

“Mary’s Humility” | Christmas Eve Sermon 2024
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At Christmas we find God in a lowly manger. Finding God here should remind us of the places we don’t, or cannot, find Him.

The first place we won’t find God is in **the heights**. Christmas is not about ascending to heaven to get to God. It is not about becoming sinless enough, good enough, holy enough, to climb to His throne.

God dwells in the heights; we don’t. So, we can’t find our way to him there.

The second place we won’t find God is the **mushy middle**. This is the place of comfort, of focus on having a good life here and now, of oscillation between causal interest in religion and outright indifference about God.

We dwell in the mushy middle; God doesn’t; he won’t. So, we don’t find God there.

There is a place, however, where both God and we do dwell. It is the place of lowliness, smallness, need, humility. Peering down over Bethlehem and Mary, and finding the Christ child in the midst of this vast universe, we are reminded at Christmas that though we cannot find God in heights of our own righteousness or lukewarmness of indifference—God can be found *in the depths*.

Perhaps this is a question that matters to you—*where can God be found*? Perhaps it will matter to you one day. But let us ask, as we turn to Mary and her child, what it means to find God in the lowly depths of humility.

There is a tension between the heights and the depths that surrounds Jesus’ birth.

Where and Who: God does not send the angel Gabriel to Rome to announce his coming; nor will God choose the powerful family of Caesar for the incarnation. Gabriel is sent to an otherwise unknown family, Mary and Joseph, who live in a backwater town, Nazareth.

How: And in coming to us, God doesn’t appear with angel armies or chariots of fire. He comes as a child,—the Infinite, the Almighty, dependent on Mary for protecting, clothing, feeding.

The incarnation makes a statement: **God resist the proud, but draws near to the lowly**. And Mary sounds this theme in her song, the Magnificat:

God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.... and the rich he has sent away empty (Luke 1:51-53).

In answering what it means to find God in the depths of humility, we must first consider why we don't find God in our prideful self.

I. Pride Kills

The Bible is blunt in relaying God's opinion about pride: he hates it: "I abhor the pride of Jacob," (Amos 6:8). "God opposes the proud" (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).

Christians have warned us about pride for a long time; it tops the list of seven deadly sins. What exactly is it?

Defining Pride

Pride is, essentially, an overestimation of ourselves. Sometimes it's subtle, other times overt.

Pride is our tendency to compare ourselves to others, wanting not merely to be happy or successful, but happier and more successful than him or her.

Pride is our over-confidence in ourselves, thinking we know best, even know better than God.

Pride shows up also as indifference—indifference toward people we deem less important.

Here is the thing about pride: *it's exhausting! It's damaging! It's a killjoy to our souls.*

Pride Cuts Us Off

Blaise Pascal, in his little book *Pensée*, says that a proud man "concentrates all his efforts on concealing his faults from others," because he can't stand to look needy, or sinful. Thus, pride makes us wear a mask so others never really see us. Pride isolates.

Pride also can keep us from seeing others—often others we might otherwise have the sweetest connections with.

I had to clean out a storage closet this summer up in Pennsylvania. It meant going through boxes of old family pictures, which included my teenage years. These are the years when we may decide we are "too cool" to be seen with our family. I don't think I smiled in a picture from ages 14-16. I felt too cool—or too prideful—to be seen with my family. Looking back, I realize pride was isolating me from the joy of family

I am not sure we really outgrow this sudden flush of teenage-self-awareness.

Through life, pride can keep us from relating to certain people because we are trying to impress the so-called important people. Perhaps this is how we've come to view God's people, the church: those we'd rather not invest our time in, or be seen with.

Over God: Pride's final dagger is that it doesn't push us *away from* God, as other sins do. Rather, it exalts *us over* God. Pride says we have the final right to ourselves, our lives; we know what is best; we ought to be on the throne.

And who likes pride when they see it in others? **It's off-putting.** And who of us hasn't felt the sweet relief of finally letting our guard down—our pride down—around someone and confessing our weakness, fears, or failings.

And this takes us further into the heart of the Christmas story. God doesn't leave us alone in our fortress of pride. He lowers himself into the depths of our misery and sin. In invites us to find him in the place of lowliness. God teaches us that while pride kills, humility saves.

Pride Kills. But humility Saves.

II. Humility Saves

Mary stands as a model of this humility, as she sings:

he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate (Luke 1:52).

Humility is one of the features of Mary that we so love. After the angel's announcement, she responds: "be it unto me according to your Word."

But how exactly does Mary's humility work? How might we practice it? We'll close by considering two things about the humility surrounding Mary's statement, in the opening of her song, the God is her Savior. And we'll see, that wrapped up in this title for God is the pathway to humility. Mary sings,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God **my Savior**" (1:46-47).

(1) First, to call God savior, requires the humility to know you need saving. It requires accepting what the Bible has to say about us, and about God.

And by saving, we mean more than help in the areas of our physical or emotional or social maladies. We mean saving from sin.

Pride, you see, is a species of sin. It is the most pernicious; the queen of sin. The Bible says that we all are sinners—we all have set ourselves over God; lived independent of God; not loved God or neighbor. The Bible says that the wages of our sin is death. And we cannot pay these wages.

Mary understood, as she sings to God as savior, that her son has come into the world to save us from our sins.

So, you will need the humility to understand yourself as a sinner, and God as the proper judge over your life, if you are going to sing these words with Mary: my spirit rejoices in God **my Savior.**"

And here pride may rear its ugly head, whispering to us: “this is ridiculous; sin’s an old-fashioned idea; if there is a god, he loves everybody no matter what. Don’t ruin your life with religious extremism—that’s for needy people.”

God is for needy people—needing people like Mary, like me.

But when it feels that our own humility can’t win the battle over our pride, there is another way to understand God’s title as Savior. You see, what ultimately topples our pride is not our own humility, but the humility of God. The story of the coming of Christ, the Gospel, is the story of God’s humility defeating man’s pride.

(2) So second, our hearts need to be won by the extraordinarily humility of God.

Embedded in the word savior is the Gospel: The Son of God humbling himself to take on flesh, suffer reproach, take on our sins, and finally to be crucified. This is the ultimate display of humility.

If the baby in the manger starts to unsettle our pride, the Cross of Christ destroys it. It is hard to remain a proud man when standing before the Son of God crucified.

And have you not felt the power of humility like this—the humility of another person, towards you? A humble love has a way of slowly winning your heart. Maybe you have experienced the humble love of someone through your life—your mom or dad, a friend, a teacher.

The greatest force in the world is humble love, because it has the power to win and transform hearts. The British Journalist and eventual convert to Christianity, Malcolm Muggeridge, once said, “If the greatest of all, Incarnate God, chooses to be the servant of all, who would wish to be the master?”

Ask yourself this Christmas, if pride is playing too great a role in your life. Ask yourself if pride is keeping you from really connecting with people—or worse, from connecting with God. And if it is, take that pride to the manger in Bethlehem; let the Son of God then take that pride with him to His Cross. And looking then into the face of your savior (as Mary did), see the eyes of this burning humility, and be humbled by them. And exclaim with Mary, “my spirit rejoices in God...*my Savior*.”