

## **Session Fifty-Four: God Helps Us Get Ready for Jesus**

**Theme:** Great Reversal

### **Law/Gospel Focus:**

If left to our own merit, we would be doomed by our sin to eternal damnation. But God reverses the plight of humans to reveal His unmerited, undeserved goodness and love through the person and work of Jesus. We respond to the love Jesus demonstrated to us on the cross by echoing Mary's adoration, "The Mighty One as done great things for me."

### **Objectives:**

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, we will:

- 1) describe how God reversed "human" rules to accomplish His plan of salvation;
- 2) explain how God continues to work through His means—Word and Sacraments—to reverse the plight for all people;
- 3) give thanks to God for the great things He has done.

### **Introduction:**

1. What do the following have in common?  
the sun rises and sets  
day follows night  
birth comes after the pains of childbirth  
pain occurs when you shut your hand in the car door  
you reap the rewards of hard work  
the price of sin is death
2. How has God revealed the following?  
you reap the rewards of your work  
the price of sin is death

Only God can reverse the normal order of nature. Only God can reverse the spiritual condition and consequences all people face. Today, we learn how through His plan of salvation, God reverses ordinary human ways.

### **Inform**

Read Luke 1:26-55 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

### **About the Text:**

Mary's song begins and ends by extolling the grace and goodness of God as revealed in His mercy.

Her story opens with the visit from God's messenger Gabriel (Luke 1:26). "In the sixth month" links God's promise to Mary with the similar promise to Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John. Nazareth, a village in the northern province of Galilee, is an unlikely stage for history's most-celebrated announcement. God chooses humble persons and places to fulfill His Word of grace to the world. Mary and Joseph are both descendants of King David, members of an ancient and noble family—the tribe of Judah. (It was common within Israelite society to marry within one's clan.) Together they looked forward to the coming of Israel's Redeemer, the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promise to the nation.

Mary's engagement ("pledge") to Joseph took place in the presence of witnesses. Their promises were likely sealed with a contract and a token of their covenant relationship. Perhaps a wedding date had been set, but it was God's timetable that guided the course of events. Mary the virgin was chosen to give birth to God's Son, apart from any human procreative act.

"Greetings" is a traditional salutation and expression of friendship. Mary is "favored," that is, she is blessed by God's limitless kindness, not because of her status or personal merit, but because of God's plan for her life. "The Lord is with you" reveals that God is truly present, with almighty power and purpose, to carry out His will. The angel simply announces what God has decreed: "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus" (1:31). The child is the rightful heir to David's throne, the true ruler over Israel (Jacob's house). His conception and birth take place by the creative design of God's Spirit, for from the beginning of time all things have come into existence through God's spoken Word (Genesis 1:3; Hebrews 11:3).

Mary's response, "How can this be?" flows from a humble yet inquisitive heart. The mystery of the virgin birth, foretold by Isaiah (7:14) and confessed by Christians of all generations, centers on the simple truth that "Nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). As Mary reflects on God's miracles for His chosen people, she acknowledges her dependence on His promise.

Soon after the angel's announcement, Mary visits Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant with her first child. The fact that both women are expecting is an occasion for rejoicing, as each son is destined for a special role in the redemption of Israel.

Mary travels to a village in Judea. At her greeting, the child in Elizabeth's womb stirs—leaps for joy at the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth, too, is filled with the Spirit. She understands that Mary's news marks the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise to send the Messiah. Her relative is to be the mother of the Savior, the Lord. Elizabeth naturally blesses Mary, as she herself has been blessed by Mary's visit.

The hymn of praise that Mary sings—or speaks—is called the Magnificat (from the Latin “to glorify”). Her words are reminiscent of Old Testament psalms but show an even closer connection to Hannah’s song at the dedication of her son Samuel in the Lord’s service (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Mary’s hymn expresses her joy at God’s help and deliverance spoken to and now realized by Abraham’s descendants. Every thought and phrase extol the greatness of God for His people. But Mary’s adoration is profoundly personal: “The mighty One has done great things *for me*” (v. 49). She praises God for her unique role in His mighty act of salvation.

The hymn unfolds a major theme in Luke’s Gospel and in the Christian message: the overthrow of human ways and expectations. God reverses the ordinary “rules” of life by choosing the humble and lowly to achieve His purposes. In this way, “no one may boast before Him” (1 Corinthians 1:29).

For Mary, the great reversal means life for God’s people. It also means a special place in the story of the Savior’s birth. “All generations will call me blessed,” she confesses, “for the Mighty One has done great things for me” (Luke 1:48-49).

### **Discussing the Text:**

- 1). How does God reverse “human” rules  
by choosing Mary as the mother of the Messiah?  
in the method through which Jesus was conceived?  
in Joseph’s response to the knowledge of Mary’s pregnancy?
- 2). Why was it essential for God to reverse “human” rules in order to carry out His plan of salvation?
- 3). How does Mary reflect some of God’s great reversals in her song of praise?
- 4). What does God’s great reversal mean to Mary?

### **Connect:**

In studying the story, focus upon the following applications: As God chose Mary—a humble, sinful servant—by His grace, He chooses us also through His love in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. By the Spirit’s power, Mary responds to God’s promise in faith. Believers today respond in praise and in service to God’s gift of salvation in Jesus.

In sending His Son to earth, God reverses ordinary human ways to reveal His unmerited, undeserved goodness and love. In many respects, the world operates on the principles of merit: we are “rewarded” for our knowledge or efforts or skill or achievement. Christians, too, may fall prey to the lure of “self-justification” before God and others. The Gospel, however, proclaims pure grace. God forgives not on the basis of merit or worthiness but through Christ. In the Law we see both God’s righteousness and our own flaws and failures. In the Gospel we see the

Savior, who redeems us with blood and makes us His beloved, forgiven children called by His mercy alone! Like Mary, we confess, “The Mighty One has done great things for me!”

- 1). How does God’s choosing Mary provide us comfort and hope today?
- 2). How has God performed a “great reversal” in your life through faith in Jesus?
- 3). Share what this great reversal means to you.
- 4). Use Mary’s Song of Praise as an outline to write a song of praise to God for what He has done for you in Christ Jesus.