

Mary's Song - The Magnificat - Luke 1:46-55

Scripture Reading: 1Samuel 2:1-10

Introduction

Country music star, Travis Tritt, is quoted as telling this very compelling story about his early days before he made it big. In those days, like many musicians starting out, he played in out-of-the-way bars and dives that are known for the fights that often break out over the most insignificant things as the patrons get overly intoxicated.

One evening, as a brawl got rolling, Tritt tried something that worked so well it became his standard tool whenever a fight would break out.

Tritt tells the story like this:

"Just when [things] started getting out of hand, when bikers were reaching for their pool cues and rednecks were heading for the gun rack, I'd start playing 'Silent Night.' It could be the middle of July - I didn't care." And he said that as he played, those tough men would stop and calm down. He continued, "Sometimes they'd even start crying, standing there watching me sweat and play Christmas carols."

There is something about a Christmas carol that reaches out and takes us to a better place - a different frame of mind. And this morning we are starting a four sermon series where we are going to look at the four "songs" surrounding the birth of Christ we find in the gospel of Luke.

We are going to take them in the order that we find them in the Bible and that means we are going to begin with Mary's song that is recorded for us in Luke 1:46-55 - let me encourage you to open your Bible to Luke 1 so you can follow along.

As we read through Mary's song, you will notice that it very closely parallels Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving that we just heard in our Scripture reading.

Mary has been visited by the angel, Gabriel, and given the news that God had chosen her to bear his Son and Mary has travelled from Nazareth to Judah to the home of her older cousin, Elizabeth.

When she arrived and greeted Elizabeth, Elizabeth's baby - who we know as John the Baptist - leaped in her womb with joy and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be^a a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mary responded with her song:

Follow along as I read Mary's song beginning in verse 46 in its entirety [**Luke 1:46-55**]

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Before we dig into the song, let's take a look at the passage and its immediate context to see what we can learn about Mary

I. What we learn about Mary

First, we learn in **Luke 1:26** that Mary was living in the city of Nazareth in Galilee

Although it's referred to by Luke as a "city" Nazareth was a very small town likely containing no more than 150 residents at the time of our account

It was a truly backwater village of no significant economic or political consequence at the time of Jesus

From what we know of Jewish culture in those days, it is universally understood that Mary was likely a teenager when Gabriel appeared to her with the news of her impending supernatural pregnancy

And, while we aren't told her precise age, it is widely presumed that she was between the ages of 13 and 17 years old when the angel came to her

And it's likely that Mary was at the younger end of that range since Jewish women were typically betrothed around the age of 13

We can rightly say then that Mary was a small-town girl in the truest sense when Gabriel appeared to her

We also learn that Mary was a virgin which means that she kept herself pure even during her betrothal to Joseph

To fully appreciate this fact, we need to understand that the Jewish betrothal is not like our modern day engagement

Marriage for Jews of Mary's day was a two-step process and betrothal was the first step

When a couple was betrothed they were, in a sense, legally married because the betrothal was pledged in front of witnesses and binding on the bride and groom

They were considered to be married in all legal and religious aspects with the only exception being that they did not live together as both continued to live in their parents' homes until after their wedding ceremony which was generally held 12 months after the beginning of the betrothal

So, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she was living in the space between those two stages of marriage as Joseph's wife who was not yet living with him

Sexual relations were not expected to commence until after the second step in the marriage process but people weren't all that different in Mary's day than they are today so it wasn't unheard of for couples to consummate their union early

But Mary kept herself pure and that prepared her for God's use as we see in **2Timothy 2:21**

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

Then in **Luke 1:45** we see Elizabeth report that Mary believed what God revealed to her through the angel Gabriel

We know she was puzzled by what she was told and she wondered aloud how it could possibly happen because she was a virgin - and committed to remaining one until her wedding day it seems

But she heard what Gabriel said in Luke 1:37 that "nothing will be impossible with God" and she believed and responded by trusting what God had revealed and she obediently made herself available to God as we read in verse 38 [**Luke 1:38**]

Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Folks, that is a textbook example of faith - Mary believed and trusted God and she acted accordingly in spite of any questions and fears she might have had

So far, this is likely information that you were already aware of to some degree but we also learn some things about Mary from her song that you might not have seen before

In her song, Mary is revealed to have remarkable knowledge of God's Word

We've already seen how her song closely parallels Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving but it also alludes to at least 12 other Old Testament passages with many of them contained in the Psalms of David

We also learn from **Luke 1:31-33** that Mary knew the identity of the Son she would give birth to:

She knew his name was Jesus which means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation"

She knew he would be called "the Son of the Most High" God

She knew that God was going to give him the throne of his ancestor, David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever and his kingdom would have no end

Mary fully understood the significance and purpose of her pregnancy and she knew before anyone else who her Son was and why he came

She knew she was selected by God to give birth to the Messiah that her people had long been waiting for and she was willing to bear the scandal and scorn that she was likely to face because she recognized that she was God's bondservant

Mary likely went to stay with her cousin, Elizabeth, and her husband, Zachariah, in part to escape the wagging tongues and shaking heads back in Nazareth and to find the friendly face of someone in a similar situation

After all, Elizabeth had recently become pregnant at an advanced age and was likely suffering through being the talk of the town herself

And when Mary arrived to hear Elizabeth loudly exclaim [**Luke 1:42-43**]

"Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Mary couldn't contain her emotion and she began to sing the song recorded for us in Luke 1:46-55

We might well wonder at that - I mean, what on earth could an unwed, pregnant teen from backwater Nazareth who was betrothed to a poor carpenter who was considering divorcing her for infidelity have to sing about?

After all, her life had just taken a very scary turn as the best she could hope for was to be shunned by Joseph, her family, and her community and at the worst she could be stoned for adultery

But Mary didn't protest or try to talk God out of what he was calling her to do - she didn't sing a song of lament over the burden God was laying on her

She sang about her Lord!

In the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, the first line of Mary's song is: *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*

That's why her song is often referred to as "The Magnificat" which means "magnify"

And her song is a song of praise, a song of present joy, and of the assurance of blessing to be seen in future days

Mary begins her song with the words [**Luke 1: 46-47**]:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior

It's difficult to know just how much emphasis to put on Mary's use of the words "soul" and "spirit" and whether she is making a purposeful distinction between the two or simply engaging in the parallelism commonly found in Hebrew poetry

In any event, I think we are safe in saying that Mary is praising God with all her being as her soul exalts God and her spirit, in effect, jumps for joy because of God

This is reminiscent of David's praise in **Psalm 103:1** –

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

So, Mary's song is a song of praise to God in which she exalts God for three things represented by the three stanzas of the song

II. Mary's Song in three stanzas

The first stanza is found in verses 47-49 where Mary praises God for his blessings to her personally

A. For God's blessings to her

Mary lists three specific blessings

Look with me at verse 47 [**Luke 1:47**] where we find the first thing Mary recognizes God has done for her

This one is a bit subtle as Mary says her spirit rejoices in "God my Savior"

Mary recognized that she herself was a sinner in need of the Savior and she acknowledged that she was being blessed individually by what God was doing in sending the Savior into the world

In calling the Son she was carrying "my Savior" Mary testified to her need for a Savior and her personal acceptance of him as she rejoiced and praised God for meeting her need

Second, we see in verse 48 [**Luke 1:48a**] that Mary recognized that she was personally unworthy and yet God had chosen to bless her

She says that God "*has looked upon the humble estate of his servant*" and the Greek word translated as "servant" is *doulos* which means "bondservant" or "slave"

Mary saw herself as the most unlikely person for honor and yet God considered her and chose her out of all the women on earth to bless with the great honor of bearing and raising his Son

Mary's attitude stands in stark contrast to what we are led to believe today - that we are deserving of all the good that comes our way and even more to the point that many people rarely feel satisfied let alone grateful

She knew she was God's possession and she recognized that, in spite of her lowly status, God considered her his prized possession and she praised him for the honor he bestowed upon her rather than assuming she was deserving of it

The third personal blessing Mary praised God for is found in the second half of verse 48 and verse 49 [**Luke 1:48b-49**]

Mary knew her life had forever been changed and that all generations from this moment on would call her blessed

What she could have easily grumbled about as being a burden or curse, she recognized as a privilege that would cause future generations to recognize how much she had been blessed by God

And once again we see that she knew that she wouldn't rightfully be called blessed because of who or what she was but because her mighty and holy God had chosen her in her lowly estate and had chosen to bless her

Mary didn't suffer from illusions of grandeur or entitlement - she was a humble servant of God who gave God all the praise and glory for what he was doing in and through her

Then in verse 50 we see the focus of Mary's song broaden to include not just the blessings that she had received but also how all those who fear God will be blessed

B. For God's mercy

Having spoken of God's might and holiness she now mentions his attribute of mercy [**Luke 1:50**]

Mercy is one of God's great attributes and one that I am personally very thankful for because I know how much I need it

But God's mercy, at least the ultimate expression of his mercy, isn't unconditional - it is for those who have a reverential fear of him

And the fear needs to be thus qualified because unbelievers have reason to be afraid of God's judgment but for the believer, fear of God serves to motivate us to surrender to him fully and to honor him completely

Hebrews 12:28-29 gives us a good description of what Mary means when she says "those who fear him"

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

And Psalm **103:17-18** tells us that

...the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

If you are a true Christ-follower you have no reason be afraid of God but you must respect him and seek to please him and that means that our fear of the Lord will change the way we live

But the point is, Mary realized that what God was accomplishing through her wasn't for her alone; it will be experienced forever by those who have a reverential fear for him

And the apostle Paul makes clear in **Romans 3:18** where he quotes from Psalm 36:1 that unbelievers do not fear God

Therefore, God's ultimate expression of mercy is only for those who believe in his Son

Unbelievers do not properly fear God and are therefore outside of his mercy while they remain in their unbelief

And that helps us to understand the reason behind Mary's song as she offers praise for the Lord's work in the world

C. For the Lord's agency

I have used the word "agency" in our outline because it involves activity but it also includes the idea of sovereignty - agency is activity because of sovereignty

One thing we can easily overlook and read right past is that Mary's focus changes in this last stanza

Beginning with verse 51, Mary begins talking about the baby she was carrying as she describes his activity in the world

And she describes what Jesus will do as if he has already accomplished the deeds even as he has not yet been born

Mary was so certain the things she mentions in the verses that follow that she was able to speak of them in the past tense

So, in verse 51 [**Luke 1:51**] we see that whereas she had previously praised God the Father for being mighty now she talks of how Jesus was going to manifest his power to rule - that he was going to exercise his sovereignty on the earth

And one of the things Jesus was going to do was "*scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts*"

Jesus has done this many times in the past as the gospel accounts show how Jesus repeatedly humbled the proud and confounded the thoughts and intentions of their hearts in his interactions with the religious leaders of his day

And he continues to do so today as we read in **1Corinthians 1:27-31** that God's plan to use his Son to reconcile mankind to himself is foolishness to those who think themselves wise

But when Christ returns at his second coming all vestiges of human ambition and boasting will end for all time

As Mary's words conjure up the image of the vanities of the proud being so much chaff that the Lord will blow away

Then in verse 52 [**Luke 1:52**] we see that the agency of Jesus is two-fold or two-sided

In this verse we read: *he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate*

Jesus brings about a reversal of fortunes as he makes the high low and the low high

We see Jesus teach about this in **Matthew 23:12** where he says:

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

And in **Matthew 20:16** where teaching about his authority to honor or humble Jesus taught that in his economy:

...the last will be first, and the first last.

And in Luke 14 Jesus told a parable about being invited to a banquet and where to sit - look with me at **Luke 14:10-11** where Jesus gets to the crux of the story:

But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Christ-followers should be people of humility - like Mary was - so that God can exalt them when the time is right because God actively opposes the proud even as he gives grace to the humble

Mary then turns to the metaphor of food in verse 53 [**Luke 1:53**] as she continues singing about how the Lord deals with people

She says: *he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty*

The first part of that verse is like **Psalm 107:9** which says:

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things

Jesus certainly provides for our physical needs but I don't think that's what Mary means

I believe she is singing about providing us with the spiritual food we need

Look with me at **John 6:35** –

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

I believe that concept is what God placed in Mary's mind as she sang that line in her song

Jesus is the bread of life and he will not refuse to satisfy anyone who hungers and thirsts spiritually and turns to him to be filled

Sadly, though, not everyone is hungry

There are many who are full of themselves and who don't want the bread that Jesus offers choosing to be content with their wealth or their position or their relative goodness, or whatever other advantages they enjoy on this earth

In fact, right after he taught that he was the bread of life in John 6:35 we read in **John 6:60** that many of those who were following along and listening to him left saying his teaching was too difficult to accept

Lastly, Mary sings praise to Jesus for his activity concerning Israel in verses 54-55 [**Luke 1:54-55**]

Jesus' coming was the fulfilment of the covenant that God made with Abraham because in sending Jesus God kept his promise to be merciful to God's people forever that we find in Genesis 22 when he told Abraham [**Genesis 22:16-18**]

"By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

And Mary recognized how, in spite of Israel's repeated apostasies and after 400 years of silence had passed, God was honoring his covenant because of his unchanging character by sending the Messiah just as he promised he would

Conclusion

Most people love Christmas regardless of whether they believe in Jesus as he is described in the pages of Scripture
They love the excitement, the decorations, the gatherings, the presents, and they love the carols of the season
They love to sing about the baby in the manger and the angels and the wise men...

But that's as far as many people go

Sadly, most people aren't hungry or they don't recognize the source their hunger or they don't know how their hunger can be satisfied

But during this season, Christ-followers have a unique opportunity to show people Jesus as Mary recognized him even before she gave birth to him

We can lead them to the bread of life because we know the way

And we must

Because God has chosen to leave it to us who know Jesus personally to magnify him before those who need to meet him

And he has provided us with the example of a young, small town girl that humbly trusted God as she submitted to his will for her life even though it stood to cost her greatly and then couldn't help but sing his praises

Let's pray that God will give us opportunities to do likewise along with Mary's courage and commitment to do likewise

1Samuel 2:1-10 (Page 272)

And Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord.

My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.

"There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.

The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.

"He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven.

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."