



Theme: Peace by Piece – Advent 2020
““Dreaming of Peace and Light””

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber
December 12-13, 2020

Weekly Memory Verse:

***⁴⁹ For the Mighty One is holy,
and God has done great things for me.***

■ *Luke 1:49*

Scripture Readings:

Luke 1:46b-55

VIDEO **Sermon Bumper**

SLIDE **“Dreaming of Peace and Light”**

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. As we continue our journey towards Christmas, we are spending time asking how we can discover peace in today’s world.

Today we turn our attention to the Magnificat, or Mary’s song of praise. Mary is a **teenager**, growing up in the village of **Nazareth** which in essence is the low-income housing section of the greater area of **Sepherus**. Sepherus

was a town of 35,000 people and was considered the jewel of the Galilee at the time. There was **great wealth and schools and theater and shopping**. Outside the walls of the city was where we would find Nazareth, which had the **least expensive form of housing** in the first century: **caves**. Some caves were nice, but others were very modest in the town which had maybe **100 people** at most.

The angel **Gabriel** has come to Mary in Nazareth and announced to her that she is **full of grace and the Lord is with her**. She is going to have a child which was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is a revelation to Mary because she is engaged but not yet married. Girls are **engaged** in the first century typically **after their first period** because the **life expectancy** for women was **35 to 40** years old. This means that she was most likely a young teenager.

Mary's engagement also means that she is in a **one-year waiting period** before the actual wedding. Mary is frightened because she knows what can happen if she is found to be pregnant by someone other than her husband to be during this one-year engagement. The law stipulates that **she can be stoned to death**. Without telling any of her family, Mary decides to go meet up with their elder cousin **Elizabeth**, who we might consider more like an older aunt. Elizabeth has also experienced a **surprising and miraculous** kind of pregnancy. She is too old to have children, yet she and her husband **Zechariah** become pregnant. Mary goes to see Elizabeth to find out if she is going crazy. She's probably wondering if she **made it up in her head** or if it's really going to happen.

Mary's journey to see Elizabeth is a **10-day journey** to the other end of the country, down **south near Jerusalem**. She enters the home of Elizabeth and Zachariah in the town of **Ein Karam**. Ein Karam was a suburb of Jerusalem and the childhood home of **John the Baptist**. John is the cousin of Jesus, the child born to Elizabeth and Zechariah. Before Mary says a word to

Elizabeth, Elizabeth shouts with joy:

BIBLE ***“Child, you are blessed among women. Blessed is the fruit of your womb.”***

In this moment, **Mary knows that what the angel said is true** and she is not going crazy. Mary lets go of her fear and joy seizes her heart. **10 days after** she has learned that she is going to have a child, Mary announces in Elizabeth’s presence, the ***Magnificat***, which is a song of praise. There are several things that it’s good to note as we look at this piece of Scripture from Luke’s gospel.

If you have had a chance to study the Old Testament Scriptures, you might see some similarities between the *Magnificat* and different passages in the Hebrew Bible. **Hannah**, who was the **mother of Samuel** the great prophet of Israel in the Old Testament, was **too old** to have a child but she also ends up pregnant. She has her son Samuel whom she dedicates to God at an early age and then she breaks out in song and **sings words that sound very much like the Magnificat**. You can find this in **1 Samuel chapter 2**. That song was likely **learned by every Jewish girl** when they were a child.

For Mary, that song to her was to her like **“Amazing Grace”** is to many of us. Most of us can sing at least the first verse of “Amazing Grace” without lyrics in front of us. You know it by heart because you have sung it so many times. Even if you don’t normally go to church, you can probably get out the first line or two because it is in many ways a part of our culture. **Mary no doubt had this song in her heart** as a young Jewish girl and it becomes a part of her song in Luke’s gospel. There are **parts she has left out**, and she has **added a few things**, but it becomes her **song of praise to God**.

Sometimes we hear this song, and we think of it is as **beautiful** for the Christmas season, there is **much more** to the song. If all we hear is something **docile**, then we probably **haven’t listened** to the song very **closely**. It’s not

just a **touching, lovely** little song. It is actually a **dangerous song**. In **Guatemala in the early 1980s**, under one of the most **oppressive regimes** in the history of Central America, it was **forbidden** to read the Magnificat aloud. The regime recognized that **its words might lead people to revolt** against the government. In **Nicaragua**, when **peasants were being oppressed**, they **carried copies of the Magnificat** with them and would read them regularly because of the **promise** that it held for them as those who were **poor and downtrodden**.

The words of the Magnificat were **encouraging to slaves in the United States in the early 1800s**. In many places in the world today, those who are living under oppressive governments, learn these words because they **speak to us about God's mercy for people** who have been **pushed down** and made to **feel small**. The Magnificat speaks to us about how **God lifts up the lowly** and it warns us that **God humbles and tears down the proud**. Today we are going to listen to this dangerous song and listen for what God might say to us through it some 2000 years after Mary sang it upon discovering her pregnancy.

The song is easily broken into two halves and so let's listen to the first half from Luke's gospel in chapter 2 beginning at verse 46 from women serving in ministry all over the world.

VIDEO Part One – The Magnificat

46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. 50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.

The young girl who was frightened is now filled with exuberance as she says, "My soul praises or magnifies the Lord." The word "**praise**" means, "to

magnify or make things bigger.” Mary’s expanding her understanding of God and declaring how great God is because of what God has done in her life. She then says, **“How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”**

SLIDE **rejoice = “to jump high”**

The word “rejoice” means, “to jump high.” Mary is, in essence, **leaping** for joy. **Why is she leaping for joy?** Why is her heart filled with joy at this moment? We often think that Mary is singing for joy because she is going to have a baby, but that’s **not really the case** here. If you **want to have a child** and you become pregnant then you are going to jump for joy. You were going to **call all your friends** and tell them, “Guess what, I’m pregnant!”

But, if you were **not expecting a child**, and you are **not yet married**, and you don’t know what your **fiancé is going to say** when he discovers that you’re pregnant, and you have **no idea what your parents** are going to do, or if they’re going to **disown you**, and if you are wondering if you **will be stoned** to death, you probably are **not leaping for joy** because you are pregnant. **Why is she leaping** for joy then?

Mary goes on to tell us the next few verses, **“For God took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.”** What she is declaring is that even though she is a **nobody from nowhere**, a place where people look down their nose at it, **God has chosen** her for this task. Mary has been chosen to bring forth the long-awaited messianic King and **she is marveling** at the fact that **God does what God consistently does** in the Bible. God **chooses the least expected** to be as instruments. God cares about the people who were **pushed down** or **made to feel small** and those who the **world doesn’t even see**.

This is a **consistent theme with God** as God chooses the **unexpected**. **Abraham and Sarah** are too old to have a child and yet God comes to them and tells them to go to a land that they have never been to before and that

he will give them children. God tells him he will **bring forth a whole new clan** of people, the **people of Israel**, through this older couple and **Sarah** even **laughs** because it sounds so silly and ridiculous. God chooses Moses to set the Israelite slaves free. **Moses stutters** when he speaks, and he is in hiding because **he has committed murder** and yet God chooses him. God chooses the **Israelites even though they are slaves** in Egypt, and he sets them free. God chooses **David who is the scrawniest and youngest** of the sons of Jesse to be the greatest hero and King that Israel would know. This is what God does. **God chooses the least expected** and the nobodies, and Mary is celebrating this truth.

SLIDE **lowly = “powerless, unimportant, insignificant”**

The word she uses to describe herself which we read as lowly means to be powerless, unimportant, and insignificant. Mary says, **“God saw my powerlessness, my insignificance and the fact I was a nobody and God lifted me up.”** That word “lowly” means to be **as low to the ground** as you can possibly get, almost **lying flat**. Mary’s **social status** is as close to the ground as it can get. She is **not even a rung** on the ladder, but God has chosen her.

SLIDE **megaluna = “magnify”**

Mary then says, **“God has done great things for me.”** The phrase, **“great things,”** is the word *megala*. The word “magnify” is megaluna and in both of those you hear the word, **“mega.”** When you hear that word, what does it usually mean? Mega usually means **big or giant!** Mary is literally saying, **“My soul magnifies the Lord because my God has magnified me.”** This is what she is praising God for in this song. This whole idea of God showing **grace or compassion toward those who are made to feel small** or bullied or push down or oppressed or insignificant, is captured by a **Greek word** in the New Testament. The **word appears twice** in the Magnificat.

SLIDE **Eleos = mercy**

This idea of mercy is one of the **major themes of the Magnificat**. The idea is that the **God we serve is a God of mercy**. God is merciful and God exalts people and blesses people who are also merciful. So, here's a question the Magnificat puts before each of us.

SLIDE Am I merciful?

Am I **growing in mercy**? Do I have more mercy today than I did this time **last year**? Even if I am not, am I **more committed to be full of mercy next year** than I am this year? **We are never more like God than when we are full of mercy**. Mercy means **concern** and **compassion**. Mercy means to care for people who are pushed down or bullied or made to feel small or oppressed or weak or the least of these, as Jesus describes them. The New Testament was written in Greek but remember the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, which is why I call it the Hebrew Bible when I refer to it on many occasions. When the **Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek** from Hebrew there is a word that became this word in Greek, *eleos*. This Hebrew word is used **240 times** in the Hebrew Bible.

SLIDE *Hesed* = "loving kindness, covenant love, compassion, mercy"

One of my favorite passages in the Hebrew Bible comes from the prophet Micah in 6:8 when he says:

BIBLE

"What does the Lord require of you? Do justice, love kindness (*hesed, eleos, mercy*), and walk humbly with your God."

The Scriptures tell us that this is a requirement. What it means to be human is to **mirror the attributes** that you see in God and that **God is merciful and has compassion** on those who are made to feel small, pushed down or insignificant.

There were **five businessmen running through O'Hare Airport in**

Chicago trying to catch a plane. They have been in business meetings all day long and if they can catch this flight, they will get home in time to have dinner with their families on Friday night. They have their laptop bags and their travel luggage dragging behind them as they run as fast as they can. When you are running fast, those bags can swing all around in the airport and as they ran past a fruit kiosk one of those bags swung over and hit the fruit stand and knocked all the apples off the applecart as well as several other baskets of fruit. There was fruit rolling all over the concourse and, when they realize what they had done they **stopped briefly** and looked back and said, **“We’re so sorry.** We didn’t mean to knock over your fruit. We are running late and going to miss our flight but were sorry and wish we could stop to help.” **They kept running** through the airport.

As they made their way down the concourse, this **interaction began to bother one** of the business travelers. He looked back and noticed the **young girl** who was in charge of the cart and she was **trying to grab all of the fruit** that was rolling all over the concourse. **He yelled** to his friends, “Go on ahead, **I have something I have to do.**” He didn’t tell them what it was, but he **headed back** to where the girl was and said to her, “I’m so sorry. I was one of the **dorks who knocked over your fruit** and I just want to come back and help. **Are you okay?**” He really looks at her for the first time and he notices that there are **tears in her eyes** and she is **blind**. He then feels horrible and says again, “I am so sorry. We didn’t know. We were just being **stupid and inconsiderate.** We were in a hurry and trying to catch this plane. Are you sure you’re okay? **What more can I do?**” He begins to **collect all the apples and other fruit** and begins to **stack them back** on the fruit stand.

He notices that some of the **apples are bruised** as are some of the other fruit and so he says, “You know I really love fruit and I’m really hungry today. **Can I buy the rest of your fruit?**” He gave her \$80 which was more than enough to cover the fruit and then he apologized again for what

happened. He told her he hoped she had a great day and then **she looked at him** and said, **“Can ask a question?”**

“Sure,” he said.

She asked, **“Are you Jesus?”**

He said, **“No, I am most certainly not Jesus. Jesus never would’ve bumped your fruit cart** and then kept running. **I am nothing like him, but I wish I was. Why do you ask?”**

She said, **“Because when I was on my knees** on the floor trying to find all of my fruit I just **cried out, ‘Jesus, please help me!’** And he **sent you.”**

That’s what mercy looks like and we are never more like Jesus than when we are showing mercy. I encourage you to ask this question again.

SLIDE Am I mercy-full?

Do I have **compassion and care** for those who were **bullied**, made to feel **small** or who have been **wounded** in some way? Do I **have a heart** for those who have been made to **feel invisible**? If not, **am I willing to cultivate that heart** this Christmas season, when **it is needed more than ever**? This is what **Mary is teaching us in the Magnificat**. That might be a **beautiful sentiment for this Christmas** season, the idea of being merciful and what God does on behalf of those who are **feeling low**.

But the song becomes a **little unnerving** when you look a bit deeper at what happens to those **who are merciless**. The song becomes a little **dangerous** at this point. Mary goes on in the second half of the Magnificat to say these words, once again hearing them from **women around the world** seeking to serve **mothers in poverty**.

VIDEO Part 2 – The Magnificat

51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has

scattered the proud and haughty ones. 52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.

This is the **disturbing** part of the song, that God is **actively engaged on behalf of those who need mercy** and **God is actively working against** those who **fail to show mercy**. Mary uses a **phrase which is used repeatedly** in the Old Testament. We read about God's, "**mighty hand and outstretched arm.**" This is an **anthropomorphism**, which is **describing God in bodily terms** even though God doesn't have a body. We have this picture of **God with a strong arm** which can do **one of two things**. The **arm can help and be strong to save**, or it can **destroy and fight against** those who are merciless. **Mary mentions both** of these things. **I don't personally want to experience** God fighting against me and I would love to know that God comes alongside of me, so let's see what Mary says about this and here it might be helpful to look at some other versions of the Bible to help us understand what this means in verse 51. Here is how the New Revised Standard Version puts it.

SLIDE ***God has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.***

God has scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts. I think of that phrase that we use sometimes, "**scatterbrains.**" There are times where our **thoughts become clouded and** we don't see very clearly. I think Mary is reminding us that **this happens to the proud** when we come to a place where we are **not thinking clearly**. The "not thinking clearly" **becomes their downfall**. **God typically works through human ways** and one of the things that happens to us humans is that when our **thinking gets cloudy because we are proud or full of ourselves**, we can begin to make mistakes.

Jim Collins taught at the Stanford School of Business and he has a

laboratory where they study business practices. He has written several best-selling books that many of you have read. ***Good to Great, Build to Last*** and in 2009 he wrote this book that I read called, ***How the Mighty Fall***.

GRAPHIC How the Mighty Fall

Collins was writing about American businesses and how **some American businesses which were once great have fallen off a cliff**. You can think of some of those companies. **Circuit City** has disappeared, and it was once a large electronic superstore. **General Motors** went bankrupt. **Kodak** no longer makes cameras. We wonder how these kinds of things can happen and that's what Collins set out to explain in his book. He lists **five stages that lead to the decline** and fall of a company. The **first two stages** are captured in this idea that Mary has laid out for us.

SLIDE Hubris born of success

The first stage of the fall of a company is hubris born of success.

SLIDE The undisciplined pursuit of more

The second stage is the undisciplined pursuit of more. Let's talk about this one first. **Collins gives a great example** of this in the book of a pharmaceutical company. When the founders started their company they said, **"Our driving passion and mission is to create drugs which will save people's lives. This is what we exist for** and if we do that well then everything else will take care of itself." By the **1990s**, the **president** of the company had **forgotten what the founders** had said about the driving force behind their business. **Instead, he had said to the shareholders, "Our driving passion is to increase shareholder value and to maximize profits."** There is a **huge difference between existing to create drugs which save people's lives and being successful at that and saying that our driving passion is to increase shareholder value and maximize profits**. Collins says that when companies

get **confused** in the thoughts of their hearts about what they really **exist** for, their **downfall is inevitable**. That's **true for churches and individuals** and companies.

I think about how our **tendency** as humans sometimes when we become successful is **treat other people like we deserve the success**. We forget that **half of being successful at whatever we do is usually luck**. It's **never about me** and how **skilled I am**, and the best CEOs know this truth.

When I lived in Denver, I **played basketball** at a community recreation center much like the one here in Durango. There was a guy who came into play with us one day who I **recognized from being in the in the news**. He was **very wealthy and ran a large corporation** worth hundreds of millions of dollars. We were in the locker room after and we began chatting a bit and he **said several strange things** that didn't make much sense to me. After he left, another guy that we play with who was sitting next to me **began to shake his head**. I looked at him and I said, "That seems kind of strange. **How did he become so successful?** I'm sort of **surprised that he is filthy rich**. How in the world did that happen?"

My friend said to me, "Jeff, it happened the way it happens to almost everybody. **He was pretty lucky**. He had an idea that was a pretty good idea, and he was in the **right place at the right time**. He had **certain skills** that he brought to the table, but **half of it is luck**."

People ask me sometimes, "How did you get to become pastor at this great church? Did you get lucky?" The truth is that **I don't believe in luck** but do believe in grace and it's **only by the grace of God** that I get to do what I do. I tell people all the time that **I'm just along for the ride** and I try to **stay out of the way** of what God is doing and if I forget that is when **I get the real trouble**. Sometimes, **when we become successful**, we begin to **treat other people in ways** that we never would've treated them if we remember that is

not all about us. We see this happen all the time in our culture.

Several years ago you might remember something that started out as a funny, human interest story. A pair of disc jockeys from Australia called the hospital where Princess Kate had just given birth. They pretended to be the King and the Queen of England and even though they had bad English accents they managed to get all the way through to the nurse who revealed information to them on the air that she never would've revealed unless she thought it was the actual queen of England. Everybody began to point their fingers at the DJs and how terrible they were for doing this stunt but how did it make it to the morning news shows everywhere that week?

Across the globe and the **social network people thought it was funny**, **“Can you imagine that nurse** who thought it was the actual queen of England? What a **dopey nurse** that must've been.” Never mind she just worked 10 hours and how stressful it is to be a nurse in that situation. Then we learn the **next week that she took her own life**. Everybody began to blame the disc jockeys and it's true they did a really stupid thing. When you get to a certain place in your popularity and you have a radio program and a large audience, you sometimes **forget what it feels like to be picked on** and made fun of. What do we call it when a whole bunch of people pick on somebody and make fun of them and laugh at them? **We call that bullying** in our culture, don't we?

While it's true that those disc **jockeys made a mistake** and forgot about human decency, **we have no business pointing fingers**. **Why did this make news everywhere?** It made the news because **people thought it was funny until it wasn't** funny anymore. We can **easily forget** what it feels like to be the person that **other people are stepping** on top of, and who is **really low** to the ground. I don't know that **nurse's story**. I don't know if she was **struggling** with other areas in her life. I'm sure she was **overwhelmed** by

having the **world making fun** of her and laugh at her. Maybe she thought she had **humiliated her country** or her family. Whatever it was, she decided she couldn't take it anymore. So, in light of the Magnificat, let me invite you to ask this question again.

SLIDE Am I merciful or merciless?

Mercy looks like **standing with those who are being made fun** of and saying, ***"I don't think is very funny."*** I think a lot of us forget this sometimes and **we simply join in with the crowd instead of standing** beside those who are the brunt of the joke. I think this **happens at school** and in our **workplaces** and **online** and **even in our families** and even in our **churches**.

Mary goes on to say that **God has brought down the princes** and the powerful from their thrones. This is a **very dangerous** thing to say, especially where she was, just a few miles from Jerusalem. In Jerusalem was a king named Herod who called himself, **"Herod the Great."** Can you imagine what the kind of King would be who calls himself, **"the Great?"** I'm **Jeff the Great!** How many of us would **really say that?** While we might not say it, it becomes **easy to act like it** if were not careful. Maybe you've been around folks who expect other people to **serve them and treat** them like they are, **"the Great."** They **expect** people to **fawn over** them and **never challenge** them. **Mary tells us that people like that will be pulled down** from their thrones.

This was dangerous to say because **Herod** was like many people who were full of themselves and he became **paranoid**. When you begin to act in this **arrogant** way you then become **frightened** that other people want to take your place. **Herod killed his favorite wife** because he feared she was plotting with her family to take over the throne. Herod **killed three of his sons** because he feared they were plotting to take over the throne. He eventually kills innocent children to protect his power. **What kind of man does that?**

That's King Herod and what **Mary** said could have gotten her **arrested** and maybe even **put to death**. You better whisper words like these that, "**God brings down the mighty** from their thrones." Sometimes this happens at the **hands of their own people**. We have seen this in our **own history** as a country and we have seen this in many nations as people get fed up with their rulers who missed treat them. We see this throughout human history as there is **no regime which is merciless which goes on forever**. Every merciless regime will eventually fall. Sometimes they fall by natural causes. **Herod eventually died from syphilis** and a host of other diseases which he contracted because of his lifestyle and arrogance. But even then, when you die a natural death, if you've been merciless, **we all stand before the one with a mighty outstretched arm** to save the least of these and who **raises his hand against those who are merciless**. People **celebrate when those who are merciless get brought down**, whether you were the CEO of a company or the pastor of a church or a king of a country. Mary tells us in her song that this is what happens.

The last warning that Mary gives is that God **sends the rich away empty** while he fills the hungry with good things. This should disturb us just a bit because relative to the rest of the world. Statements like Mary's are meant to help us recognize our relative wealth. I just want us to know that this is not my sermon. This is Mary's sermon. If Mary came to sing this song or preach this sermon in many of our churches in America, she would probably get nasty emails from people calling her a socialist. "**God sends the rich away empty and makes sure the hungry have plenty of good things.**"

For some of us, that just **doesn't sound very American**. As people of faith, we must remember this is **Mary, the mother of Jesus**, who is saying these things. We can debate about how we deal with the economic inequalities developing our country. Some people think the **government is the solution** and some people think the **government is the problem**. Some

people think **taxes should go up** and some people think **taxes should go down** to spur on economic activity.

But there are some things we can't debate. We **can't debate that God cares about the people who don't have enough to eat**. We can't debate that **God cares about the least** of these. We can't debate the fact that if we are among those with **the most resources** then we are responsible for our brothers and our sisters, those people who are children of God just as much as we are. We have an **obligation to be merciful** and that's really **not open to debate** if you read the New Testament or the Old Testament and if you want to take Mary's song seriously. **We ignore Mary's Magnificat to our own peril**. Mary says that **God lifts up the lowly** and he **fills the hungry with good things**. The question we might ask is in light of Mary's song what is important.

SLIDE How does God lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things?

We've learned through experience that **God very seldom responds** to problems in our world by **sending angels** to miraculously fix things. God is not sending angels to the poor or those who have been beaten or picked on or bullied. **If God does something** in the world **it's through people** in the world who are listening to his Holy Spirit speaking to them and they say, "Here I am Lord, send me." That's just how it works. The church is called the, "body of Christ." **We are meant to be the physical presence of Jesus Christ** in the world which is what it says on website and on the doors of our church. If the **lowly are going to be lifted up** and if the **hungry are going to go away with good things**, it's going to be because **God's people** said, "**use me to be your presence in the world.**"

What's interesting is that **in the process of being used by God to fill up others we find our own salvation**. Don't get me wrong, we are **saved by the**

grace of God and the mercy of his love through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. But when we act upon his call upon our lives **after we have said, “yes,”** we are **no longer is prideful** as we once were. We are **no longer mercy less** but merciful when we do what God asks us to do. In the process of that we find joy. **We find joy and peace and light and wholeness and salvation ourselves in being used by God.** If we are going to bring the hungry good things and raise up those who are lowly it will **require selflessness and sacrifice and conviction** and sometimes **courage.** This isn't just about helping the poor. It is also about finding those people who have been pushed down and then helping to lift them up.

Here's a question we must ask during the Christmas season. How will this community be more merciful because this church is in it? Sometimes people leave the church because they think the **church should just be quiet** and peaceful and feed people **spiritual lives,** but that is **only half** of what it means to be the presence of Christ in the world. I'm reminded of what Mother Teresa said.

GRAPHIC Do Small things with Great Love

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love that can change the world.” That's what we are called to do as the body of Christ in the world. We are called to **model** what it looks like to be merciful. We are meant to **encourage people who work with us** and **for** us and **alongside** of us and our neighbors and our friends and our fellow students, to be more merciful.

One of the reasons we **give away our Christmas Eve offering** each year is to allow each of us to be more merciful and to lift up the lowly and to bring the hungry good things. This year, our local ministry is Habitat for Humanity and I want you to hear about them this weekend.

VIDEO Habitat for Humanity Christmas Offering

I want to close by inviting you to be part of another outreach this Christmas to Native Hope, which is our partnership with pastors serving the Navajo nation during. This ministry is especially important during the pandemic. **We will be hosting a Collection Drive in the church parking lot from 5 to 7 pm on December 15th, 16th and 17th. The drive will be supporting Navajo families as well as local foster families for Christmas. For Navajo Families, you can drop off Non-perishable food items, Coats, Hats and Gloves, Blankets, Shoes/Clothing and Toys. You can also drop off Walmart Gift Cards in any amount for Local Foster Families we are supporting this Christmas.**

The donations for Native Hope will be delivered to families on the Navajo Reservation during the week of Christmas by our two Navajo Missionaries, Melton Tom and Joseph Pino. They will both dress up as Santa Claus as they go around dropping off the donations. The gift card donations for local foster families will be delivered to Human Services and will be distributed to foster families in our county to help provide some extra resources for those families for Christmas.

The Collection drive will be happening simultaneously with our “Christmas Box Pickup”, but there is no obligation to bring a donation to pick up your Christmas Box, and vice versa. We’ll have two designated lines, one for picking up Christmas Boxes and the other for dropping off donations. If you are coming to drop off a donation and also pick up a box you can pick up your Christmas Box on your way out of the parking lot after dropping off your donation.

GRAPHIC Navajo Hope 1

GRAPHIC Navajo Hope 2

GRAPHIC Navajo Hope 3

On the Navajo Nation so far, we have been able to help out about **60** different individuals and families living in **extreme poverty** with very poor living conditions. We continue to find families that are living in **plywood shacks** that are using **tarps for a roof**. They are also coming across families living out of **tents this winter**, which is a heartbreaking situation given the cold temperatures. We continue to find **elderly men and women living without transportation, electricity, or water** in dire need of food, water, and firewood. Many are not prepared for winter and firewood or coal is in great need. When the last round of deliveries was dropped off, some came out of their homes with **hands raised**, giving thanks that they were remembered. When I heard about that, I was reminded of Mary and her Magnificat, and that God had done great things. That's what being merciful looks like.

I hope you, with me, will ask this question once more.

SLIDE Am I mercy full?

This is what God dreams for from us because this is God's character. What's more being mercy full brings peace and light to ourselves and to the world. Listen to the final two lines of Mary's Magnificat.

BIBLE 54 "God has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. 55 For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

God will be merciful to us, his children, forever. This is the promise that we can count on this Christmas season and is can bring peace, salvation and wholeness this Christmas.

Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

As we bow our heads, I want to simply invite you to pray to God in your own words something like this.

God, please make me merciful... Please help me have a heart of compassion for people who are bullied and picked on and pushed down... Use me to lift them up and to fill them with good things.

God, we thank you for the Magnificat and its powerful words that unnerve us and call us and comfort us. Help us to be mercy full. As the Lead Pastor of this church, it's a privilege to work with your people and serve them here. I see your mercy in them daily. Help all of us to be even more merciful in the future than we have been in the past... to leave a mark in this community and in the world... in Jesus' name we pray. Amen