

- "A pause for reflection in the midst of the festivities..."

Cultivating Thankfulness

- I know its the day after Christmas....
 - but I want us to rewind just a little bit...
 - back to the annunciation, to the angel announcing to Mary that she would have a baby...
 - ...and particularly to Mary's reaction to this startling news!

What was Mary feeling?

- What was Mary feeling?
 - just been told by Gabriel to have a child;
 - outside marriage, society that disapproved, no child-benefit or income support;
 - would her parents support her? Would Joseph stand by her?
- Even though she had God's promise, she must have had moments of doubt:
 - certainly been my experience over the years... for instance, as we looked forward to finding a charge: knowing God's in control, yet with times of uncertainty, even fear...
- Quite likely that's why she headed up to see Elizabeth:
 - was she the only person who might understand what Mary was feeling....?

Yet by time she got to Elizabeth...

- Yet by time she got to Elizabeth... something has changed!
 - she was able to praise God, to allow her **thankfulness** to spill over in a torrent of wonder-filled praise!
- Why?
- Let me suggest two factors:
 - **first**, she had had **time to reflect** on all that the angel had said to her, on the implications of it all, on the significance - several days journey from Nazareth in the North to the hill country of Judah in the South.
 - **second**, she had the **opportunity to praise**, the context in which to give voice to all that she had come to realise - joined with someone else who understood, who was as attuned to God's working as she was.
- Same with us - we need both **time** and **opportunity** to adequately express our thankfulness.
 - often need **time** to play with that new toy, or learn your way around that new computer, or read that new book before we fully appreciate what we have been given!
 - also need an **opportunity** to express that thankfulness - a letter, a phone call, a meeting - or it will fade away

We need to do what Mary did: Reflect on God's goodness to us:

- What did she do?
- She picked out the:
 - **particular ways in which God had dealt with her;**
 - **also took in God's wider work & character.**
- We need to do both.
- In some ways, we're not very good at either.
- We certainly don't find it easy to name things, particular things, God has done for us - if I were to ask each person on the door on the way out this morning what God has done for them in the last month, say, most of us would find that difficult, awkward.
- Yet that's what Mary did - **"my heart praises... for he has remembered me"** (in the honour & responsibility of bearing & raising Jesus)
 - intensely personal; Gabriel had come and spoken to no one else; and Mary's eyes were open to what God was doing
- Maybe we need to take more time to identify what God is doing in us & for us, so that we are able to give him the thanks & praise.

- Neither are we brilliant at appreciating with our hearts as much as our heads **all that God has done for everyone**
 - look at way Mary really reflects on whole of God's work - vs.49b-54 are aorist, probably referring to God's work in sending the Messiah, so definite in its achievement can already be talked of as complete though Jesus still in Mary's womb!
 - she has grappled and pondered, **and is full of wonder.**
- Mary **reflected** on God's power, God's holiness, God's mercy as she journeyed up to the hill country of Judah to see Elizabeth
 - and it all became food for her thankfulness
- We can do the same:
 - daily Bible reading...
 - regularly not just "at" worship, but engaging, joining Amen, listening, pondering, joining the praise with our hearts and not just our throats

We need to do what Mary did: Give Expression to our thankfulness:

- Mary also **gave expression** to that thankfulness that was welling up within her as she pondered God's activity.
 - she sang!
 - a beautifully crafted and highly expressive hymn of praise to God
- She must have taken time over it:
 - it reflects a deep knowledge of the OT Scriptures
- Didn't merely allow that appreciation of all God's goodness to fade and be forgotten, but rather joined with someone else to praise.
- **How do we express?**
 - Prayer - do we participate? or do we spectate?
 - Singing - are our hearts in it, or are our eyes looking around to see who else is out this morning?
 - Giving - a duty or a joy?
 - Hospitality and welcome...?
 - Wider lifestyle - self-giving, loving, kind, gentle, patient...

Cultivating Thankfulness

- Can learn from Mary something of how to cultivate that spirit of thankfulness:
 - time to reflect on all that God has done, to think, to ponder, to learn and appreciate;
 - opportunity to express that praise and thanks - for the particular things God has done for us, shared with others, as well as the wider work and character of God our loving Heavenly Father
- Will our thank you letter to God be a short scribbled note merely done out of a sense of obligation, that its expected somehow, or a genuine expression of deep gratitude, drawn from the personal experience of God at work in our lives and expressed together as a family of his people?

Concluding reflection

- **Close by playing David Mitchell's version of the Magnificat, with words on screen...**
 - warn that its roughly 44 seconds into the track before any words come...

David Mitchell's Magnificat

- *Roughly 44 seconds into the track before any words come...*

My soul shall praise the Lord for his angel came to me
My soul shall praise the Lord for his angel came to me
My soul shall magnify the Lord my spirit rejoices in my God
My Saviour has looked down upon my lowly degree

Now for evermore from east to west all generations will call me blest
for the holy one has done great things for me.

His tender love extends to those who fear his name
Through every generation his mercy is the same
He has shown his strength to everyone
And deeds of power he has done

He scatters those who are proud
In the thoughts of their hearts
He has looked on kings with his eye
And brought them from their seats on high
And exalted those who play a humble part

His tender love extends to those who fear his name
To every generation the same
My soul shall magnify the Lord who has set his name on me
My soul shall praise the Lord for his angel came to me

His wisdom turns the world in a most peculiar way
He fills the hungry poor but the rich he sends away
He has helped his servant Israel
Remembering to be merciful
By sending us Messiah which he promised of old
For he gave his word to Abraham and all his children after him
That he would be our God for evermore

For he has satisfied the poor hungry with good things
And sent the wealthy empty away
And now he sends his Saviour king that he promised us of old

His love endures for ever as Abraham was told

His love endures for ever and all the world will see
That he who lives for ever has set his love on me