

Sermon – 01/08/2010 am

Mary's Song of Praise

Study Text: Luke 1:46-56

*My soul doth magnify the Lord
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

In many churches you will hear worshippers chanting what is called the Magnificat. The Magnificat is the song of Mary; 'Magnificat' being the first word in the Latin translation. This beautiful song of praise came from the mouth of the Virgin Mary after she heard the inspired outburst from Elizabeth. Elizabeth pronounced blessings upon Mary and the child that was conceived in her womb.

The text does not state that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit as it does with Elizabeth, and later with Zacharias. The song is not a prophecy about the child to be born but a song of praise to God for who he is and what he has done for his covenant people. Mary demonstrates a deep knowledge of Scripture and a firm belief that God will act according to his character and his word.

The song of Mary is similar in many ways to the Song of Hannah that we read in I Samuel 2. Hannah was barren like Elizabeth. In tears she prayed to the Lord, and in the fullness of time the Lord answered her prayer. When she weaned Samuel she took him up to the temple to serve the Lord. At that time she prayed

*My heart rejoices in the Lord;
My horn is exalted in the Lord.*

I smile at my enemies,

Because I rejoice in your salvation (I Samuel 2:1)

Mary's song echoes Hannah's prayer but without such strong words of judgment upon her enemies and the enemies of the Lord.

Rejoice in God

Mary's visit to Elizabeth certainly lifted her spirits. Her situation had not changed but, as God intended, this meeting with Elizabeth was a blessing to Mary as well as to Elizabeth. Mary submitted herself to the will of God when told she would conceive and give birth to a son to be called Jesus, and the Son of God. However, being a virgin made it dangerous for her to be pregnant. Maybe no one knew about her pregnancy until Elizabeth spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit. That Elizabeth did not judge her was probably a relief to Mary. Here was someone who understood her situation, someone who believed the word of the Lord as she did. What blessed fellowship these two believing women enjoyed!

In both soul and spirit, or in her whole being, Mary rejoiced in the Lord. My soul magnifies or glorifies the Lord she said. Like Hannah she exalted the Lord and gave him all the glory. True worship means giving all glory and honour and praise to the Lord and to him alone.

Mary referred to God as *the Lord* or 'Yahweh', the covenant making and covenant keeping God. She referred to God as *my Saviour*. She recognized her need of a saviour. These words rule out any notion or teaching that Mary was sinless. She needed a saviour and she rejoiced in God her Saviour. Jesus Christ was her Saviour, just as he is ours. He is the Saviour of the world.

Mary rejoiced in being chosen by the Lord to serve him in this unique way. Why he chose a humble girl living in the backwaters of Nazareth in Galilee she did not know, but she accepted God's will.

Pondering the visit of the angel, and his words to her, Mary realized how special she was. Then she heard Elizabeth say *blessed are you among women*. Even so, her words *henceforth all generations will call me blessed* (1:48) appear divinely inspired.

Reverence for God

In many Psalms the initial words of praise are followed by a reflection on who God is and what he has done. Mary would have known and sung these Psalms just as she knew the song of Hannah. Her thinking and her speaking were profoundly influenced by her knowledge of Scripture. The Psalms in particular help us express ourselves in worship, in prayer and in all our conversation. Is this what you find?

He who is mighty (1:49). Mary knew that God is all powerful. She knew he created the world in six days. She knew he delivered his people from the clutches of Pharaoh in Egypt. The most powerful king in the world was destroyed by God in the Red sea. History showed Mary how God destroyed the enemies of his people time and again. God performed great wonders in doing so. Remember all the plagues of Egypt. Knowing God is this way enabled Mary to say God *who is mighty has done great things for me*.

Holy is his name (1:49). At the burning bush Moses asked God about his name. God said 'I am who I am'. He is the Lord. His name is exalted in all the earth. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. The name of God must be used with reverence and awe because his name is holy.

His mercy is on those who fear him (1:50). On the mountain God revealed himself to Moses as merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in goodness and truth (Exodus 34:6). God is all powerful but he is not vindictive. He is merciful to those who come before him with reverence and humility. Mary is a great example of such a person. She submitted her life and all she had to the will of God. *Let it be to me according to your word* she said (1:38). *Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your reasonable service* (Romans 12:1).

Many people have their own ideas about God. Many have their own gods of course, but among those who call themselves Christians you will find some strange ideas about the nature of God. Mary had no individual or strange ideas because what she knew about God came from the Scriptures. She knew that God is almighty, that he is holy, and that he is merciful, because she knew the Scriptures. Where do you get your knowledge of God from?

From generation to generation (1:50). Mary understood that God is unchanging and that he is faithful to his covenant promises. The promise God made to Moses was renewed with Joshua after Moses died. *I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you* the Lord said to Joshua (Joshua 1:5). Did you know that that same promise is given in the New Testament and applies to God's people today? You will find it in the book Hebrews, where we also read that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever?* (Hebrews 13:5, 8)

Reversal of Order

Mary, like Hannah, refers to the proud being brought down or scattered, and the lowly being lifted up or exalted. Mary lived in a day when the rich and powerful oppressed the poor and needy. Pride made the king jealous and cruel. Armed men oppressed and exploited the poor. Is there a place in the world, or a time in history, when this was not the case? Sinful hearts are proud hearts, and proud hearts are selfish hearts. Men and women with such hearts want power and prestige. They live by the imagination of their proud hearts. Many today are dreaming of being rich or famous or powerful.

In the kingdom of God everything is reversed. The proud are brought down and the humble lifted up. This is what Mary saw in the Scriptures with people like Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Esther and Daniel. She saw in God's holy law a concern for the poor and needy, for widows and orphans. The Messiah was the one who would usher in this new era of peace and prosperity for all.

He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty (1:53). Is this reference to physical or spiritual hunger? Maybe it is to both. The poor frequently go hungry, even in the world today. It is not that there is insufficient food in the world. It is because some have more than they need and fail to share with the hungry. Mary saw that in the Messianic age the rich would be sent away empty. Those who are self satisfied and self secure in this world are in for a shock when this new era comes.

Mary's words are amazing in that they summarize what Jesus said in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. When God judges the world there will be a complete reversal of fortunes. The man who was rich and lived in luxury found himself in torment, while the poor man who begged at his gate was lifted up.

It is interesting that Mary spoke in the past tense as if this reversal was already in place. It is not uncommon for prophecy to be spoken in such a way. This indicates that the fulfilment of God's word is absolutely certain. Do you speak with such certainty when sharing what God has said in his word? People do not like such certainty in spiritual matters. How can you be so sure they will say? You can be sure because God's word never fails.

It is also interesting that Mary does not refer directly to the child she will bear; but from the words of the angel, and from Elizabeth's words, she understood that a change in world order was about to take place. The kingdom of God was at hand. Such a reversal was seen in the life of Jesus, especially in his relationship with his disciples. Their teacher and Lord stooped down to wash his disciples' feet. He demonstrated how they should live in the kingdom of God. We look forward to the coming of Christ and the Consummation when the kingdom of God will be fully revealed in all its glory.

Paul was accused of turning the world upside down when he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. Delivering a slave girl from exploitation landed him in prison. Should it be any different for those preaching the gospel today? Should we expect any less than what Mary spoke of in this song in terms of a reversal of world order? Let us be clear as to the gospel that we preach. It is a gospel for the poor and the outcaste, not just for those who are socially acceptable. Remember what James says about partiality in the church (James 2).

Remembrance of Israel

Mary's song ends with an assurance that God will be faithful to the promises he gave his people. The angel spoke of her Son being given the throne of his father David (1:32). Mary saw that God was coming to help his people. God was being merciful to his people. Messiah would deliver God's people from bondage.

What was happening to Mary was wonderful and new and unique, but it was something promised by God long before. She understood it as a continuation, and indeed fulfilment, of the promise he gave to Abraham (1:55). What did God promise Abraham? He said *in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed* (Genesis 12:3). To Isaac he said *in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed* (Genesis 26:4). This promise was handed down from generation to generation.

Mary knew this promise. She knew how God had been merciful in helping and delivering his people down through the generations. Her people inherited this promise. In an amazing way she saw that she had a unique role to play in the fulfilment of this promise. She would be the mother of Messiah, the Son of God.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months. What a blessed time she had. Just before Elizabeth gave birth to John, Mary returned to her home in Nazareth to await the arrival of her son and the Son of God.

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