

## LUKE 1:39-80

## TWO SWEET AND SIGNIFICANT SONGS

The lovely lyrics which came from the lips of Mary form a precious song indeed! The occasion upon which the words were first uttered was a visit that Mary paid to her cousin Elisabeth, shortly after the former had received the promise of the miraculous birth of her Son (verses 39-45). Upon hearing the salutation of Mary, Elisabeth addressed her in high spiritual ecstasy – declaring her to be supremely blessed among women because of her Son Who was to be born. And Elisabeth also wondered at her own honor in being thus visited by the mother of the long-awaited Messiah. Elisabeth congratulated Mary upon her faith and assured her that the promise upon which Mary relied was certain to be fulfilled.

The name of the song which Mary sang – the *Magnificat* – has come from the first word in its Latin form. Her song is modeled very closely after that ancient hymn that was sung by Hannah over 1,000 years earlier, when her heart – like that of Mary – was rejoicing in the promised gift of a son (1 Sam. 2:1-10). The hymn is a meditation upon the mercy and grace of God; the general movement of thought seems to be from the goodness of God to Mary as an individual, to His resultant kindness to Israel as a nation.

The first stanza (verses 46-48) begins a pattern that is repeated in those which follow, for it contains one of the chief features of Hebrew poetry – namely, the expression of parallel thoughts in successive lines. In her innermost being, Mary praises or magnifies the Lord; and she rejoices in Him as her Savior. This salvation was not only for her people, but it was particularly for herself; it was not only political, but also personal and spiritual. Out of all women, the Lord had chosen her – a humble country maiden from an obscure village, who was engaged to be married to a poor hard-working carpenter. The thought of the second stanza (verses 49-50) centers upon the character of God, as it was here revealed in His gracious gift; and in the third stanza (verses 51-53), the results of the coming of the Messiah are stated as though they were already achieved. In contrast with the blessedness of those who fear the Lord, the proud, rebellious, and unbelieving are pictured as being scattered like the hosts of a defeated army. The oppressed are exalted while tyrants are dethroned; the hungry are filled while the rich are sent away empty-handed. These results are to be regarded as spiritual as well as physical. Such reversals are certain to occur wherever Christ and His happy Gospel-tidings are preached and believed. The last stanza of Mary's Song (verses 54-55) emphasizes the faithfulness of God to His ancient promises to His people, which Mary was about to see fulfilled in the birth of her Son.

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ Mary goes down to visit her cousin Elisabeth – verses 39-45
- ❖ Mary's song of joy – verses 46-56
- ❖ Elisabeth gives birth to her promised son – verses 57-66
- ❖ Zacharias' song of thanksgiving and prophecy – verses 67-80

The aged Zacharias had received from Gabriel the promise that he was to be given a son who would be called John, and who would be the herald of Christ; and when he had asked for a sign to attest the truth of the prediction, he was smitten with the inability to speak, as a rebuke for his unbelief and a stimulus for his faith. Even when the promise was finally fulfilled, the sign was not removed and he was not able to speak again until he had given a written expression of his confidence in God (verses 57-64). This occurred on the eighth day after John's birth, when the happy parents were about to name the child in the presence of their rejoicing friends and family. The mother declared that his name would be John, despite the fact that no one in their family carried that name. And when Zacharias was consulted on the matter, "he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, His name is John." And as soon as he had done this, "his mouth was opened immediately ... and he spake, blessing God." His thanksgiving was voiced in a prophetic hymn whose main theme was a spirit of thanksgiving for the coming birth of Jesus and the salvation which He would bring.

Zacharias' song is named the *Benedictus*, which is also from the first word in the Latin version. It is an ecstatic expression of gratitude to God for His boundless goodness. The first stanza (verses 68-69) speaks of the redemption of Israel as if it were already accomplished in the gift of the Christ-Child Who was soon to be born. The second (verses 70-72) indicates that Christ's work of deliverance from all enemies is a fulfillment of the promises which were made through the prophets, cherished by the ancient forefathers, and embodied in the holy covenant that had been made with Israel of old. In the third section (verses 73-75), we have a description of the nature of this salvation which was assured by the Lord's oath to Abraham. It was to be a deliverance from political oppression that would make it possible for Israel to have a true, priestly service of God, as a nation that was holy and righteous before Him. Verses 76 and 77 contain the fourth stanza; and here the singer declares that John is to be recognized as a prophet of God, and that his Divine mission will be to announce and define the promised salvation as being a spiritual redemption (not a political one), consisting in the remission of sin. John was not to be a revolutionist, but a reformer. He was to call a nation to repentance, so that those who obeyed his message might be ready to receive the salvation of Christ. This mission of John is linked with that of Jesus, as the description of the latter reaches its climax in the closing stanza (verses 78-79). The source of all the blessings that Christ will bring is found in "the tender mercy of our God." And these blessings will consist in a visitation of "the dayspring from on high" – when the Sun of righteousness arises upon the helpless, terrified wanderers of the night, who are seated "in darkness and the shadow of death."

*Lord, thank You for the wondrous subject that is recorded in this chapter: the miraculous conception! Let us cry out with the Apostle, "Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in our flesh!" Amen.*

