gospel. At the end of chapter 16, Jesus tells this **parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.** The Rich Man thought he had it all together. He had the money. He had the might. He had a full stomach. It says he *“feasted sumptuously every day.”* While Lazarus laid at the Rich Man’s gate begging for table scraps.
 - If you asked the average person back then (or today) to assess the situation. If you ask, *“Who in this scenario do you think is blessed and who is cursed?”* The answer would be unanimous. No one would consider Lazarus blessed. No one wants to be in his position. We would all want to be in the Rich Man’s blessed shoes.

- ❖ But, of course, we wouldn't be as selfish or cruel as that man. We would take Lazarus into our home, feed him, and clothe him. We would try to be a kinder, more generous Rich Man. But that still misses the point. **That kind of thinking still assumes the Rich Man is more blessed than Lazarus.** That those with money and might are in a better position than the poor and lowly – even if only so they can be a blessing to others.
 - **But so long as your view of blessedness corresponds with one's socioeconomic status, you're still thinking like the world.** Mary's song will still sound strange. As if it were being sung in a foreign language. It sounds backwards, upside down.
 - And that same inversion within the song takes place in the parable. The tables are turned. Everything gets flipped. Lazarus ends up exalted to Abraham's bosom and the Rich Man is cast down to Hades (Lk 16:22-23). **The rich and mighty are brought low and scattered.**

- ❖ Now I want to be clear. Nowhere in Scripture is money or might, in themselves, being condemned. As if it were a sin to be rich or to be in a position of power and influence. **The Bible never says it's wrong to be rich. But you could argue that it does say it's wrong to die rich.** It's wrong to end your life with a hoard of wealth because you simply laid up for yourself treasures on earth (Lk 12:13-21).
 - There's a danger accompanying wealth and power. **The conveniences of the rich and the social standing of the powerful can be temptations to grow too independent of God and too insensitive towards the needs of others.**
 - Jesus taught that it's difficult for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Lk 18:24-25). Again, not because wealth is evil in itself. **But because wealth breeds independence** – a self-reliant, godless independence that makes it difficult for anyone to enter the kingdom by faith (by dependence) in Christ alone.

- ❖ This is what the rich need to beware. This is what *we* need to beware. **Let's be honest, the vast majority of us in this congregation are rich compared to the vast majority in the world and are in positions of power.** Or we will be after we graduate with that degree.
 - We need to listen carefully to this aspect of Mary's song. **God, in stark contrast to the world, is not partial to the rich, the powerful, or the proud.** This world is! That's what we're told to chase. But how many people have crashed and burned flying after pride, power, and wealth, flying upside down without even knowing?

- ❖ In the beginning of Luke, we're told that he dedicated his book to a man named **Theophilus.** Commentators think he was most likely the benefactor funding Luke's project – this effort to compile an accurate narrative of all that took place concerning Jesus of Nazareth (Lk 1:1-4).
 - So it's very likely that the original recipient of this Gospel possessed power, wealth, and had a lot to be proud of. So Luke knows his audience and he's not pulling any punches. **He's not trying to start off his Gospel narrative with some sentimental Christmas song. No, he starts off with a warning to his audience.**

- ❖ Theophilus, consider this God of the gospel. He's not impressed by your money or your might. **Yes, he's great but that doesn't mean he's partial to the great.** In God's eyes, the rich and powerful are no better than the poor and powerless.
 - That's why God chose to bless a poor and lowly girl from Nazareth to be the mother of the Son of God. Such a surprising choice is a rebuke of the world's categories of who God is and whom he blesses.
 - *Is that the God you were thinking you were here to worship? If you were expecting a God who gathers the proud, who exalts the mighty, who satisfies the rich, then you're looking for the wrong God here.* That's not the Son of God that Mary gave birth to.

The Poor and Powerless are Lifted

- ❖ Jesus came to invert those categories. Let's consider the third inversion. **Because of Mary's baby, the poor and powerless are both lifted up and filled up.** God has "*exalted those of humble estate.*" (v52) "*He has filled the hungry with good things.*" (v53) What is Mary saying? She's saying the God of the gospel lifts up the poor. **He reminds those who have little and are little that their smallness doesn't preclude them from God's blessing.**
 - But the world has a different message. The world is always telling the poor and powerless that they don't count. That they don't have the education, the skills, the pedigree, or the connections to really matter in this world.
- ❖ Religion is the same. Religion says that the decent people, the educated, the hard-working and moral – they get God. They get to enter the kingdom. But Christianity comes along and says salvation is an act of sheer grace. **The gospel says that decent people, moral people, powerful people are no better off than the poor or powerless.** Because no one earns their way into the kingdom. No one merits salvation.
 - At the foot of the Cross, we're all on level ground. We're all sinners in need of a Savior. And Jesus' blood is sufficient for all. **Through his life, death, and resurrection he purchased a salvation that none of us could pay for.** It can only be received freely by grace through faith.
 - This is how the gospel lifts up the poor and powerless. By taking those who are already humbled, who have no impression that they can impress God – those who know they have nothing and are nothing – the gospel freely comes and lifts them to a seat of heavenly honor.
- ❖ There's another illustration in Luke's Gospel of this kind of inversion. In chapter 21, Jesus is at the temple, and he sees rich men putting sizable gifts into the offering box. Then comes a **poor widow** who puts in all she has, two small copper coins, and Jesus turns to his disciples and says, "*Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.*" (Lk 21:3)
 - Now the world hears a bunch of sentimental words. They sound nice, but they're meaningless. There's no way her two coins are more than all that the rich men were dropping in. We don't see it. **But what if that's because we're looking at it upside down?** That's what Jesus is implying.

- ❖ **Jesus is saying that this poor widow is the one who is truly rich in his Father's kingdom.** Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom. Blessed are you who are hungry, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep, for you shall laugh (Lk 6:20-21). The last will be first and the first will be last (Lk 13:30). **If that makes no sense to you, it's likely because you're still looking at things upside down.**
 - Jesus is describing a right side up reality. And if you want to see it – if you want to believe it – then you need to be turned around. You need to be converted. You need to be inverted. **Unless you are converted (or inverted), you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven** (Mt 18:3).

- ❖ Friends, if much of Jesus's teaching still makes little sense to you – if it still seems too impractical or too idealistic – if you're still unsure if living a life that observes all that he commanded would be joyful and fulfilling – then perhaps you still need to be converted. Perhaps you need to experience a great inversion.
 - You may be experiencing spiritual disorientation. But by God's grace, Jesus can straighten you out. **Just be aware that being converted can feel like your life and all your assumptions are being flipped upside down.** Becoming a Christian can result in a lot of tension internally and in your relationships with others.
 - But think about the alternative. **Do you want to continue flying at high-speed, navigating through life, unaware that you're upside down?** You can ignore this gospel, you can ignore Christ, and find out the hard way that you've been flying upside down when you life ends in a tragic crash.

- ❖ The Puritans used to say: **The same sun melts the wax but hardens the clay.** The same gospel will lift some up but bring others crashing down.
 - Which is it for you? Now that you've listened to Mary sing her song, the question is: *How will you respond?* **Is the gospel melting you?** Humbling you? Is it stirring up faith and affection for Christ?
 - **Or is it hardening you?** Does it offend you? Does it sound foolish and totally upside down? Which is it?

- ❖ **That God would pass over the proud, the powerful, and the rich to show favor to a poor, lowly girl is a foretaste of a Great Inversion that has and is to come.** It's going to happen. The only question is if you're going to be lifted up or knocked down when it comes.