**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Mary’s Song of Praise**

**Luke 1:46-55**

**December 15, 2024**

Mary’s song is the first of four songs that are found in the opening chapters of Luke’s gospel. Like Zechariah’s Song (Luke 1:67-79), and the angels’ song (Luke 2:14), and Simeon’s song (2:29-32), Mary’s Song is a song of praise (1:46-55). It is one of the great praise hymns in all of Scripture.

It’s known as the Magnificat because of the opening word in the Latin translation: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (“My soul glorifies the Lord”). It reads like an Old Testament psalm of thanksgiving; yet it echoes the hymns of praise which were sung in response to God’s powerful work in the lives His people. The Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10), Moses (Ex. 15:1-18), Miriam (Ex.15:19-21), and Deborah (Judges 5:1-31) all come to mind.

The striking feature about Mary’s Song is that most of it comes directly from the Old Testament, especially the psalms and the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10). It reveals just how much Mary loved the Scriptures, and how she longed for God’s promises to be fulfilled through the coming of the Messiah. In the words of Wiersbe, “Mary had God’s Word in her heart and turned it into a song.” The chart that is included at the end of this message reveals just how much of the Old Testament Mary had hidden away in her heart. She is a remarkable example for us to follow.

Her hymn is arranged in four strophes, or stanzas. “The arrangement is logical,” writes Hendriksen, “and easy to remember.” In the **first stanza**, Mary praises God for what He has done for her (1:46-48). In **second stanza,** she reveals the reason for her praise (1:49-50). She is blessed, not because of any merit on her part, but because God is mighty, holy and merciful toward *all* who fear Him. In the **third stanza** (1:51-53), she celebrates Yahweh’s mighty works that will be accomplished in the future ministry of her Son. God’s concern for the helpless (v. 51), the humble (v. 52), and the hungry (v. 53) will continue in the dawning of “the Messianic Age.” In the **fourth stanza** (1:54-55), she praises Yahweh because the birth of her Son is a faithful fulfillment of His covenant promise to Abraham and to *all* hisdescendants in *all* generations.

The connecting link between Mary’s Song and the preceding verses is found in the opening words of verse 46; “*And Mary said* . . .” This takes us back to verses 39-45, where Luke records Mary’s visit to Elizabeth’s home. After she greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth exclaimed, “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear*” (v. 42). The Magnificat is Mary’s response to the glorious work that God has done in making her the mother of Messiah.

**A. The First Stanza (1:46-48):** “*And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed . . .*” If this opening stanza tells us anything, it’s that Mary never considered herself exalted. She was very much like the rest of us, a sinner in need of a Savior. She also recognized her “humble state.” She knew that God often uses people who are not great in the world’s eyes to accomplish His great purposes.

No doubt there were others whom God could have chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. But the Lord had been “mindful” of her lowly position and her servant’s heart. As His “bondslave” (NASB), she was willing to surrender her will to His. As a result, she predicts that not only Elizabeth (v. 42), but all generations will call her “blessed.” What she means is that all generations are going to praise *God* because of the marvelous way in which He has honored her as the mother of our Lord. The next part of the hymn will confirm this.

**B. The Second Stanza (1:49-50):** “*For the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is His name. His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.*” The reason for Mary’s praise is centered in three of God’s attributes – His power, holiness, and mercy:

**(1)** She is in awe of the “Mighty One,” whose great power has created a miracle within her womb. Mary would have no problem singing one of today’s best known hymns: “To God be the glory, great things He has done! So loved He the world that He gave us His Son.” Mary knew this firsthand.

**(2)** She magnifies the Lord because of His holiness; “*Holy is he*.” This is a phrase found in many of the Psalms (22:3; 71:22; 89:18; 99:3; 103:1). It’s the attribute that sets Him apart from us and makes Him the object of awe and adoration because of His transcendent glory. Mary would have known this, having been instructed in the Hebrew Scriptures from childhood. She would have known, for example, the refrain of Psalm 99: “*Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name – he is holy*” (vv. 2-3, 5, 9).

**(3)** She also praises the Lord for His mercy, now quoting from Psalm 103:17; “*But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s mercy is with those who fear him . . .*” In the context of Psalm 103, “*Those who fear him*,” (v. 17) are the same as “*those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts*” (v. 18). Mary knew that when God’s people honor Him and trust in Him, as she has done, God honors them. She knew that His “mercy” or His “loyal love” is for all those who fear him.

**C. The Third Stanza (vv. 51-53):** “*He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty*.” As commentators often point out, the six verbs in this section are in the past tense. They could be pointing, therefore, to God’s past redemptive actions toward Israel, as in the Exodus; “*Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm*” (Deut. 5:15).

However, it is possible that Mary’s references to these radical reversals relate to the coming of the Messiah. If so, then she’s describing God’s actions in the past tense as “anticipations of what God would do in the future through the child in her womb.” (Robert Thomas, Stanley Gundry, The NIV Harmony of the Gospels). Jesus’ announcement about the purpose of His mission would seem to confirm this: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord*” (Luke 4:18-19; Cf. Isa. 61:1-2).

**D. The Fourth Stanza (vv. 54-55):** “*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers*.” With these
final and climactic words, Mary calls to mind that the birth of her Son will be the faithful fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:7-8; 22:15-18) and to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Nothing is as certain as God’s own word, and no one knew this better than Mary. Her praise is based on her assurance that God will be true to His promises.

We don’t worship Mary today, as many do. But we do honor her as the mother of our Lord, as Elizabeth did (1:42); and like Elizabeth, we also honor her for her faith (1:45). It is Mary’s *faith* that is so beautifully expressed in the Magnificat – her faith in the mighty and merciful God, the Holy One, the faithful God of the covenant, whom she trusts as her Savior. Mary’s Song of Praise could just as easily be called her Song of Faith.

But more than anything else, Mary’s Song is a primer on how to offer praise to our heavenly Father. Dr. Dale Ralph Davis says it best when he writes, “Unknown to us, Mary has waylaid us into her school of prayer. If we want to offer praise or engage in prayer, how are we to do so? Use Bible words . . . We should recognize that a majority of the prayer and praise we will need has already been written in the Old Testament and especially in the Psalms.” He then suggests that we “soak” ourselves, for example, in the Psalms “until they begin to shape the way we pray. Mary teaches us that marination in the biblical text is the best preparation for prayer” (Luke: The Year of the Lord’s Favor).

It is obvious that Mary in no way intends for our attention to focus on her, but rather on God. That’s more than evident from the way in which she explains the blessing she has received. All generations will count her blessed because “*The Mighty One has done great things.*”Holy is *His* name! *He* has performed mighty deeds! *He* has scattered! *He* has brought down! *He* has lifted up! *He* has filled! *He* has helped! What Mary knows is what every Christian should know, namely, that God delights in hearing Hischildren praising Him for the mighty and merciful things He has done. That’s why we should tell Him what He means to us, as Mary has done, and flood heaven with our grateful praise! There’s no better time of year to do this than the Christmas season.

 To God be the glory, great things he has done!

 So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,

 Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,

 And opened the life gate that *we* may go in.

 (Fanny Crosby, 1875)

**Lines from *Magnificat* OT Quotations/Allusions**

My soul exalts the Lord 1 Sam. 2:1-2; Ps. 34:2-3

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior Pss. 24:5; 25:5; 35:9; Isa. 12:2;

 Mic. 7:7; Hab. 3:18

For He has had regard for the humble state Ps. 138:6

of His bondslave; For behold, from this

time on all generations will count me blessed.

For the Mighty One has done great things Ps. 24:8; Zeph. 3:17

for me; And holy is His name.

AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER Ps. 103:17

GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.

He has done mighty deeds with His arm; Pss. 98:1; 118:15

He has scattered those who were proud in

the thoughts of their heart.

He has brought down rulers from their Job 5:11; Ps. 2

thrones, And has exalted those who were

humble.

HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD Ps. 107:9

THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.

He has given help to Israel His servant, In Isa. 41:8-10

remembrance of His mercy,

As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and Gen. 17:19; Ps. 132:11;

his descendants forever. Isa. 41:8-9

(Taken from Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Luke, NASB, Charles Swindoll)