

COMING OF PEACE, LK.1:26-56

Heaven Come Down #2

◆**Intro:** In 1980 my family moved to New London, CT. and bought an old, A-shaped cottage like house, complete with stucco first level siding, on a corner in an aged neighborhood. It was a fixer-up to say the most. Every room inside was a different color and odd ones at that. Some of the roof was rotted out, and a colony of army ants that lived in a nearby hollow oak was so busy moving into the house that we discovered a bare earthen trail about 1/2inch wide and 10' long from the oak to the corner of the house! So we set about to make the place better. Fresh paint inside. Outside we chopped down the oak and my brothers and I were enslaved to plant no less than 30 three foot arborvitae along the street edge of the yard, until we had a virtual fence of green. [Mom may or may not have been a bit neurotic about those trees. In the winter to keep them from dying we were made to wrap each one in plastic garbage bags. It was embarrassing! Our house became known as the "house with the trees bags."] We planted raised flowerbeds and repainted the garage. Years later I happened to be passing through New London and wanted to go past our old house. It was a sad sight. It had returned to a run down state of disrepair. Some of the arborvitae were a complete pale tan shade of dead. (Clearly someone had removed the bags!)

◆Suppose you went by a house you used to call home and discovered that the yard was full of junk, and the inside was layered in dust and trash. Nothing seemed to work, and though

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there were humans in the place, they had become sullen and nasty. Well this is a picture of the human race and the human place, earth. What was once orderly and lush with beauty is now a significantly dysfunctional place, as every war, or oil spill, or drug needle reminds us. But it is to this place that Heaven came down in the person of God's Son. Now sometimes people imagine that Jesus was born to show us how to escape earth and make it to heaven, as in the old spiritual "This world is not my home I'm just a-passin' through." And while we can understand the sentiment it's actually not true because we are not headed for another world. We are headed for a renewed world, a restored earth. Neal Plantinga puts it,

◆ "The great writing prophets of the Bible knew how many ways human life has gone wrong because they knew how many ways human life can go right. And they dreamed of a time when God would put things right again. They dreamed of a new age in which crookedness would be straightened out, rough places made plain. The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble. They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would stream with red wine, a time when weeping would be heard no more, and when people could sleep without weapons on their laps. People could work in peace, their work having meaning and point. A lion could lie down with a lamb, the lion cured of all carnivorous appetite. All nature would be fruitful, benign,

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and filled with wonder upon wonder; all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God, their shouts of joy and recognition welling up from valleys and crags, from women in streets and from men on ships.”

◆ This is a picture of what the Hebrew people called “shalom”, or “peace.” This is what they longed for and waited for, literally. Now, Mary was not from a particularly wealthy family. Her circumstances were lowly and humble. She didn’t know it yet but her son would be born in a stable, not even a hotel, certainly not a hospital. But Mary is a picture of hope and confidence and I suggest that is the case for several reasons.

◆ **1. If you want to be hopeful, sing about God, not yourself.** It’s a no-brainer, really. If you are all about yourself, paying your own way, not accepting help, proving to the world that you are a somebody, well, it will be very hard to hope or to live peacefully. That’s because you are under the gun to perform! And the fact is that we all fail and fall short a great amount of the time. And further more, you will not be able to accept the grace of God in paying your way which puts you at eternal odds with God. And yet our first inclination is to sing about ourselves in order to encourage ourselves. If Mary was anything like the divas of our day her song would have said a whole lot of different things like,

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- ◆ “Yow. This girl is on fire!” or “I’m beautiful...”
- ◆ “I wanna thank all my fans for believing in me.” or
- ◆ “I just want all little girls out there to see in my achievement that you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. (which is pretty much not true.) or
- ◆ “Let me tell you all, it takes believing in yourself! I watched my diet. I exercised daily. I read the Torah and the Prophets daily, and look how it paid off! Here I am about to be the Mother of God!”
- ◆ But Mary says nothing at all like this, does she. She right away points to God. She says things like “my soul glorifies the Lord” (46), and “the Mighty One has done great things for me” (49). Do you wonder why Mary can hold it all together after being visited by a terrifying angelic being, and told she’s about to be swept into the main flow of all of human history? It’s because she looked constantly toward God’s face and not in the mirror.
- ◆ Singing my own praise will never fill my soul. So take a clue from Mary and give glory where glory is due. Yes do your best. Yes study for the test. But in the end we all must recognize that we are the force in control our our existence.
 - ◆ “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21, NIV.
- ◆ We don’t choose the family we were born into. We had no say in the longitude or latitude that determined our culture and shade of melanin. None of our greatness contributed to whether or not

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we arrive in poverty or wealth. And while we may pat ourselves on the back for how far we've advance materially, I'll tell you with surety that there are ten other people who worked just as hard as you and didn't hit it big.

◆ *"To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the LORD comes the reply of the tongue." "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." Proverbs 16:1, 9; 21:1, NIV.*

◆ If something has gone well for you, sing to God. Mary shows us that it is humility that leads to hope.

◆ *"What makes you better than anyone else? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why boast as though you have accomplished something on your own?" 1 Corinthians 4:7, NLT.*

◆ As long as we keep telling ourselves, "I'm gonna make it big. I'm gonna have this or that. I determine my steps -well, we'll not live in hope.

◆ **2. Set your eyes on the Coming Kingdom in order to live in hope.** Mary sings like the prophets wrote. She sings of balance, and justice, and the world being put right again. Hungry people being brought home for dinner, and selfish people going away empty (v53). God-followers down through history have been able to endure being fed to tigers, being used as Roman

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torches, hiding underground, being thrown in prison -and still being the willing hand of aid, even to their captors. The reason for their endurance is where the eyes of their hearts were fixed. They fully expected that at the end of life, right and goodness, and God's way would prevail. Convinced that the man Jesus is in fact THE God, they focused on his assurance: that he would come and when he did even people long dead were going to get justice and restoration. The planet would be altered. The animal kingdom also transformed. The human race made into more than we ever dreamed. That is why Christians celebrate Advent. Jesus has come, and he will come again to finish and reform every square inch of creation, and every millisecond of time. The prophets preached nothing less. Mary expected the same.

✦ Now I know that it's a cracked world we live in. I know some of you carry tremendous sorrow, and loss with you every day. I know that many of us look at our lives and think "Man, this is not what I signed up for." I know that some of us have experienced betrayal that we still can't believe took place. If you are one of those folks, Mary's message is this: look to the Day of the Lord! Hope and peace comes from a confident belief that He is coming no matter if in our lifetime or not. He is coming. That means absolutely everything you do in cooperation with his eternal kingdom has eternal consequence and purpose whether or not it seems to pay off here. You share a can of coke here because of love arising from Jesus in your heart? The Bible promises, it will

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not be forgotten in the new world. You endure unfair treatment, maybe refuse to retaliate here because you're trying to follow Christ? It is known and remembered by God there.

◆ *"But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Luke 6:35, NIV.*

◆ **3. To have hope in your heart, also reflect on what God has already done.** The last thing I urged us to do was to look to the future with God. Now I'm saying that by looking at the past with God you will gain confidence for doing so. This is what Mary did! The girl new her Bible. She knew the acts of God in history. She was a woman of history which made her a woman of hope as well. Lets take a look.

◆ *"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 for ever; his kingdom will never end." Luke 1:32, 33, NIV.* -That was said to David over a 1000 years earlier!

◆ *"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." Luke 1:36, 37, NIV.* -That was spoken to Sarah, Abraham's wife 2000 years earlier when in her old age of 90 she had a baby.

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◆ *"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." Luke 1:44, NIV. -that also happened to Isaac's wife Rebekah in Gen.25.*

◆ We can tell that Mary knew biblical history. She was well aware of God's doings among her people. Look how she responds!

◆ *"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as he said to our fathers." Luke 1:54, 55, NIV.*

◆ Nothing give hope like history. You know your friend will show up and so you don't worry because you know your friend. He always shows up! You give money away (tithe) to someone who needs it without worry that you won't have enough, because you've done it for years and God has always supplied. When things are dark, friends, rehearse the history of God in your life. Remember his deeds. It's what many of the Psalms do. It's frequent in Scriptures. So you do it.

◆ Did we not seek the Lord's direction on colleges? Did our son not get in? Did we not pray and ask God to send help for that bill? Didn't we get that unexpected gift from the brother-in-law? Did we not ask God to have a friend call and the phone rang right then? It is important for you as a follower of God to revisit his answers and provisions, or in your painful moments you will believe the evil one when he lies to your mind that all is lost, you have no hope. The writer of Psalm 77 was wondering why his life was troubled. He wrote...

◆ *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will*

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remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds." Psalms 77:10-12, NIV.

◆C. What are your God-things? Keep a record. Write them down. Tell your friends and your children. Rehearse them at your Christmas parties. There is a reason for this you know. Those with the best memories are the most resilient.

◆**Conclusion:** You know, Mary's son was the son of God himself! Heaven come down to earth. But Mary still had to do the laundry. And Mary still had to get old, and maybe have arthritis. And Mary still had to bow her head each day and pray to her Father in heaven. And Mary had to wait too. She and Joseph have long since died. What did they say on their deathbeds since Jesus, their remarkable son hadn't returned yet? I imagine she might have sung her song again. At that point she'd have seen him turn water into wine, heard of his walking on the Sea of Galilee, seen him crucified by the Roman army, and also resurrected, walking around and talking to people with and ascending to heaven promising to return. I seriously doubt she had any doubt.