

## Sermon 8, The Magnificat, Pt. 2, Luke 1:46-56

**Proposition:** God's work of sending Jesus into the world benefited not only Mary, but all God-fearers; that it has resulted in a thorough reversal of the world's values and status; and that He did it because He remembered His promise to show mercy to Abraham and his seed forever.

- I. The Beneficiaries of God's Work, vv. 48-55
  - A. What God Did for Mary, vv. 46-49
  - B. What God Does for Those Who Fear Him, vv. 50-55
- II. The Effects of God's Work, vv. 46-55
  - A. Calling Forth His People's Praise, vv. 46-47
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- III. The Reasons for God's Work, vv. 54-55
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  - C. God's Promise to the Fathers and Abraham
  - D. God's Promise to Abraham's Seed

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is the last worship service of the year. We have been traveling through the first chapter of Luke together, examining the glorious narrative of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have not gotten particularly close to chapter 2, though at least we are more than halfway through ch. 1 — or will be by the end of this sermon. What we saw this morning was this: Mary's Magnificat celebrates God's word, and describes God's work in thoroughly Biblical terms as a work of reversal and a work that hallowed His name. Well, that was the overview of the larger points of Mary's song. This evening we are going to look at the details of the song — how Mary interpreted God's work in sending His Son through her. We will see that God's work of sending Jesus into the world benefited not only Mary, but all God-fearers; that it has resulted in a thorough reversal of the world's values and status; and that He did it because He remembered His promise to show mercy to Abraham and his seed forever.

#### **I. The Beneficiaries of God's Work, vv. 48-55**

Mary begins her hymn by speaking of how she personally has benefited from the marvelous work of God, and then widens her perspective to speak of what He has done for those who fear Him in general. In other words, Mary herself recognizes that though the benefit to her of

mothering the Messiah is incalculable, the benefits that God showers upon all those who fear Him are just as overwhelming.

#### **A. What God Did for Mary, vv. 48-49**

What did God do for Mary? She does not describe it directly in the poem, for the poem explains what we already know from listening to Luke's previous account. God had announced that she would bear the Savior of the World, a boy named Jesus who is the Son of the Most High. She describes this work as looking upon her humble state, and as doing great things for her. The Virgin doesn't need to be more explicit here. These are, in fact, exactly the things God was doing. He looked upon her—meaning that He not only saw where she was and what she was, but He cared about her and acted to bring blessing to her. She is lowly, He is mighty — but He did great things for her. Making her pregnant with a child who has no human Father is indeed a great thing. It is a greater thing than any man could do. It is beyond the capabilities of the scientists. You may speak of cloning, but that reproduces someone who had a human father. God gave Mary a Son who, in human terms, was hers and only hers. At the center of the Bible is a single mom — single not because her child's father left, but because her child has no human father.

In doing this, God also gave to the Virgin union and communion with His Son. Scripture does not describe the closeness of Jesus and Mary, and speculation has gone nuts on this topic. But we must conclude that knowing the Son of God after the flesh better than anyone else does or did was another one of the great things that God did for Mary. Paul is right to warn us that knowing Christ after the flesh is not everything. A social acquaintance with Jesus is not salvific. But it is impressive and worthwhile to know the Son of God in any way, no matter how small. To be the mother of a man who never married is to have the closest of human relationships with that man. He who is mighty did indeed do great things for this girl.

#### **B. What God Does for Those Who Fear Him, vv. 50-55**

But there is more, much more. God's work toward those who fear Him is described at much greater length than His work for Mary. Mary celebrates His looking at her and doing great things for her. But when it comes to those who fear Him, she lists even more mighty works.

God shows mercy; He shows strength by scattering the proud, bringing down the rulers, exalting the humble. He feeds the hungry and rejects the rich. He helps Israel, remembers His mercy, and keeps His promises. This list of nine or ten things that the Lord does for those who fear Him — or better, that He did for those who fear Him in the Incarnation of His Son — highlights that God's work is personal, but not limited to Mary or to just a few highly favored ones. The whole multitude of God-fearers benefits to this day through what God did for the virgin from Nazareth.

One application here is obvious. Don't worry that you aren't the Virgin Mary, that you will never bear the Messiah — or, to put it more broadly, that all the good, really favored positions in the Kingdom are already taken. One thinks of the JW's insistence that all 144,000 have already been saved and you will never be one of them.

Don't go down that road. In the very act of mentioning God's two overwhelming favors toward her, Mary mentions ten overwhelming favors that He shows to all of those who fear Him without exception.

There are plenty of good spots left in the kingdom. Remember, the least in the kingdom is greater than John the Baptist, who is the greatest man born of woman up until that time!

Serve God with joy, then. Mary herself testifies that blessed is everyone who fears the Lord! She recognizes how great God's favor to her is, and she in no way minimizes it, but she spends most of her song celebrating how great His favor is to *everyone* who fears Him! So fear Him today, and know His favor and His gracious gift of Himself to you.

## **II. The Effects of God's Work, vv. 46-55**

The second lens through which we will look at this poem is the effect of God's work, or, to put it differently, what exactly Mary says God has done in sending His Son through her.

### **A. Calling Forth His People's Praise, vv. 46-47**

The first of these is that He has called forth His people's praise. Mary magnifies the Lord and exults in God her Savior, but not in a solitary fashion. Surely when she says "My soul magnifies the Lord," she is thinking, as you should be thinking, of the invitation in Psalm 34:3 "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!" And yes, it's the same word in the LXX of that verse as Mary uses in Luke 1:46. She magnifies the Lord, not only for herself, but as an example and invitation to us.

The first result of the work of God, at least as described in the Magnificat, is that we praise Him! Is that true of you? Do you praise Him loudly, powerfully, regularly, happily, irrepressibly? Do you speak in such a way as to make Him great? When you read the Bible, does that move you to praise? When you look at the faces of your children, does that move you to praise? When you see the sunset over the prairie or the mountains, do you magnify the Lord who thought of it and painted it in the sky?

### **B. Calling His People to Bless Mary, v. 48b**

The second thing God did by sending His Son through Mary was to invite the believers of every generation to call her blessed. She recognizes that, at a stroke, she has become the most celebrated and beloved woman in the history of the world, through her task of mothering the most celebrated and beloved man in history. While there is no doubt that some overzealous Christians have taken this too far, their overdoing it is no excuse for us to underdo it. We are not commanded to pray to Mary, but we are certainly instructed in this very verse to bless Mary. May God bless the woman who believed that God would keep His promises, the woman who accepted the labor of child-bearing without the rewards of sexual intercourse, the woman who sang this song for the instruction of the church and who taught the Son of God how to tie His sandals!

When was the last time you called Mary blessed? She is, for as we saw last time, King Solomon and the house of David are blessed and will be blessed, regardless of what wicked things their enemies do. Mary is a key part of the house of David; all generations should and must call her blessed. Heaven knows she has a lot to teach our generation, which has gone mad in its purposeful misunderstanding of masculinity and femininity. Parents, teach your daughters

to be like Mary and they won't go far wrong. Use her as an example for your sons, too, of what they should be looking for in a wife. I remember one of my daughters freaking out about pregnancy: "It's going to be so painful; I don't think I can do it; I don't want to do it!"

"All right," I said to her. "What would you think of Mary if she had said such a thing to Gabriel? Was all the suffering worth it to bring Jesus into the world?"

Well, these questions helped my daughter work through her fears and realize the blessing of being female and gifted with the potency to carry babies. May God bless the Virgin Mary!

### **C. An Intellectual Revolution, v. 51**

The third thing that Mary celebrates is the intellectual revolution brought about by the coming of the Son of God into the world. Those whose hallmark is intellectual pride have been scattered. Now, as we saw this morning, this already happened once — at the Tower of Babel. In other words, this is a perennial problem in human life, as all of you already knew. The people who are full of intellectual pride, who fancy that they know everything, are a source of many of our worst problems.

How does the coming of Jesus take those who are proud in what their hearts imagine and scatter them? One way is that it pushes pride to the margins. In pagan morality, pride is a virtue. In Christian morality, humility is a virtue and pride is a sin. Since pride is a sin, those who are openly proud in the imagination of their hearts are shunned from polite society and prevented from gathering together and forming Babel-like schemes for conquering heaven without God's permission.

The presence of Jesus in the world makes humility desirable.

### **D. A Political Revolution, v. 52**

The coming of the Son of God also brings about political revolution. The specter of this notion is with us on a daily basis; we live in the age of revolutions that began in the early modern period with the revolt of Parliament against King Charles I in England in 1642. Since then, we have seen political revolution in Britain's American Colonies in 1776. France in 1789, across Europe in 1848, in Russia in 1917, in China in 1949, Cuba in 1959, and Cambodia in 1975 — and our intelligentsia are deeply in love with the idea of political revolution.

So let me just say here that Jesus did not overthrow Caesar Augustus or even Herod the Great. He did not teach His followers to engage in political revolution, and political revolution was not the answer for virtually any of the nations I just listed. So when Mary says that the coming of Jesus has brought down rulers from their thrones, what does she mean? She means that the coming of Christ will ultimately overthrow all power and authority that does not submit to Him. The day is coming when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ — and He shall reign forever and ever.

### **E. A Social Revolution, v. 53**

Mary then speaks of a social revolution, where God welcomes the hungry and feeds them, while sending the rich away empty. When, you may ask, did this happen? Well, economists and others obsessed with economic inequality in our time have tried to ask that question. In general, they have found that the only thing that is able to pry some wealth out of the grasping hands of the

rich is major wars. Otherwise, the rich get richer. But it is clear that in historical terms, the coming of Jesus Christ changed the mindset of those in power in Christian countries. In non-Christian places, you might help the poor because they can make trouble for you if you don't. But in Christian places, even non-Christians often believe that you ought to help the poor because it is morally right to do so. There are laws in our society requiring medical institutions and professionals to treat people's needs free of charge. Why? Because we believe that those who have something ought to share it with the poor. At least some of the poor are deserving, but even the undeserving poor don't deserve to be mistreated.

When has God sent the rich away empty? Well, as with all of the things in the Magnificat, this is at least partly to be fulfilled in the next life. One thinks of the rich man in the parable begging Abraham for a single drop of water with which to cool his tongue, for He was tormented in the flame.

When you think about the kind of mother Jesus had, His later teaching about rich and poor makes perfect sense. His woes on the rich pronounced in Luke's gospel tie right back to Mary's teaching of her son that the poor are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God. Luke also shows repeatedly that a changed attitude toward money and possessions — a newly generous attitude — is a hallmark of conversion. If you read the rest of Luke-Acts, you will see that generosity is a sign that people have submitted to Christ. So how about it? Will you be generous? Will you give from your resources to those less fortunate? Or would you rather risk being sent away empty on that great day of judgment?

#### **F. Helping Israel, v. 54a**

Finally, we are told that God has helped Israel. The word is "to take hold of." He has grabbed on to Israel; He holds tightly to His own. He helps His people by sending His Son to save them.

This is the gospel message, brothers and sisters. The good news is that God has visited and redeemed His people. In helping Israel, of course, He is not helping those Pharisees who declared "We have Abraham for our father!" He is helping all those who fear Him, all His elect, all His people, "the Israel of God" as Paul terms it in Galatians 6.

### **III. The Reasons for God's Work, vv. 54-55**

Why? What are the reasons for His work? Mary closes out her song by listing four of them.

#### **A. God's Memory**

The first is that He has remembered. God has not forgotten His relationship with His people, His promises, His faithfulness, His character. I have a friend who has repeatedly said things like "I'll buy you such-and-such for Christmas" and then never followed through. He does not remember what he says. And frankly, it can be very annoying.

God is not like that. His memory is perfect. He has a photographic memory, indeed, better than that. He is better than the elephant who never forgets. The Almighty always remembers.

#### **B. God's Mercy**

What does He remember? He remembers to have compassion on misery. Many of us avoid showing mercy because we don't want to get involved in other people's misery. It's an incredible

pain to be caught up in misery that isn't even yours. But God is not afraid of it. He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows.

### **C. God's Promise to the Fathers and Abraham**

He also promised something. Mary does not specify the content of the promise except to say that it was a promise to remember His mercy. We can think of the promise to Abraham that in His Seed — in Jesus Christ — all the families of the earth shall be blessed. God remembered that promise. He followed through on it.

### **D. God's Promise to Abraham's Seed**

At the end of the day, that promise was not primarily to Abraham, but to Jesus. Why do I say that? Because Paul wrote to Titus "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal" (Tit 1:2 ASV). God promised eternal life before eternity. To whom could He have promised such a thing at such a time? Only to His Son, who was right there with Him. In the Incarnation, that promise was fulfilled. God sent His Son to secure it, because He will always keep His word to His beloved Son.

If you are in Christ, you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Take that thought with you into the new year. Christ has come, and in His coming, Abraham's seed is saved. Hallelujah! Amen.