

Text: Luke 1:46-55

Title: The Magnificat

Truth: God is worthy of praise.

Date/Location: Sunday December 24, 2006 at FBC

Introduction

The word *magnificat* means a hymn of song or praise. It is so often attached to the song of Mary when she visited with her cousin Elizabeth that the word almost immediately brings that particular song to mind. This is because in Latin, the first words of that song are “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum.*” The word itself comes down to us from Latin word that means *to magnify* or *to extol*.

We have to remember, however, that the Magnificat is not about *Mary*. It is about *God*! The whole point is that Mary is magnifying the Lord. She says in the opening two lines that her soul magnifies the **Lord** and her spirit has rejoiced in **God her Savior**. What she is saying is that with her whole being she extols, praises, glorifies, and worships the Lord and takes joy in her God.

Background about Mary

Think of Mary’s background— she knew something of the Messiah. In fact, her praise in this passage indicates she was well informed about the Law and prophets. She probably knew Gen. 3:15 about the “seed of the woman.” She knew Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6 that a virgin would give birth to one who was “God with us” and “the mighty God.” It is not a frequent thing that a virgin has a child (to say the least!). She knew just how privileged she was.

Mary clearly identifies God as her Savior. This plainly shows that Mary was a sinner just like the rest of humankind who need a Savior. She knew that she fell short of the perfect standard of God. We know that Mary herself was born like any other person—she was not immaculately conceived to avoid original sin. No—she had sin like the rest of us. The Bible mentions the normal days of purification after the birth of her son (Luke 2:22) and that she offered a sacrifice (2:24). This all was in accord with Leviticus 12 in the Mosaic Law, where a woman who bears a son was unclean for 7 days (12:2), and then another 33 days (12:4). After that, she had to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering (12:6, 8).¹

Mary worships God by expressing who God is and what He has done to help her and others. She has good cause to praise God because:

Reason #1: God Has Helped Mary, vv. 48-49

Mary testifies that God looked on her not only from afar, and that He saw with compassion—He considered and cared about her specifically.

She readily admitted that she was a lowly person, referring to her social and economic status, no doubt. She also said that she was “His maidservant.” That basically means that she was God’s slave. She had said as much in 1:38 when she told Gabriel that she wanted things to be just the way God wanted them. What a great example she is for us.

And so it should be—because she tells us also in v. 49 that God is mighty and holy. He is all powerful and all perfect.

God’s “regarding” of her low estate resulted in a very honorable place for Mary, namely that all generations would call her blessed. And they do. Some take this way out of proportion and essentially make Mary an object of worship. But taking it rightly, we ought to consider Mary to be blessed by God. She was singled out despite her lowly condition for a great service for God. He did great things for her. When we consider this, then we can put ourselves in her shoes. Similarly “lowly” in our estate in sin, God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings if we have believed in His Son. What great things He has done for us, and what a happy condition has come out of a hopeless one.

Reason #2: God Will Help Those Who Fear Him, v. 50

Genuinely God-fearing people receive the gift of God’s mercy. For all generations, God has been and will be this way. All people are called upon to fear God—that is to recognize and reverence Him for Who He is. God gives His mercy to these people.

But who is a truly God-fearing person? Many times people say they pray to God or believe in God or thank God for life and health. Yet as true as these things may be, no one can truly be a God-fearer unless they submit themselves to the authority of God in His Word and to His Son the Lord Jesus. John 5:23 tells us “that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” Today, a God-fearing person must believe in Jesus Christ, else he gives evidence that he does not *truly* fear God.

Reason #3: God Exalts the Humble and Opposes the Strong, vv. 51-53

This section is full of verbs that portray God’s actions toward people. He has demonstrated His strength by powerful actions. Some of these actions include the following:

1. Scattered the proud. The proud are those who imagine themselves to be something when they fail to recognize they are nothing. See Dan. 4:37.
2. Put down mighty. God sets up and puts down rulers as He pleases, Rom. 13:1.
3. Exalted the lowly. One of two “positive” statements in this section, one example of which is what God did for Mary. She is world-famous, though she was a nobody.
4. Filled hungry with good things. God delights to give His own what they need.
5. Sent away rich empty. For instance, the rich young ruler in Matt 19:16-26, who left the Lord without salvation. In material terms, riches are fleeting (James 5:2-3).

All of this God did! Note the general idea of fellowship with God. The proud, mighty, and rich are put away from God, while the lowly and hungry are helped (Jer. 9:23-24).ⁱⁱ

Reason #4: God Has Helped Israel, vv. 54-55

Reflecting on Gabriel’s announcement that Jesus would be given David’s throne and reign over Israel forever (1:31-33), Mary says that God has helped His servant Israel. Israel’s long-awaited prophesied king was finally on His way.

Note again the word *servant*. It was used before of Mary, now of the entire nation of Israel. Numerous times in the OT God wants the nation of Israel to serve Him.ⁱⁱⁱ In other OT passages, the nation is sometimes called God’s servant.^{iv} Here the word servant is translated from a word that can mean child as well as servant. Exodus 4:23 ties the two notions together— Israel is both God’s son and His servant.

The main point of these verses is that God, through the soon coming birth of the Messiah, was “helping” His servant Israel because He was keeping his promises to Israel. God remembered his mercy to Abraham and the fathers (Isaac, Jacob, the 12 patriarchs, and probably David as well). The promises He spoke to these men were forever. Consider: Exodus 32:13 “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” See also 2 Chron. 20:7, 2 Sam. 7:13, 15-16.

The nation was in rough shape at that time, being under Roman rule as it was (and how much better is it today?) The faithful remnant were looking for help from God, and it was about to be delivered. They counted on God and were not disappointed.

Conclusion

Take a moment to take stock of this fact: There is no self help in the Bible! There is “God help” but no “self help.” It is **God** who helps. It is **God** who raises up the lowly. It is **God** who did great things for young Mary. It is **God** who provides mercy to those who fear Him. It is **God** who helps Israel. The saying “God helps those who help themselves” has a wrong focus. Of course, we ought to be active participants in what God wants us to do, but to make God’s help secondary to us helping ourselves gives us way too much credit. Rather, we should say, “God helps those who cannot help themselves.”

The fact of the matter is that THE CHRISTMAS GIFT (Jesus Christ) is someone we all desperately need. Without him we will perish in our sins. But if we receive him, we will live eternally with God’s help all the way! And then we can be like Mary—extolling God with all of our innermost being. And that really is the point of Christmas—God and His Son Jesus Christ. Not us!

MAP

End Notes

ⁱ In God’s eyes, there was something unclean about childbirth—not that having children is sin, but the blood and so on is impure not just on a hygienic level but on a moral level under the Law.

ⁱⁱ See also Matt. 23:12, Luke 14:11, 18:14, 1 Peter 5:6 for the very clear Biblical teaching that the proud will be brought low and the low will be exalted.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ex. 4:23, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 9:13, 10:3, Ezek. 20:40, cf. Acts 7:7.

Page: 3

1 Chron. 16:13, Ps. 105:6, Isa. 41:8, 44:1, 2, 21, 48:20, Jer. 30:10, 46:27-28, Ezek. 28:25, 37:25.

^{iv} 1 Chron. 16:13, Ps. 105:6, Isa. 41:8, 44:1, 2, 21, 48:20, Jer. 30:10, 46:27-28, Ezek. 28:25, 37:25.