**My Soul glorifies the Lord**

December 16, 2012

Luke 1:26-56

Key Verse 1:46b,47 “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...”

Ephesians 5:18,19 says that one of the marks of a Spirit-filled life is speaking in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Our souls can rejoice when we have God in our hearts and when God includes us in his work. Many people ask, “What is God’s will for me? How can I know God’s will?” The motivation for their question usually comes from their fear that God will drastically alter their lives. They think that God will ask them to go to Amazon jungle as a missionary and die as a martyr. But God works through our ordinary lives. What is God’s will? John 6:40 says, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” In order to save people from their sins, God had to send his Son to this world. For that, he needed a young woman to bear his Son and give birth. God did not drastically alter Mary’s life. She still married to Joseph. It was surely difficult to be the mother of Jesus. But when Mary accepted God’s mission, she rejoiced that she was able to participate in God’s work. May God bless each of us to rejoice when we participate in God’s work.

I. The birth of Jesus foretold (26-38)

Mary was a virgin pledged to be married to Joseph. Mary may have had many a dream of marriage and of a sweet home. Mary was an ordinary country girl. So she thought she would be an ordinary housewife. She must have whispered many times a day, “Joe, I want just to see you.” But one day an angel came to her with a shocking news that she had found favor with God. God’s favor was not a honeymoon ticket to Hawaii but that she would bear the Son of the Most High before marriage. What a difficult mission it was for her! How could she explain her situation to her fiancé Joseph. Her bond of love with Joseph would be broken to pieces. In addition, Mary lived in a rigid, traditional Jewish society. Those who became pregnant before marriage were supposed to be stoned to death. She would become the object of scorn and disgrace. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Mary to obey God’s mission. But Mary was a godly woman even if she was very young. She decided to obey God’s will absolutely. Mary gave her dream of marriage to God in order to obey God’s holy mission.

After being convinced, Mary’s soul inclined to hear the angel’s message. But Mary had a scientific question. Look at verse 34. “‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’” Mary was not negative. Her question shows a positive response. The angel taught her in verse 35: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” When the angel expounded that Mary’s pregnancy was not an accident, but was precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, Mary accepted the angel’s message. The angel continued: “Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God” (36,37). The angel convinced Mary that nothing is impossible with God.

Let’s briefly think about who Jesus is. Look at verses 31-33. “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” The first part refers to Jesus’ first coming, and the second part refers to his second coming. The name “Jesus” means “The Lord saves.” Jesus came to this world to save people from their sins. For that, he had to die on the cross as the Lamb of God. But he was raised on the third day, and ascended into heaven. He will come again as the King of kings and Lord of lords to judge the living and the dead.

When Mary heard this, she realized that God had a high purpose for her life and wanted to use her in his great salvation work. She had to choose between the destiny of being an ordinary woman as Mrs. Joseph or a woman of God. She simply chose to do the will of God and said in verse 38, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” How could she choose to do the will of God, giving up her marriage? It is impossible for anyone. But it was possible for her because she had the fear of God. In other words, her love and respect for God was true. When she had the fear of God she was not an ordinary woman; she was an extraordinary woman of God.

II. Mary visits Elizabeth (39-45)

When Mary made a decision to obey God’s will, she had many obstacles to overcome. She had to figure out how to explain her situation to Joseph. Humanly speaking, she was not in God’s favor, but in deep trouble. If she were a worldly woman, she might have visited Joseph first and cried many tears for his human sympathy, saying, “Please do not misunderstand.” But Mary did not go to Joseph. Instead, she decided to visit Elizabeth to see the work of God in her, as the angel had said. This was an act of faith. In her act of faith, Mary gave up her beautiful dream of marriage and Joseph, too. But it was not easy for Mary to visit Elizabeth. What if Elizabeth would not believe, and condemn her as an unwed mother?

It was a moment when Mary could have felt sorry for herself and fallen into self-pity, saying, “O Joseph, Joseph.” She could have been frightened by the intimidation of Satan and remained frozen. But she did not sit down only to cry. Instead, she began to fight the spiritual battle. Here we learn a universal truth: Even a country girl must fight a spiritual battle. Otherwise, she is doomed to be the prey of Satan. How nice it would be to get an A without any study. How nice it would be to do God’s work without any hindrance of Satan. But when we want to do God’s work, Satan is right there to hinder us. Mary must have absorbed many of Satan’s jabs and counter punches. But with God’s help, she won the battle before fighting. God gave her strength to visit Elizabeth in that situation. How easy it is for all sinful people to go to Joseph, forgetting all the words they had learned. But Mary remembered the word of God through the angel’s message. God is with those who are holding on to the word of God. It is important for us to remember God’s word when we are in spiritual crisis.

Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth. It was an act of faith. One act of faith is better than knowing 10,000 theological arguments. Her faith enabled her to accept herself as the most blessed one, not as an unlucky woman. With God’s help, Mary finally knocked at the door of Elizabeth’s home. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. In other words, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb welcomed Mary first. Then Elizabeth welcomed her. Look at verses 42,43. “In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” A white-haired grandmother bowed her head down low before an unwed girl and called her, “the mother of my Lord.” It seems funny that an old woman treated a young girl like a senior person. It is only possible in the spiritual world. Look at verse 45. “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” Elizabeth did not say, “It is good to carry out God’s mission, but I feel sorry for you.” Instead, she counseled Mary prayerfully until Mary was convinced that her pregnancy before marriage, becoming the mother of Jesus, was the will of God and that it would be done as God had promised. Elizabeth counseled her to follow God’s will even if it meant endless suffering. It is not easy for anyone to counsel others spiritually. We end up sympathizing with others and make them weak. But those who follow spiritual counseling bear the good fruits God wants.

III. My soul glorifies the Lord (46-56)

**First**, Mary praises God because she was convinced that God was working in her life. Look at verses 46,47. “And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’” When Gabriel first said to her, “You will be with child,” she was afraid. But now she was convinced that God was doing a great work in her life to use her as the mother of Jesus. When God’s word was confirmed by Elizabeth’s encouragement to believe what the angel had said, Mary burst into a song of praise. There are 150 psalms in the Old Testament. Most of them were written by King David. King David did not write these psalms of praise to God because his situation was always good and favorable for writing many poems. He wrote songs of praise to God when he was in the midst of human agonies, when he was running for his life, at a time of defeat and at a time of victory. He could sing songs of praise because he believed that God was with him. In Psalm 23:1,2a, he said, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures...” The happiest time for mankind is when we believe that God is with us as our good Shepherd.

Mary said in verses 46b,47, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” There is in these words a twofold act--she glorifies God and she rejoices. Her fountain of joy was her soul; it was not her feelings or thinking. When she was pledged to be married to Joseph, her soul did not rejoice. Instead, she enjoyed the dream of marriage and talked to herself, “Joe, O Joe, I want to see you just one more time.” This kind of joy is an emotional and temporal one. Such a joy has no guarantee after marriage. Through this we learn that those who have God in the center of their hearts have true joy. Otherwise, human beings are doomed to be miserable all the time, even if they eat gourmet food every day.

**Second**, Mary praises God because she realizes that God included her in his work. Look at verse 48. “For he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed.” Here, a personal testimony from her very soul comes pouring out. Mary was very humble. She was nothing but a poor country girl. She was no more than an unworthy, ordinary woman. She wondered why God's eyes should have fallen on her, and why God favored her. She exclaimed, “From now on all generations will call me blessed,” deeply realizing God’s favor by choosing her to do his work. Mary had the assurance of being a blessed one. God's blessing was to carry out a mission to be the mother of Jesus. But her blessing involved her to watch all the suffering of her beloved son. Finally she had to stand beneath the cross of Jesus to watch crucified Jesus. Mary had already experienced the pain of a broken relationship with Joseph. Mary had to pay the high cost of being the mother of Jesus. But she was happy, so happy that she praised God from her soul. People’s concept of blessing is to have a little better husband, a little better house, and to live an easy and comfortable life. In history, there may have been no one who suffered more than Mary as a woman. But no one calls her a woman of sorrow, or an unfortunate woman. Down through generations, people were abundantly comforted, even to think of the beauty of Mary and they call her the most blessed woman. Why? Because she accepted God’s mission. Some people think that God’s work is burdensome, saying, “Why me?” But Mary did not say, “Why me?” Instead, she thought she was the most blessed. May God give you this wonderful assurance, “I am the most blessed one!”

**Third**, Mary praises God for his mercy on those who fear him. Look at verses 49,50. “For the Mighty One has done great things for me--holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.” In this part of the song, Mary is no more a mere country girl. But she was able to see God in history. When she had the fear of God she saw God who rules history. There are three clauses which express God’s twofold character-- “the Mighty One” and “His mercy extends” to his suffering people. Personally the Almighty God extended his mercy to Mary by calling her from an ordinary life and including her in his great salvation work because she had the fear of God.

In this passage we learn that those who have God in their hearts can be truly happy. They can sing songs of praise from their souls. May God help us to participate in God’s work so that we may rejoice in God our Savior.