

**Our theme for today: Gift or giver? Where is our gaze?**

We can rejoice in His mercy, and we can rejoice in His strength. We can also rejoice in His blessings. That's a good thing, right – to rejoice in His blessings? Today, where is joy? It's an important question. Let's read His Word and see what God wants us to know.

Scripture

<sup>53</sup> *he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.*  
<sup>54</sup> *He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”*

*Luke 1:53-55*

Thought provokers

- As we contemplate these verses, we note that Mary has this belief that God makes all things equal: the hungry are filled, while the rich are sent away empty. Which is noteworthy, if not amazing. Why so?  
All of us have seen some form of poverty and some form of wealth – even from a distance. Such discrepancies are often the basis for fights and arguments either between individuals or even in national unrest. But Mary sings a song!
  - Now there are plenty of Country Music songs about fighting in relationships or fighting between one group and another. Indeed, Mary's own country is in the midst of turmoil, right? But, does she sing some ballad about the fighting? No, in contrast she sings about God.
    - If you are in a fight with someone today, would you sing? And, if so, what song would you sing?

Let's now talk of the blessing and the taking away. Have you experienced the kind of blessing where you were hungry, but God filled you? Or, have you ever been sent away by God? What is God teaching when He gives, or when He sends away?

Reflections

Some might say that Mary is naive to sing such things; that God has filled the hungry, and that the rich get sent away empty. Most people would say that the rich get richer, and the poor stay trapped in poverty. Is Mary simply overly optimistic? Has she lost the plot? Is Mary just silly, or is she sincere; are her words foolish, or are they profound? Perhaps, seen in the right light, we can discover that Mary knows something that can change us – her discovery can be a source

of everlasting joy. Mary had learned that the joy is not in the blessing, it's found in Him – the one who gives the blessing! To put it another way: her gaze is not on the gift, it's on the giver.

Some folks focus so much on the blessing, so much on the gift, they lose sight of the giver – in fact, the giver becomes only the means to get the gift. With such focus on having and not having, we are all too aware of poverty and wealth! In our culture and society, we very much want the good things of life, we want comfort, we want all the trappings, we want that blessing – whether we are rich or poor. In fact, it's not just that we want these things, we crave them! We'd rather have another pair of shoes; we'd rather have one more outfit – we want more and more blessings. We are addicted to blessings. And yet we rob God of a tithe.

So, what shall we say of Mary's perspective? Mary is actually speaking to both the wealthy and the poor. If your attachment is to good things *only* (rich or poor), you won't be happy in the long run, you won't have joy. Yes, God can give to you, but remember that what He gives is really still His. Just like power, blessings are meant for a better purpose – to further His Kingdom. Changing our focus from the blessing to the blessed takes a prompting of God. Is God prompting you?

#### Prayer and Song

Take time to pray and sing praises to Him. This is a touching poem made into song by Christina Rossetti. For the full poem look up "*In the bleak midwinter.*"

#### ***What Can I Give Him?***

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
Yet what can I give Him?  
Give Him my heart.*