

6] My Soul Magnifies the Lord (Sunday, October 24, 2021)

Scripture: 1 Sam. 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-56

INTRODUCTION

Our text today is called the Song of Mary or in Latin the *Magnificat*, the Latin translation of the first part of Mary's song.

In the Byzantine tradition this song is called the Ode of the Theotokos, the song of the God-bearer.¹

These words not surprisingly became an important part of liturgies of more *traditional* churches.

Sadly, as I have noted and as you know very well, there is much false teaching about Mary which leads sadly to the sinful worship of Mary.

What we should see is that Mary was given an incredible calling through God's grace.

Mary also by God's grace was given a true understanding of God and His sovereign and gracious work.

As we will see as we study her song, there are numerous OT passages that are directly or at least indirectly connected with her expression of praise.

One question that we should ask is that if we somehow lost access to our Bibles, how much Scripture would we be able to remember?

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnificat>

Now importantly, Mary was not trying to put on a show of how much of the Bible she memorized.

What stands out most of all is God's mercy to a sinner.

Do you also know with assurance that God has shown His mercy and grace to you?

Are we filled also with a similar spirit of praise and exultation of our great God?

May we be filled with praise as we consider how a holy, just, and mighty God has had mercy on us.

John Calvin suggests that Mary's song can be divided into three parts. That is a good outline, but for simplicity we will look at this song in two parts:

1] God's Mercy to Mary, vv. 46-49

2] God's Mercy, Power, and Faithfulness to All of His People, vv. 50-56

1] GOD'S MERCY TO MARY, vv. 46-49

What do we know about Mary from Scripture?

The **name** Mary is found **54 times** in the NT, but there are several Marys in the NT.

Here is something I did not consider before doing some research: the name Mary is not used for Mary at all in the Gospel of John.

In John, Mary is called the **mother of Jesus**.

The last time that Mary is mentioned in the NT by name is in Acts 1.

After the ascension of Jesus, we read:

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and **Mary** the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Luke's gospel is where we find the most information on Mary, and yet it is still somewhat limited.

What Scripture clearly shows is that although Mary played an incredible role in God's plan of redemption, the focus is not on Mary but on Mary's son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, this means there are a lot of details we simply don't know about her.

What we do know shows God determined to use a young woman who lived in obscurity to advance His **sovereign and saving work** in fulfillment to all of His promises to Israel.

What we can say even before Mary was given a calling like no one else, that God chose to work sovereignly in her heart to give her an understanding of her desperate condition apart from God's grace.

Mary came to believe and trust in God alone for salvation.

She feared the only true God. And this fear of God was evidence not of her own goodness but of God's goodness to her.

And this stands out given the generally low spiritual state of the nation at the time of Christ's coming.²

² Excerpt From: R.C. Sproul. "Luke: An Expositional Commentary." Apple Books.

Looking at the cross references for our text, I came up with a list of **21 passages from the OT** connected with the words of Mary.

The passage that is most similar overall would be Hannah's expression of praise that we read earlier from 1 Samuel 2.

The other passages that connected with Mary's praise would be the book of Psalms, Genesis, Isaiah, and Zephaniah.

The town of Nazareth from what we know was a very insignificant little village in Galilee, the northern part of Israel.

Mary speaks of her **lowly state**.

We can say that in terms of social status or wealth, she lived at the **bottom of the scale**.

Yet perhaps through her parents, she was taught God's truth.

By God's grace and work in her life, she came to know and confess the only true God and believed what God promised.

Now after the amazing words of Gabriel and after the beautiful words of praise spoken by Elizabeth, **Mary also expressed her great praise of God**.

You see in verses 46-49, Mary speaks of herself in relationship to God and His saving work.

My soul magnifies the Lord.

Magnify is not a common verb in the NT, used only 8 times.

In light of what God is doing, Mary all the more is brought to greater joy and praise of the Lord.

Mary does not think she was making God greater, she is expressing how she is all the more coming to see the greatness of God.

Sproul expressed Mary's use of magnify this way:

“My soul has been saturated by a sense of the divine and by His presence and by His mercy. And so, from the deepest part of my being, I want to exalt Him.”³

Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

That is what Mary is expressing here in her words of praise.

Is there evidence also of this working of God in your life?

Are you also being directed by His Word and Spirit to be filled with praise to Him?

We see reference to soul and spirit in verses 46 and 47, which means not that they are two entirely separate things, but two related things.

John Calvin understood spirit and soul to mean this:

spirit being taken for the **understanding**, and *soul* for the **seat of the affections**.⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 67578.

My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior!

How does Mary understand that God is her Savior?

The word salvation or Savior doesn't always refer to eternal salvation.

Sometimes the word speaks of other aspects of deliverance.

But what about in this passage?

Here is where it is good to look at the context of our passage and think of other passages that are connected.

We have already seen that Elizabeth understands that Mary is carrying in her womb the Messiah.

And we should also consider Matthew's gospel and the dream that Joseph was given maybe at about this same time that Mary was expressing her words of praise.

Matt. 1:21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

If Joseph was given an understanding that the central purpose of Jesus was to save His people from their sins, then don't you think Mary also had a similar understanding?

Yes, Israel was filled with turmoil over political matters.

Israel was under the rule of Rome ultimately and more directly under wicked Herod the Great.

But I believe that Mary was also given an understanding that she **needed God's personal work of salvation**, not just God's deliverance in other ways.

MacArthur wrote here:

Nothing here or anywhere else in Scripture indicates Mary thought of herself as "immaculate" (free from the taint of original sin). Quite the opposite is true; she employed language typical of someone whose only hope for salvation is divine grace. Nothing in this passage lends support to the notion that Mary herself ought to be an object of adoration.⁵

In verse 48 Mary again expresses great humility and also speaks of her very low condition.

Maidservant is the word that I mentioned previously that means a female slave, a *doula*.

It is the feminine form of the same word that Paul frequently used.

The word lowly doesn't speak of humility of character but of position in life.

I would say that likely everyone in Nazareth enjoyed a **lowly state**.

I don't think we can truly understand how challenging life would have been for someone like Mary.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 19336.

The last part of verse 48 then speaks of how she was taken from such a lowly position to be called the most blessed.

Behold – this is something amazing, something that really stands out.

Now, Mary was not boasting at all about this.

You sometimes see athletes who speak of how they came from a poor background, but later become well known for their talents.

Generally, it is a very self-centered attitude, look at me, I am great.

But Mary is simply believing and declaring what God promised her through the words of Gabriel.

Mary is not boasting; she is believing!

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

The expression **great things** comes from a word used only one other time in the NT in Acts 2:11.

The word is used more frequently in the Greek translation of the OT including the apocryphal books.

What great things has the mighty God done for Mary?

We have to go back to the fact that Mary understood her incredible privilege connected with God's work of salvation through her Son.

Mary's life was not going to be made any easier.

It is not like she was going to enjoy all the attention and praise of the world.

But she by God's grace was not self-absorbed but thankful to be used by God in such an amazing way.

And in this Mary speaks of the holiness of God.

Holy is His name.

It is God's holiness and perfection that make His plan to save sinners so much more amazing!

Why does God choose to do anything good for us?

Only because He has satisfied His perfect wrath and keeps all that He has promised.

2] GOD'S MERCY, POWER, AND FAITHFULNESS TO ALL OF HIS PEOPLE, vv. 50-56

I have divided this song of praise in two parts, but this is somewhat artificial.

As we look specifically at verses 50-55, you notice that mercy is mentioned at the beginning and nearly at the end.

The middle verses speak of God's work in reversing expected outcomes.

The center is God's power and His promises.

We will look at these words of praise in a little more detail, but consider the three main themes that we have here.

We must begin with God's mercy.

We are grateful that God is at work bringing judgment.

We can have certainty that God will fulfill all of His promises.

Let's look at verse 50 in more detail.

And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation.

John Calvin asked a great question about this statement.

What is the purpose that God is merciful if no man finds him to be merciful unless he deserves God's favor?

It would seem that man's goodness would then be the cause of God's grace!

Two important points can be said.

First of all, no one fears God without God's previous work of grace in his life.

Martin Luther before he came to a true and full understanding expressed how he hated God, because God is just and punishes sin.

So, no one comes to fear God as he should unless God so works in our hearts and changes them.

So why is the truth of verse 50 presented the way that it is?

Here John Calvin makes a great observation that it is expressed this way to shake off the perverse confidence of hypocrites.

God does not just want us to think, God is bound to me because of my flesh, my heritage, or anything I have done.

God desires rather that He be truly feared.

There is absolutely no value in just going through the motions.

And praise the Lord that He has always had a people who have come to know and love Him.

There is absolutely nothing of which we can boast, but we desire to see many others come to know the great love and mercy of our holy God.

What is also significant and interesting about Mary's song is the grammar of verses 51-55.

The verbs are expressed in the **past tense**.

Is Mary thinking of the past or is this an expression like we see in parts of the OT where the past speaks of the future?

Both answers are possible and reasonable.

Leon Morris wrote:

It is perhaps more likely that she is looking forward in a spirit of prophecy and counting what God will do as so certain that it can be spoken of as accomplished.⁶

The language is so rich and beautiful in terms of what God does and what we desire that He will do.

Don't we live in such a wicked, twisted world?

⁶ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 93.

We certainly can look at other time in history where the forces of evil have been on a rampage.

Mary's prayer recognizes the presence and evil of the proud, the mighty, the rich who have gained wealth not just through honest labor but through theft and deception.

We must never downplay the presence and force of evil.

And yet we also must never forget that God through all chaos reigns and that His purposes will be carried out!

And let us never forget that God's central purpose and work is that of saving sinners even as He promised to make of Abraham an innumerable seed.

We want to see our nation turned to the Lord in repentance.

We would love to see true reformation throughout our nation.

We are not given promises directly related to our own nation or our individual situations, except to say this – God is always faithful. He has never failed his people.

He will continue to advance His truth, preserve His Word, and spread His gospel.

Sproul stated this great and encouraging truth:

“If there was any central theme that defined the entire faith of Old Testament Israel, it was this fundamental assertion: the Lord God omnipotent reigns. God is the Lord, and there is none other. In His omnipotence, He is the King of all things. The doctrine of the government of God in His providence means simply

this: He raises kingdoms up; He brings kingdoms down. No one exercises power in this world apart from the sovereign government of God. At Christmas, we celebrate the One who comes, whose government is on His shoulders, and to whom the Father gives the authority to reign with a government that will have no end. We fuss and fret and stew and worry every day about the problems we face from the earthly governments of this world, even in our own nation. Sometimes we forget who is actually running things. It is the Lord God omnipotent who reigns.”

Here is the challenge for us who live about 2000 years after these words of praise were first spoken.

As much as Mary did, we must live by faith in God and what He has spoken.

The just shall live by faith!

We have seen God’s great work in the past through all the bloody and disgusting aspects of history.

Much more seems to be coming, and yet we face the unknown not boasting in who we are but that God will remember His mercy.

CONCLUSION

May we be filled with praise as we consider how a holy, just, and powerful God has had mercy on us.

- 1] Spirit of Praise
- 2] How much do we really know our Bibles?
- 3] Full confidence in the Lord and in His might

Prayer

Hymn 667

BENEDICTION - JUDE 24-25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, *Be* glory and majesty, Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen.