

This morning, as we continue to prepare our hearts during this Advent time, I would like to look at the “Songs of Christmas” and ask God to just open our souls up to come and worship, worship Christ.

As we begin I want to start with a question. The question is this. What is the greatest Christmas carol ever written? The greatest Christmas carol in history was not written by Irving Berlin or Mel Tormé or even Charles Wesley. The greatest Christmas carol ever written was composed by a pregnant, teenage Jewish girl named Mary. She was visiting her cousin Elizabeth who had just pronounced a blessing on her because of what was about to happen and Mary responded by pouring forth these remarkable words. It’s called “The Magnificat.”

Now, when Mary sang her song, everybody knew who the King was. The King was a man by the name of Herod. He was called Herod the Great. Herod had to fight for that title. He knew how to get what he wanted. Herod knew the way the world worked. He knew how power operated. Herod wanted to be known for huge, magnificent building projects. Part of why the Temple was so controversial in Jesus’ day is that Herod built it. It was called Herod’s Temple and he built it on the backs of the poor. His taxation, his economic policies, absolutely crushed the poor in Jesus’ day.

Herod knew how to take out the competition if necessary, to murder even family, wives, or children. He knew how to out maneuver, out wait, outsmart, outfox, out intimidate. He knew. One day some strangers came to Jerusalem. They were called Magi, *visitors of the east, and they came asking the question*, where is the one who was born King of the Jews?

So now you understand this next phrase: When Herod heard this, he was disturbed. And now you understand the next phrase: And all Jerusalem with him. Meanwhile little Mary, little meek, mild Mary

sings her song. He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. Who do you think that might be? He has brought down rulers from their thrones. Who's on the throne? He has sent the rich away empty.

All the hopes of Mary, all the fears of Herod. Hopes and fears. To one the coming of Jesus was the foundation, the very hope of the world.

To the other it was a catastrophe to be feared and prevented at all cost up to and including genocide and Mary sings her little song.

But God is reversing everything. There is a very important theme in scripture. This is the beginning of what some New Testament scholars call "the great reversal." A couple of chapters later in Luke Jesus comes along. He says, "Blessed are you who are poor ..." Now again, to the poor in Jesus' day can you imagine how these words would sound? Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you who hunger now... (Luke 6:20ff) Why, because it's a good thing to be hungry? No, it's because the Kingdom of God has become available to you for you will be satisfied.

One of the things this means is that God has no intention of tolerating the injustice and greed of this world on a permanent basis. God does not. There is no doubt that God expects the church to show compassion to the poor, because they are in a unique position to appreciate that they must be dependent on God. One of the delusions of wealth, power, and status is that we think we might be in control of life. Our hearts need to reflect His heart.

And now, in what we call Christmas, in Jesus, God has started to do something about it. God has begun to set things right. In Jesus, the great reversal has begun. He has begun to set things right but He will not overthrow Herod by using Herod's methods. He won't out-Herod Herod. He will out-love Herod. Jesus will defeat Herod's capacity to hate by His greater capacity to serve and to suffer.

This is Jesus. This is the one who comes to be born, who we now worship. He will humble Himself. He will be born in a stable. He will

grow up in poverty. He will be accused unfairly. He will be tried corruptly. He will be mocked mercilessly. He will be executed excruciatingly.

He will overcome the power, the dominion, the lostness of sin through His suffering on a cross for me, for you, for rich and poor, for Herod, if only Herod would get down on his knees and say yes.

Mary is not rejoicing because God's given her an easy season, because it's a nice time of year. She is rejoicing because she has a big God. Her song is called "The Magnificat" because in the Latin translation that's the first word—"magnify." "My soul magnifies God."

Likewise, we are to do that—always and in all things. We are magnifying all the time. We are either magnifying our problems or we will magnify our God. Notice, Mary had all kinds of problems—no status, no resources, no human possibilities. She says, "God, notice my humble state," but she doesn't magnify her problem. She magnifies God. God's at work now. God's up to something. "I want to be a part of it and therefore I rejoice."

Now, just so we know, to magnify God, or to glorify God, *similar concept*, is not just something we do with our lips. It's not just singing a song or saying words. It's what we do with our lives. Our job is to magnify God in our minds and our lives and then God does the great reversal in us.

Those who know God and His grace can well echo Mary's song. We do not have the honor of giving birth to the Savior of the world, but we do have the blessing of becoming one of His children. Our job is to magnify God in our minds and our lives and then to know that God is working in us always and in all ways to draw people to Himself and see and experience the great salvation that is available in Jesus Christ.