



Who-Ville: Sweet Cindy Lou Who

Luke 1:39-56

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I don't know about you, but this is the time of the holiday season when I've just about lost my mind. Though there is another Sunday to come, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are hiding just around the weekend's corner. Life in the office is no less hectic than life at the house – end of the year preparations are in full swing. There's one budget being closed out, and a second one being set into motion. There are plans being made for guests, which means cleaning the house and preparing a menu for meals. And ... umm, what am I forgetting? ... Oh yeah, there's the Christmas celebration itself too. The work of preparation is no small task.

And let's not forget, that is the invitation of the Advent season, the hard work of preparation. Advent is a time that calls us to ready our lives for the interruption of God in the person of Christ.

Can we be honest with one another? When it comes to seasonal preparations, there's a hierarchy of things to do. If we were to list it all out, it would likely be a bit too overwhelming, so let's just settle for a short mental list. There's readying our personal lives for the birth of Christ, and then there's readying our physical lives for the celebration of Christmas. Which ones is the priority right now?

I think ordering these is important, because whichever is at the top of the list is likely the one we think is going to make the biggest difference in our lives in the coming weeks, and in the coming year. And there's probably some truth to both, right? I mean, if we don't have the room ready for momma and daddy to come visit, or if we don't have the Christmas ham at the house before next weekend, or if we don't have that last gift or two on order by Amazon's shipping deadline ... well, those could cause some serious issues. If we haven't thought about where Aunt Tennessee and Cousin California are going to sit at the family feast, they could end up sitting next to each other, and well, that too could cause some serious issues.

Perhaps both types of preparation are important; but perhaps, we place a bit too little emphasis on one, and perhaps we place a little too much on the other. And perhaps, we could learn how balancing them, or flipping the order, could bring a bit more peace into our lives in what is generally a very hectic season. To consider this balancing act, we're learning not just from Mary and Elizabeth, but from Sweet Cindy-Lou Who.

We've been considering how the seasonal favorite, Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, offers some unexpected guidance for our seasonal preparation, and how the characters of the animated story-book connect with the Biblical story of Christ's birth.

Do you remember how Cindy-Lou Who entered the story?

*"As the Grinch took the tree, as he started to shove,
He heard a small sound like the coo of a dove.*

*He turned around fast, and he saw a small Who!
Little Cindy-Lou Who, who was no more than two.*

*She stared at the Grinch and said, "Santy Claus, why,
Why are you taking our Christmas tree? Why?"*

*But, you know, that old Grinch was so smart and so slick,
He thought up a lie, and he thought it up quick!*

*"Why, my sweet little tot," the fake Santy Claus lied,
"There's a light on this tree that won't light on one side.*

*So I'm taking it home to my workshop, my dear.
I'll fix it up there, then I'll bring it back here."*

*And his fib fooled the child. Then he patted her head,
And he got her a drink, and he sent her to bed.*

*And when Cindy-Lou Who was in bed with her cup,
He crept to the chimney and stuffed the tree up!"*

If one doesn't know the end of the story, it's easy to chalk up Cindy-Lou's innocence to her naivety. Children will believe just about anything. I mean, it seems so simple, but do you know how easy it is to convince your child you've eaten their favorite toy? You take in one hand, you make it look like you're putting it in their mouth, and all of a sudden it's gone! Your child will spend 30 minutes feeling your stomach and looking down your throat to see if they can figure out where the toy went. Then, you make yourself cough, and out flies the toy. It's magic! ... They will believe just about anything. And perhaps, one can chalk up Cindy-Lou's innocence to this type of child-like thinking.

In the same way, one could chalk up Mary's willing participation in the story to her pre-teen understanding of life as a mother and wife. Mary is a young, unwed female, just 13-14 years old. She knows nothing of motherhood, or of what life will be like as a wife in a day and age when wives were considered the property of their husbands. While she knows nothing about it, Mary has been promised as a wife to Joseph. And prior to their having ... well, prior to making the wedding official, she becomes pregnant. The Angel Gabriel appears to her and tells her that she is pregnant, and that her child will be given the name Jesus, and that Jesus will be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God. The angel also tells her that her elder aunt, Elizabeth, is also pregnant, and is in her sixth month (so, what's that, just starting the second trimester?).

That brings us to today's passage, which starts with Mary leaving home to go see her aunt in an unnamed town in the Judean hills. Her departure from home should not seem odd ... she's an unwed teenage female who has just found out she's pregnant, and the kid doesn't belong to the future husband. Young girls are still running away from home for situations like this. She's innocent enough to not really know what's happening, but old enough to know if found out, she's in trouble.

Her Aunt Lizzy (that's what I call Elizabeth, because she's the cool aunt. She's the one whom Mary ran away to after finding out she was pregnant.) ... Her Aunt Lizzy welcomes her into the house, and as Mary enters, the six month old in-utero child in Elizabeth leaps in the womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaims, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?"

We have to pause here because Aunt Lizzy has just dropped one of the most important lines in all the Biblical text. Up until this point in the Biblical story, the only person for whom the title "Lord" has ever applied, is God. We read this text in a post-resurrection mindset, and so we know to whom the text refers, but let's be sure, the title Lord was not a term used for anyone other than the Covenant Maker. Yet, Mary doesn't cut her aunt off. One can only wonder what Mary is thinking – this young teen girl is greeted by her aunt with such a powerful proclamation, that her child is God.

Aunt Liz continues, "As soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken by the Lord."

Again, the word "Lord" appears. Go back and look at the original manuscripts: both times the word *Lord* is spoken, it appears in the text using the same Greek work, *kurios*. Elizabeth is calling God the Covenant Maker – the one who told Mary about the pregnancy – and the child Mary carries by the same name. She refers to them both as *Lord*. Aunt Liz seems like she's not just the cool aunt, she's also crazy.

At this point, one has to wonder, Cindy-Lou Who, did you know?
Did you know that the green Grinch was stealing your Christmas tree?
Did you know that the green Grinch was taking the food from your kitchen?
Cindy-Lou Who, did you know?

Mary, did you know?
Did you know that your baby boy would give sight to a blind man?
Did you know that your baby boy would calm a storm with his hand?
Mary, did you know?

It bothers me a little that we chalk up Mary's willingness to follow along simply because of her innocence as a young, naïve girl. Let's be clear, that is exactly what the song suggests ... *Mary, Did You Know?* ... that Mary did not know how great her child would one day be.

Whoever wrote that song ... the Lord bless Mark Lowry, he was a wonderful member of the Gaithers Southern Gospel Vocal Band ... but he must have stopped reading the text at verse 45. If one is to keep reading through verse 55, reading what has become known as Mary's Magnificat, it becomes quite clear that yes, indeed, Mary does know. And she doesn't just *know*, but she has the ability to claim her knowledge with poetic proclamation.

"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. From now on all generations will call me blessed."

Um, yeah, it seems like Mary has an idea of how special she was to be the mother of this child. Perhaps her running to Aunt Elizabeth wasn't for safety or security ... perhaps she wasn't running away from anything. Perhaps Mary knew a heck of a lot more than we think she did.

What's that? Keep reading ... oh, right.

"God's mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever."

Oh, well then, look at that. Not only does Mary *know*, Mary is able to understand and articulate what's happening to her in the context of the greater tenure of time. Mary's Magnificat is not about what God is doing for her – this is not autobiographical. Mary is wax poetic about what "God will do for the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed of the world."ⁱ This song of Mary's is about the triumph of God's purposes for all people everywhere. She references what God *has* done in anticipation of what God *is* doing through her, and what God *will do* through her through this child.

Mary was not shocked by what God was doing through her, a lowly young girl, nor was she surprised that God would choose to use her among all humanity, to bring to life Christ. Mary, did you know? One can ask. But Mary's response seems to say yes, I know that out of Abraham and barren Sarah, God created the people Israel; I know that God choose the younger son of Cain and Able, and of Joseph and his brothers, to carry out a lineage of faithfulness; I know that God used a child in a basket of reeds to liberate Israel from Egypt; I know that God choose the lowly of Israel over the powerful of Egypt and Babylon to be the the covenanted people.ⁱⁱ I know, Mary proclaims, that this child is of such importance, that out of him will come the freedom of the oppressed, and justice to the poor, and life to the dead, and sight to the blind, and liberty to the enslaved, and joy to the downtrodden, and light to all who live in darkness.

And yet we wonder and question, Mary, did you know?

Cindy-Lou Who, she may have been just two, but she knew. It didn't matter if the Grinch took the tree. She knew. It didn't matter if the gifts were never returned. She knew.

Come Christmas morning, the Whos sang.

*"This sound wasn't sad,
Why, this sound sounded glad!*

*Every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,
Was singing without any presents at all.*

*[The Grinch] hadn't stopped Christmas from coming! It came!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!"*

She didn't care if the Grinch took her stuff, and it wasn't her two-year old innocence. She didn't care because she knew, as did all the Whos, that the reason for celebrating had nothing to do with the decorations and presents. She knew that Christmas was about more about a gift that the Grinch could not take.

This child, this Son of God, this celebration of Christmas, this preparation in Advent, it's hard work because it means rejecting the cultural norms of power and greed and wealth and choosing instead to receive the gift of God in Christ. It means rejecting the promises of righteousness and praise from our world, and accepting justice and mercy as given by God.

So I ask again, which list of preparation lies atop the hierarchy of 'things to do'? Perhaps we can learn from Mary and Cindy-Lou Who, who feared not the coming of the Christ, the Lord, Immanuel, but who rejected the expectations of the world amidst the joy and hope of welcoming Christ. So I wonder, do you know? Do you know that this baby boy is Lord of all creation? Do you know, this baby boy will one day rule the nations? Do you know, this child is the great I Am? Do you know?

Do you know?

ⁱ Fred B. Craddock. *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Luke*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990.

ⁱⁱ Scott Hoezee. cep.calvinseminary.edu. Retrieved December 11, 2018.