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WORSHIP FULLY
Luke 1:46-55
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We as a congregation have joined the Advent Conspiracy, meaning we are committed to getting back to the essentials of Christmas. For a lot of us, Christmas has sort of gotten out of control. Instead of experiencing the Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy of our Advent banners, we feel the pressure of needing to decorate, of going shopping, of planning for the invasion of in-laws. So much to do and so little time. We keep getting reminders. It is only 19 days to Christmas! Argh! Then you get something like this in the mail. It is a beautiful red card from a department store. On the front it says, "Be joyful." (Oh, if it were only that easy!) Inside it says, "It's that magical time of year . . . when you get everything you asked for (well, almost everything)." Or you get something like this. A nice Christmasy piece from another store. It says, "Find meaning (and savings) inside."

Well, finding meaning is what our Conspiracy is all about. Getting in touch with what really matters in the birth of Jesus. Changing habits so the real meaning of Jesus' birth comes through. Letting the meaning of the birth of Jesus change our habits so we reflect more of what he is all about. It's not too late. It is still 19 days to Christmas.

Starting today, I am going to give you four verbs that will bring a depth of meaning to your Christmas celebration and to your life. They will help you enter the story, to become a part of it.

This morning I give you the first verb. This verb describes the entry point into the Christmas story. Without this verb, Christmas will continue to be nothing but running through malls, senseless spending, and stress.

**Are you ready for the first verb that can change everything?
The word is "worship."**

Some of you are thinking, "Oh, man, and I'm giving up my Sunday morning for this? You telling me that what we do here every Sunday is what it's all about? I'm already doing it, so I've got that covered. Hurry up, will ya', because I've got shopping to do."

If you are a guest this morning, or haven't had much experience with worship – hang in here with me for a few minutes. You might be the happiest to know that I am not talking about what we do here every Sunday. Otherwise you would be justified getting up and walking out. I had a dream about that recently. I was preaching and everybody got up and walked out. It didn't upset me because when I looked at my watch, I saw that I had been talking for an hour. In my dream, I thought, "I would walk out, too."

No, the worship I am talking about this morning is not something we sit through while someone talks for an hour. The worship I am talking about that can change our habits and get us closer to that meaning we are looking for this Christmas is what the pregnant Mary did in the first chapter of Luke, beginning with verse 46. She sang a song of praise to God.

Let me set the context. After being visited by the angel Gabriel and told she would bear the Son of God, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was six months pregnant. It doesn't say, but I suspect Mary told her cousin the whole story about the angel Gabriel appearing, about her pregnancy from God. But notice what happens in verse 41. Elizabeth's baby leaps in her womb when she hears Mary's voice. This is a sign to Elizabeth that Mary's baby is truly from God. Then Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit," says some of the most beautiful words in the Bible. She says to Mary, *"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. . . . And blessed is she (meaning Mary) who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."*

I think this is almost too much for Mary. Her soul swells with joy. It is the confirmation she needed. I can imagine tears running down her cheeks as she spontaneously bursts out into song in praise of God. There in Elizabeth's home, Mary worships God. She cannot keep it in. She cannot help herself. We call it The Magnificat. *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."*

Now that's worship. Mary didn't go to a worship service somewhere. She worshipped. Worship is not a list of calculated things you do sitting in a chair for an hour or more on a Sunday morning. Not something you merely endure. *It is the explosion of your heart when life is so full and so real and so blessed that you just have to say thank you.* You just have to fall on your knees in utter wonderment and awe. I think it is close to falling in love. Our hearts get taken, and we can't help but worship.

The Greek word for worship is *proschueo*. It means to fall down before, to prostrate oneself at the feet of One who owns your life. It means showing honor, submitting oneself to the One who deserves your obedience and praise.

That's what Mary does. Overwhelmed by the reality of what God is doing through her, she *proschueos* God. She magnifies the Lord.

Let's look at it this way. Mary illustrates something fundamental here. We humans are worshipping beings. We have a need to worship something. We are made to worship. God seems to have created us with a worship gene that causes us to *proschueo* something or someone. Some of you here today may not be sure there is a God. You're not sure

about this God-in-the-flesh thing. Sounds kind of weird to you. But even if you say you don't believe in God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; even if you never worship this God who came in the flesh, you will worship something. We are all alike. We will worship something that we feel completes us, that makes us part of something bigger than ourselves. We will yield our lives to something, to someone because that's the way we are made.

The question Mary raises for us is this, "Who is worthy of our worship? Who is worthy of our spontaneous, unrehearsed praise?"
Who is worthy of your worship?

Mary praises the God of the Bible. She magnifies the Lord of heaven and earth who is now coming in the flesh. She praises the One who has chosen her to be the vessel of His coming. The God she turns to is the One who comes as the Savior of the world.

Now here is where Mary's worship departs from so much of what we call worship today. Compared to her worship, a lot of our worship is just pabulum, all sweetness and light. Beginning in verse 51, we discover why she praises God. *Her worship includes acknowledgement that the child being born inside her is about to change the rules.*

Look at what she sings. The child being born in her means God has come in the flesh to scatter "the proud in the thoughts of their hearts." To bring "down the powerful from their thrones, and lift up the lowly." God's coming in the flesh means "he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." She speaks of these things in the past tense as if they have already been accomplished.

Why is this such good news for Mary? Because she counts herself among the lowly. The God Mary worships is the One who shows a decided favoritism toward those she calls the lowly. **Finally, she realizes in her heart of hearts, there will be justice on earth.**

And this is why we have joined the Advent Conspiracy. Because so much of what passes for Christmas seems to be so far from the meaning of the baby born in a manger. He came to lift up the lowly. And he came to save us from the very things that Christmas has become.

You see, we are not the lowly of whom Mary speaks. We are those blessed beyond imagination. We are the rich. We are the powerful. We are the proud. God came in the flesh to save us from our pride, to keep us from abusing our power, to govern our use of wealth so we can in his name lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things to eat.

So this Christmas we are going to spend less on ourselves, on that which does not last, so we can show Christ's love for the lowly. We are going

to provide clean water wells in Malawi, Africa. Jesus said inasmuch as you have given a cup of water to one of the least of these, you have given it unto me. We are giving clean water to save the lives of some of the 1.2 million children who die every year from water borne disease. This is how we will worship in spirit and in truth.

Here is what I want us to take home today. If someone asks what you heard down at that strange church that meets in a gym, tell them this. **Worship can save us.** If our worship is true to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, worship can save us. Worship can change our habits. If we can only see the baby in the manger for who he is and prostrate ourselves before him, to fall down at his feet, to say to him, "You are my king, you are my Lord, you are my all come to save us." I assure you that your perspective will change and your habits will change and you will come to know the meaning of life. You will come to know the One who gives our lives meaning so deep we cannot begin to touch the bottom of it, not in this life.

Do you want a different Christmas? Something that means something? Something that lasts beyond the trash pickup the day after? Then cultivate a heart of worship over the next 19 days. Remove whatever keeps you from seeing your hope lying in the manger. Let the focus fall on him. And let your heart sing. Join Mary in prostrate. Then just let it out. Let your heart vibrate with the frequencies that hum throughout the universe. You will be a part of God's melody sung into being with your existence. Your heart will sing and the world will become a better place, a brighter place. For in your song, God will lift the lowly and fill the hungry with good things to eat.