



**Series:** Advent: Season of Hope

**Date:** December 4, 2023

**Speaker:** Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text:** Luke 1: 46-56: Mary's Song of Hope

### Introduction to Advent

You are awesome. Praise God for what he's doing through Mercy Nairobi! We love Allan and M'lynn and the team and are so thankful the Lord allowed us to be their sending church. One of the things Allan mentioned is our Christmas Missions Offering. Planting churches like Mercy Nairobi is why we take this up. In addition to giving away 11% of our annual budget, we give an offering here at Christmas.

As a church, we want to give to the advancement of the gospel through churches here locally in the charlotte area and around the world. You can see details on our

website of where this money is going. But my simple encouragement to you is to give. And I'm more concerned with participation than amount. I want all of us to give this year. Don't care how much you can give but every individual and every family let's give TOGETHER to God's Mission this year. And if you are trying to figure out the amount, the way Courtney and I try to think about it is that we want to give our best Christmas gift, as a family, to God and His mission. Here's why: Because He is worthy of it. And He's said His church is His Plan A for reaching the world with the gospel. So we give, and it's above and beyond our tithe. As a family, we give 10% of our income to the church each month because the Lord calls us to tithe first back to him as an act of trust in him and an act of humility recognizing it's all His anyway. The Christmas Missions Offering is a chance for us to give above and beyond that and we are excited to do it. **Because we want to see God move THERE, in other places, like he's moving here.** Ya'll He's moving here. It's awesome to be a part of.

Last weekend...Thanksgiving weekend...Ya'll at all 3 campuses, and in 5 out of 6 worship services, at least one person got baptized! PRAISE GOD! Ya'll that's why we do what we do. A lot of ya'll have sacrificed a lot this

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fall and I'm so thankful. God is moving through you Mercy Church and it's awesome to be your pastor.

I don't know about you but I am excited for Christmas! I actually love all of it. I love the songs, even though plenty of them are terrible. Like "last Christmas" I don't know who WAM paid off to get in the Christmas canon but man that thing is rough. But I love it all anyway. We lit the house last weekend, we start wrapping presents this week. The parties are starting up. Got my ugly sweater. Which is actually just one of pastor Brett's regular sweaters. Pastor Brett is our student pastor.

I love Christmas and I really love that each year as a church we devote the entire month of December to what we call "Advent." Which is the season of celebration of the advent, or arrival, of Jesus. This year we are theming advent as a "Season of Hope." Because the announcement of the arrival of a savior is, at its core, an announcement of hope. You'll see that in our passage today. Hope comes to somebody who, apart from trusting God, has absolutely no reason to hope. Her situation does not seem hopeful. And yet, her SOUL is filled with hope. And she discovers that hope by releasing control and trusting God. And just like her, this church is going to be filled with HOPE this Christmas. Mercy will be a place where hope will be announced, celebrated, and if you want it - it's here for

you. But will you trust God enough to release control so you can discover hope?

Today you are going to hear hope and see hope in a familiar passage of scripture. Last weekend we saw it testified to by those who were baptized. And it is the anthem of this church. There is HOPE for you at Christmas.

And I want it to fill your heart like how helium fills a balloon and makes it rise. That's my prayer for you as you hear this word from God's word today. Sometimes I think we come in like a balloon and you think my job is to smack you up in the air until you float back down next week. But what I really want you to encounter is the kind of hope that will cause your heart to rise and stay there. I believe the gospel offers that hope to you today.

If you have your bible go to Luke 1. We will be in the gospel of Luke all of the advent season and we'll be looking at the arrival of Jesus. We begin by looking at Mary. The young woman whom God chose to be the mother of Jesus. Now depending on your background you may have NO IDEA who Mary is or maybe some vague references to her as St. Mary or that virgin in the bible or something like that. Well, she's Jesus' mom. And if you are new, no worries. JESUS is like the main

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character of the bible and we'll talk about Him today and every Sunday.

Here's the big idea today: **If we surrender like Mary, we can discover hope like Mary.** Luke is inviting us to join Mary in worshiping the one true God who is faithfully fulfilling His promise to His people to provide a savior. But ironically it's the surrender that leads to hope. It's releasing control. That's the moment when hope starts pouring in. But you gotta surrender like Mary.

Here's the road map for today: **Mary's situation, Mary's song, and finally Mary's lessons in hope.** Make sense? 3 parts. Situation, Song, and Lessons in Hope.

**26 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,**

Setting: Mary belongs to the people of Israel. Which means she's heard the stories of her ancestors and how God moved among them. Israel, after all, is the people of God. She heard how God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to Moses and to David. She heard about God parting the Red Sea, about the walls of Jericho falling down and the giant Goliath taken out by David's slingshot. She knew the psalms, the prophets... She's heard about God's faithfulness to this promise through people like Ruth and Gideon and Isaiah and Esther. She's heard it.

**BUT SHE HASN'T SEEN IT.** In fact, at this moment in the account, it's been 400 years since Israel has heard from God. That's the time gap between when the events of the last OT book took place and the events we read about in Luke's gospel. That is a LONG time. Long enough for history to become a little more like folklore. Right? While God has seemingly been silent, the world was taken over and now ruled by ROME. By a guy named Caesar Augustus. Who allowed the worship of only one god - himself. On top of where Mary lived they were ruled by a guy named Herod who was a harsh murdering tyrant that taxed them ruthlessly. The poor were oppressed and marginalized. Nothing from God, oppression from the ruling power...Man do you see the situation? And oh by the way she's a single teenager who is engaged to be married. NOT MARRIED...engaged to be married. To a carpenter named Joseph. This is oppressed and poor with zero upward mobility Mary.

And I say that because some of you may feel like God is silent and you are stuck. It hasn't been 400 years but man it feels like it. Maybe you are one like Mary, and like me, who grew up around the stories. You even know what a flannel graph is. You've heard about God working.. but you haven't seen it! And you are starting to get disillusioned.

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- God if you are so good, why won't you take away this suffering?
  - God if you are so good - why am I going through a divorce?
  - God if you are so good - why is it so hard to make and keep good friends?

And it's hard to have hope in a God who SEEMS silent. So if that's you, the opening pages of the gospels are great sources of hope! Because finally...God speaks. He sends his angel Gabriel to Mary, and look at how Luke describes her:

27 to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. -- Luke 1:27

Why even bring Joseph up? He ain't there. Because of that little phrase "house of David." Luke is cluing you in, right out of the gate, that something big is happening. I'll come back to it but when you see DAVID in the New Testament you need to think...GOD'S PROMISE. And another little detail, she's a virgin. He said it twice just to make sure you know.

28 And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. --

Of course she was troubled. An ANGEL just showed up. I don't know what you think of when you hear angels but the bible describes them as warriors of light. They

frighten people to the point of falling down like dead. Fearing and trembling. Every time they show up people get so scared the angel says don't be afraid! Which is exactly what happens:

30 Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

WOW! Huge news. God's promised messiah is coming! God isn't silent anymore! He's working, He's moving, He's got a plan And He's chosen Mary for it. WHOA. Does she immediately praise God for this? No. Because she's human. And she's got questions. Mary knew this was impossible. She's learned how baby-making works. 34 Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?" -- Luke 1:34

By the way - this isn't skepticism. Some of you need to hear it's okay to ask God questions. But you need to see in Mary what I often refer to as sincere doubt. Genuine heart and mind wanting to know how God is working. Insincere doubt is looking for a "gotcha" moment. It's

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out to prove God wrong. That's not Mary here. She is looking into a mystery and saying "How can this be?"

35 The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 And consider your relative Elizabeth — even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." -- Luke 1:35-37

Remember this is the situation that sets up her song. Nothing is impossible. I know this sounds like a lot Mary so here's what I'm gonna do to help you out - I'm giving you a trusted testimony to help strengthen your faith. Isn't God so good right here? His message should be enough. But He says go see your cousin and hear her testify about me. He gives her a message to believe and then a testimony to help her get there. So she says what we all should say when the Lord gives us an assignment.

38 "See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. -- Luke 1:38

If you feel like - yeah I'm not Mary. I've said no to the Lord. I've chosen my own way instead of His. DON'T

WORRY! God is actually going to offer you great hope to you too!

Now we arrive at the setting for Mary's powerful song of hope. She's come to Elizabeth's house because the angel said there was evidence of God doing the impossible here. Her old cousin Elizabeth is pregnant? Impossible. But maybe if THIS pregnancy is possible...maybe hers will be too!

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 Then she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! 43 How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!" -- Luke 1:41-45 (CSB)

God gives Mary Elizabeth's testimony. What kindness from God! Was his word enough? Yes! After all, she said, "Ok I'm in." And yet God sets this whole thing up for her. And Elizabeth SHOUTS...like right when she gets there...BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN! I see you! What God said, I'm confirming. Blessed are you who believed the Lord! Man, the encouraging words of a faithful friend are so powerful.

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THAT'S MARY'S SITUATION. NOW WE TRANSITION TO MARY'S SONG. And look in your bible even the style changes. It changes from prose to poetry. That's because what's coming is like an OT Psalm dropped right here at the start of Luke's gospel. And one function of the Psalms is to let you look beyond the circumstances and see what's going on in the heart. In the middle of darkness and silence, God has spoken, her friend has encouraged her in her faith, and so now let's look for a few moments at this amazing song and then I'll show you the lessons Mary teaches us about hope.

And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

**Notice how personal this is? My soul, My spirit, My savior.** This personal response to God is something I want us to lean into today. Usually, I like to show how Christianity is a faith practiced in community, and it is, but part of what makes our faith so powerful is how personal it is as well. Jesus Christ saves a community of people one person at a time.

He knows **you**. He sees your situation. He sees the sin nobody else sees. He sees the hurt you are trying to keep others from seeing. He sees the guilt. The pain. The exhaustion. The loneliness and despair. And He

comes to **YOU** today and offers **you** salvation. A salvation where you lay those burdens onto Him and your soul is now able to rejoice. A savior strong enough, compassionate enough, and close enough to offer salvation from your sin and comfort in your suffering. What a savior. Not just THE SAVIOR, but MY savior.

48 because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed

She was right. Every single generation since her has looked back and marveled at the favor of God on this woman. Partly because while these things may not have appeared circumstantially great, they were GREAT THINGS. Like getting pregnant while engaged in 1st century Nazareth...not a great outward appearance. In fact, outwardly there will be some questions. But these things are nonetheless GREAT. She has been given the honor of carrying the savior of the world. And what is happening INSIDE her...**the presence of GOD given to HER as an unmerited gift**...This is a great thing. And her next words next should shoot like an arrow through time from her soul to yours...

48 because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy.

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50 His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him.

It's not just that generations will call Mary blessed. Mary is inviting every generation...including you and me today...to get in on the same mercy God showed her. Undeserved Favor. The presence of God with us. Just like Mary, you aren't owed anything by God. You haven't earned anything. But His Mercy is available For those who fear the Lord – who can say from their core...God is perfect and holy and I am not. I am sinful and therefore not worthy of God's favor. He doesn't owe me...that's the person who can receive his mercy. And his mercy is as much for the 90-year-old as it is for the 9th grader as it is for the 9-year-old. Listen if you are under 25 - You represent a different generation than me. And God has mercy for you AND for your friends. For your generation. He has HOPE for your generation.

51 He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. 53 He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty

See it's the ones who are proud, well fed, well resourced...often have a hard time seeing their need for God. Their abundance isn't bad on its own. Listen some of you are going to be wildly wealthy compared to your

peers and definitely when compared to the greater world. That abundance isn't bad. God has granted you that and I hope you will leverage it for the advancement of his gospel here and around the world. That abundance isn't bad UNLESS it becomes your savior. If you don't need God now that you have money...well then it's a problem.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.

In the birth of Jesus God is fulfilling a promise he made to Abraham saying his descendants will be as many as the stars in the sky. That all of the nations would be blessed through Abraham. Christmas is a story of God keeping His promises - which means the promises He has made to us in Christ. We can be confident He will keep those too.

If He went to all the trouble to create a census...so that a young couple living in Nazareth (OT promised messiah was from Nazareth) would have to go to Bethlehem (OT promised messiah would be born in Bethlehem) to be born in a stable...If GOD kept all those meticulous promises...he will keep His promises He's made to you if you are in Christ. And listen, that's where HOPE grows. Hope grows in the greenhouse of our

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confidence in God's faithfulness. We trust he is faithful to his promises.

- God promises to strengthen you - Eph 3
- God promises to give you REST - Matthew 11
- God promises to provide for all your needs - Phil 4.19
- God promises to work everything for your good - Rom 8
- God promises to be WITH YOU - Matthew 28
- God promises to protect you - Ps 91
- God promises to forgive you and set you free from your sin - 1 John 1
- God promises to give you everlasting life - John 3.16

DO YOU KNOW HIS PROMISES? Some of you struggle to hope in God because you don't KNOW him. You are missing out on the helium that his promises are to your daily life. Get to know His word to you. His promises for you!

This brings us to the final part of our sermon. The lessons Mary teaches us about hope. I think when we look at the situation God brought to Her and how Mary responded, man there is so much for us to take and apply.

The first one might be obvious and it actually comes from Gabriel. **Nothing will be impossible with God**

**(Luke 1.37) !** I think this is the one Christians nod our heads to but in our souls, we just do NOT believe. We are trained...I mean in every arena we are trained that faith is for the weak of mind and heart. Especially faith in a God we cannot see. And even if we assent to the central truths of Christianity - that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died for our sins, resurrected from the grave, and ascended into heaven. Even if we believe the things that happened in scripture...we struggle to believe that God is working today. After all, we think...it feels like God has been silent for a long time. And if that's where you are maybe what you needed was a fresh reminder that **Nothing will be impossible with God**. Listen to me the skepticism you carry is the weapon of Satan himself. It's doubting God at his word and it's the same thing that God Adam and Eve into trouble in the garden. Listen **skepticism poisons hope**. FRESH STORIES OF GOD WORKING.

1. You need to hear there are people among us here who are being set free from addictions. Not by their strength, but by God's power. College students are being saved by the power of God. People turning from years of disobedience to God...repenting...and finding forgiveness and hope in Christ. GOD IS MOVING and His power is available to you.

**Testimonies of Faithful Friends strengthen our hope.** For whatever reason I was really drawn to Elizabeth in



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Mary's story. Like God didn't have to tell Mary about her. But he did. Because EVEN THOUGH God's word should be enough, he knows that sometimes we need to hear about how he's working. And hearing how he's working in someone else's life, inspires hope in God in our own life. That's what Elizabeth is here for. She's got a story we'll see more about next week. But she's in Mary's story to inspire her own faith. Ya'll, we gotta start telling one another how God is working in our lives. We gotta think of testimony not JUST of how God saved me, but how God is working in me NOW.

Community Group Question - How is the Lord working in your life NOW? And if you don't know, time to take inventory. Maybe you feel like God is silent but in reality, you've just had your ears plugged. You've had your eyes covered. HE'S WORKING! OH and hey, maybe you need to be the voice of how God is working in someone's life. I SEE GOD WORKING IN YOU! Let's be specific and strengthen one another's faith. That's helium right there. This leads me right to the next lesson Mary teaches us in hope:

### **Celebrating God's past faithfulness stirs hope in his future faithfulness**

When she talks about how God has scattered the mighty, how he has been faithful to Abraham, how he has exalted the humble...What she's doing is celebrating the faithfulness of God in days past and

now connecting her story to all of those. God is being faithful.

Listen, do you know how powerful GRATITUDE is? Even the healthcare community and scientific research have caught up to how God created us in this area. God created gratitude...thankfulness...as a mechanism for flourishing in his world. **We think of gratitude as a character trait when we need to be thinking about it first as a practice.**

A study put out this year by UCLA Health said the practice of gratitude...15 minutes a day, 5 days a week, for 6 weeks...<sup>1</sup>

- Reduce Depression Symptoms
- Lessens Anxiety
- Causes a significant drop in diastolic blood pressure
- Relieves Stress
- Improves Sleep

We are made to be thankful. And we become thankful by practicing thankfulness. I have a journal that asks me this question every day. Write down 3 things you are thankful for. I have to pause and consider it sometimes. Sometimes I write the same things over

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<sup>1</sup>[Health benefits of gratitude](#)

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and over. And at least once a week I write the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Do you believe he died for your sins? Do you believe he rose again? Do you believe that he defeated death? Do you believe He ascended to the right hand of the Father? Do you believe He sent his Holy Spirit to empower and guide the church? Do you believe one day we will join Him in eternal glory?

And do you believe all of that is His mercy towards you? If He did all of that...surely he's not silent. Surely Lamentations is not lying and His mercies really are new every morning. Maybe we just aren't seeing them.

Listen you may not be like Mary. You may have rejected God for a long time. Maybe you've got a broken past and a broken heart and wonder if God's mercy is for YOU?

21 So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. -- 2 Timothy 2:21 (CSB)

God has a good work still for you. If you will turn back to him. Mary is a product of God's mercy. And you can be as well. Here's where it starts

## **Our last lesson in hope is Mary's first.**

### **Finding hope begins by releasing control and surrendering to God**

For Mary to find the blessing in this assignment she had to surrender. In what would mean very difficult conversations. And a lot of "I don't really know how this is going to work" kind of conversations.

38 "See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said."

She surrendered. And in doing so, discovered the faithfulness of God in an absolutely incredible way. Mary's whole song is a testimony of faith. It's saying God...I believe. What I've heard from my ancestors and from my friends and most importantly from you...I'm choosing to believe. And so, I trust you. I surrender to your good plan.

That's the call he's making to you. Surrender.