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## Your Status Is Not Identity!

December 24, 2018 - Mary

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### Read the Text

- Luke 1:26-56 - The Birth of Christ Foretold | [epmkg.com/luke1](http://epmkg.com/luke1)

### 1:26-38

#### The Angel and the Girl

Luke here contrasts the simple faith of a teenage girl, Mary, with the genuine but less profound faith of an aged priest, Zechariah (cf. the severer contrasts between Hannah and Eli in 1 Sam 1-2; though the story line is quite different, in both cases God uses a humble and obscure servant to bear an agent of revival to the coming generation). This section has parallels not only with Old Testament birth annunciations but also with Old Testament call narratives: Mary was called to fill the office of Jesus' mother.

**1:26-27.** Because Joseph was of David's line and Jesus would be his legal son, Jesus could qualify as belonging to David's royal house. In Judaism, "virgins" were young maidens, usually fourteen or younger. The term Luke uses here for "virgin" also indicates that she had not yet had sexual relations with a man (1:34-35). Nazareth in this period was an insignificant village of an estimated sixteen hundred to two thousand inhabitants.

Keener, C. S. (1993). [\*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament\*](#) (Lk 1:26-27). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**Nazareth** [năz'ə rěth] (Gk. *Nazara, Nazarat[h], Nazaret, Nazareth*; perhaps from Heb. *nāšar* "watch, guard, observe" or *nēšer* "sprout, descendant"). A city in Galilee where Jesus grew up.

The location of Nazareth at modern en-Nâsirah is generally accepted. The village is situated on the side of a hill some 350 m. (1150 ft.) above sea level, 24 km. (15 mi.) from the Sea of Galilee and 3 km. (2 mi.) south of Sepphoris. Toward the south and south-east Nazareth commands the view of the entire valley of Jezreel as well as Mt. Carmel and Mt. Tabor. Nathanael's comment to Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" (John

1:46), probably only indicates that the village was small. The city is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

Although some scholars are skeptical because of difficulties in correlating the two accounts of Jesus' birth and infancy, Mary and Joseph apparently lived in Nazareth before their journey to Egypt (Luke 1:26; 2:4–5) and settled there when they returned from Egypt (Matt. 2:23). Jesus lived in the village as a boy (Luke 2:39, 51; cf. 4:16), coming from there to be baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:9). Jesus apparently moved from Nazareth to Capernaum at the beginning of his public ministry (Matt. 4:12–13). He returned at least once to his boyhood home, where his message was rejected (Mark 6:1; Luke 4:16–24; cf. Matt. 13:53–58).

Modern Nazareth features a number of shrines. Nearby is a spring, according to tradition Mary's well, at which Mary and her son may have gone daily to draw water, and several other sites within the town are traditionally associated with the Holy Family: the Annunciation church, supposedly built on the site of Jesus' home; to the north a church dating from the Crusades; a Greek church, said to be the site of the synagogue where Jesus spoke of the fulfillment of Isa. 61:1–3 (Luke 4:18–21); and to the south Mons Saltus Domini, purportedly the hill from which the Jews sought to throw Jesus (v. 29).

Myers, A. C. (1987). In [\*The Eerdmans Bible dictionary\*](#) (p. 751). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

**46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (Luke 1:46-56)**

**Overview:** The song of Mary solidifies her role as one of the foremost teachers of the Christian faith. For Protestant interpreters, she lays out the key elements of the relationship between God and human beings: God is in charge, while we are lowly and unworthy. Neither the rich nor the world's rulers hold any power in and of themselves but rather are subject to God's providence and justice. Mary knows that she herself is subject to God, unworthy of his notice yet chosen through his mercy and grace. She should not be

praised for the virtue of humility, but rather she reveals God's mercy in that he chose her in spite of her humility, now translated as lowness or abjectness. And in her faithful acceptance of God's grace, she becomes a true model of hope for all, who are equally unworthy of salvation.

### **1:46–49 *Mary Gives Praise to God***

**Mary Praises God from Her Heart.** Desiderius Erasmus: For "soul" and "spirit," the Scriptures oftentimes use the word *heart*, and these are phrases of speech very common with the Hebrews, especially in the Psalms: "Praise the Lord, O my soul," also, "Say to my soul, I am your salvation." There is great force in these phrases of speech, and much more is expressed then if it simply said, "Praise the Lord," "I magnify the Lord," or "Say to me, I am your salvation." By this we are taught that if we truly want to praise God, we must praise him from our heart; if the heart is not moved, the Lord rejects and abhors our praise. Therefore the true foundation of thanksgiving is the inward affection of the mind. By these speeches we may see the difference between the spirit of truth and hypocrisy, which praises God with the mouth and lips only. "The Lord" is a word of power, by which Mary preaches the power of God, with which he effected in her works surpassing nature. Moreover, she claims none of these benefits for herself because she is the Mother of God, or because she was blessed among women or because she behaved modestly. She claims nothing for herself but turns a joyful and merry heart toward God. She acknowledges receiving everything from him and praises his holy name. Thus we also ought to lean only on God, and not on any creatures or on our own gifts. An Ecclesiastical Exposition upon Saint Luke 1.

**Mary Believed in Her Own Low Estate.** John Calvin: She explains the reason why the joy of her heart had its foundation in God—it is because, of course, he regarded her out of pure grace. By calling herself humble she renounces all worthiness and ascribes every opportunity for boasting to the gracious goodness of God. For *humilitas* here does not—as some ignorant and uncivilized people have stupidly imagined—signify submission, or modesty or a habit of the mind, but rather it means a mean and abject condition. Therefore the sense is this: "I was insignificant and despised, but that did not prevent God from turning his eyes toward me." But if the humility of Mary is compared with excellence, we see—as the matter itself proclaims and as is apparent from the Greek—that Mary completely empties herself and praises God alone. But this was not the public proclamation of a false humility. Rather it was her simple and natural confession of the conviction that was engraved in her mind, for she was of no value before the world, and she esteemed herself no more than that. Commentary on a Harmony of the Gospels.

**Mary's Sorrow and Her Glory.** Martin Luther: So what do Annas's and Caiphas's daughters have for all their renown? But people will never forget this one [Mary], as she herself sings: "Behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." That means, he

has regarded that I am only a poor little girl, and on account of that regard, he has made me into the Mother of God. This song will be sung of God, and people will say: she was a poor Cinderella that nobody wanted to regard, but God has done it, and now she will be called blessed by friend and foe, by angels and devils. "From now on I will be called blessed" means I will never be forgotten, not for the sake of my humility, but because God has worked his miracle in me and made me into the mother of the Savior. This song will be sung unceasingly; from the cradle on children will be taught this confession of faith: "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary"—that she who is called the Virgin Mary is also a mother. So no one should be afraid, if he had tough times growing up or is miserable and despised. It is not a bad omen. Look at Mary's example. And look at what God made out of her! From the time she had her son, the misery never ended. She suffered so much! And at the end, he was crucified before her eyes. And even after he was gone, she endured further suffering! How much hatred and jealousy did she bear, when she heard from Christ how he was slandered while he preached! What he suffered, she also suffered... And despite [her misery] he regarded her, the one who is not merely an emperor but God, and so regarded her that she became the mother of his Son. "From this time on all generations will call me blessed": that means from now on the whole world forever and ever will exalt me. It is synecdoche, which means that even though the Jews and some of the heathen do the opposite, her renown and her honor will remain among many until the end of the world: for no one can preach Christ without speaking of his mother. When she is so highly praised by the Son, then others will also say: Blessed is she who bore him, nursed him and raised him. "But it is not my glory," says Mary, "but [it belongs to] the one who regarded me." Afternoon Sermon on the Visitation (1535).

**God's Name and Works Are Holy and Wonderful.** Johannes Brenz: And the name of God is taken for his power, and oftentimes for God himself, as he manifests himself to us. As we read in Matthew, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." That also is properly called holy which is separated from the profane and common use of things. What is separated is kept in secret, and so what is holy is also called hidden. God therefore is called holy because his works are hidden far from human reason and are so wonderful that human wisdom cannot comprehend them. For God works glory by disgrace, joy by sorrow, happiness by misery and life by death. What manner of working can be said to be more wonderful than this? And this wonderful manner of working was also shown forth in Mary. Moreover, the name of God is called holy because it deserves the highest reverence, so that as often as mention is made of God, we must always remember his awesome majesty. An Ecclesiastical Exposition upon Saint Luke 1.

### **1:50–55 *Mary Praises God's Might and Mercy***

**Only Those Who Fear God Will Receive Mercy.** Thomas Müntzer: O, how highly necessary fear is for us! For as little as one can happily serve two masters, so little can one happily reverence both God and his creatures. Nor can God have mercy on us (as the

Mother of Christ our Lord says), unless we fear him with our whole heart. Therefore God says: If I be your Father, where is my honor? If I be your Lord, where then is my fear? Sermon Before the Princes.

**God Is Merciful to Those Who Trust Him.** Augustin Marlorat: This is spoken so that the wicked might not be made proud by the pretense of the name [of Christian]. For they are puffed up with vain security, as the apostle Paul says, “and brag about their relationship with God.” That bragging is evil. The prophet David speaks to the same purpose: “The Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” Therefore God is merciful to the children of the saints forever according to his promise, but despite this he gives no occasion for hypocrites to have vain trust. Those who are degenerate children of the saints and have forsaken their godliness and faith boast in vain that God is their Father. So by this exception their vanity and boasting are reprov’d, which are puffed up by false pretense and rely on the grace of God without any faith. It is true that God made a general covenant of salvation with the children of Abraham, but just as the stones are not softened by rain showers, so the obstinacy and hardness of heart of the unbelievers will keep the promised righteousness and salvation from entering into them. All godliness and religion are comprehended under the fear of God, which cannot stand without faith. An Ecclesiasticall Exposition upon Saint Luke 1.

**God’s Strength Defeats All the Plans of Human Pride.** Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg: He shows strength with his arm, he who created the world and strength. The origin of all strength—shall he not exercise what he is himself and make it bubble up and flow like a spring forever and ever? He shows it as a master his art, as a king his authority—a cause whose success cannot fail to happen. He has shown it from the beginning of the world and will show it to its end, indeed, in infinity. His strength has the same confines as does his wisdom, namely, endlessness. What miracles will yet emerge? Oh! Who could regard and contemplate them sufficiently?

O adorable strength of God! What manner of miracle will you not yet work? Almighty arm of God! What more will you yet effect, especially against the proud? For you scatter them in the imagination of their hearts. When they have gathered their spirits and forces like stone and lime mortar and erect a great Babel in their imagination, you scatter them by not assenting to its completion; when they have set mountain upon mountain, like the giants, to storm heavenward, so much they perish in the sea of your might and wisdom. When, like ants, they have assembled their mountains of pillage and smoke, he customarily spreads them out and scatters them with the staff of his mouth so, like those ants, they must run off and hide in a thousand places. Meditation on the Pregnancy of Mary.<sup>10</sup>

**All Rulers Must Be Humble Before God.** Edwin Sandys: He that raises up can likewise cast down. For “he has cast down the mighty from their seat.” And what he has done once, he can do again. The highest place is not the sweetest or the safest place: much authority is

weighed down with many cares. Such as have entered into a great responsibility must also enter into a great accounting. And they have greater cause to fear their reckoning than to be proud of their ruling. The more that God has lifted you up, the more you ought to humble yourself before him, lest he cast you down eternally. A Sermon Preached Before the Queen.

**Bearing the Christ Child Is a Greater Honor Than Any King Has.** John Lawson: “He hath put down the mighty from their seat.” In comparison with Mary and the honor which she has by bearing this Savior, kings and their honor are, as it were, no honor, as a candle light is no light where the sun shines. The honor which comes by suffering for Christ is a greater honor than what comes by ruling a kingdom. The honor of Paul and the other martyrs of Christ is a greater honor than that of Alexander, who conquered the world. Who would not be in the apostle’s shoes, rather than in the shoes of Alexander the Great? Gleanings and Expositions of Some Places of Scriptures.

**Mary’s Words Teach Both Rulers and Subjects.** Rudolf Hospinian: The example of the Virgin Mary particularly serves here, for she was a simple, poor, disregarded girl, but she was raised up to the highest honor and dignity in that she should carry his Son in her body and should bear him, a true human being, for this world.... To sum up, all histories are full of the same sort of example, and daily experience is enough for us to understand that God holds all kings and princes, yes, even cruel tyrants and maniacs, under his rule and in his power. He may take a while to punish the wicked world, but in the end he knocks them down also with great dishonor, disgrace and shame.

In the first place we learn in the record that all kings, emperors, princes, rulers, and those in authority have their power from nobody else but from God alone. And all those who are subjects now learn from this that they should be obedient to those in authority, because they are put in place and ordered by God. They should not oppose them rebelliously. But likewise, all rulers and authorities should be reminded by their offices that they should place God’s honor before all other things, because he alone lifted them up into great honor and dignity, and he can also easily pull them down again and bring them to ruin....

Third, these words of the Blessed Virgin Mary also serve as a lovely comfort for all poor, simple, oppressed and troubled people, against all temptations and vexations of the flesh. For because they are scorned and despised by the world and have no better than the others, they have such a hard time that they might also believe they will be abandoned by God and that he takes no notice of them, and so will not ask them how it goes with them on earth. But here they hear from the Virgin Mary that God has a good estimation of poor, despised and troubled simple folk and is so far from forgetting them that he even at times lifts them up to the highest honor and glory. And in fact, he considers in such a fatherly way

in temporal things that they should not doubt that he has a much greater estimation of their souls. The Fifth Sermon.

**The “Hungry,” or Poor Christians, Will Be Filled with Good Things.** Simon Musaeus: With these words, Mary leaves the city hall and worldly government and turns to the governance of the home, for now she speaks of those people of wealth who will be empty and the hungry who will be satisfied, all of which belong to the governance of the home. Now, the Lord can certainly suffer the wealthy with their riches, just as he suffers the powerful on their seats, because it is all his gift and blessing, as Solomon said: “The blessing of the Lord makes rich.” But Mary shows that the majority misuse their riches against God and his Son, by neglecting his word, by capitulating under persecution, and with stinginess, usury and cheating. Therefore Mary threatens such servants of godless mammon and those enslaved to their own bellies with the curse of the Lord, that God will send them away empty, which can happen when they lose their riches through sudden bad luck, theft or robbery, fire or shipwreck. These things can quickly turn a rich man into a beggar. However, even if a person still has and maintains his wealth, if he is stingy or is weighed down by cares, depression or sickness, he cannot be happy or live a balanced life, and finally he will end up with wicked and irresponsible heirs....

But Mary comforts the hungry—that is, poor Christians who seek the kingdom of God before everything else for the sake of God’s Word. The “hungry” are those who will risk everything of this world and who act justly and honestly, so that they would never bring any sort of derision on God. They will be filled richly, not with many tons of gold or silver but with something that is much better, namely, with “good things.” These “good things” are the blessed means of sustenance, whether great or small, that they along with their children and heirs receive, that they might use and enjoy these blessings with happy consciences and healthy bodies, to the welfare of the body and the benefit of the soul. As David says in Psalm 37: “The little that a righteous person has is better than the greatest possessions of many wicked.” Why is it better? Answer: It is blessed by God, and he allows them to enjoy it, as Saint Paul explains when he says, “God ... richly provides us with everything to enjoy,” for it is not like the false appearance of the cursed possessions of the wicked, which they cannot enjoy. Therefore one should take these words of Mary, “He fills the hungry with good things,” and write them with justice on the door of every house and treasury, in order to comfort poor, hungry Christians. They should take comfort, despite their poverty, in the inexhaustible blessings of God. But these words will bring terror to the wicked, rich folk who serve their bellies—they should not take comfort in their many piles of things, for the curse of the Lord can comprehend everything and cut it all away. Exposition of the Gospel on the Day of Mary’s Visitation.

**God Impoverishes Those Who Misuse Their Wealth.** Martin Luther: Possessions produce courage, courage pride, pride poverty, and poverty causes pain. But the hungry he fills with good things, so they have food and drink. She speaks of the rich. The “rich” are not

those who have possessions but those who love them. David also had possessions, pious kings and emperors have had wisdom and power but did not put their trust in them. Therefore [the Bible] says: those who trust in them are the idolators, those who will not use their goods to honor God and to benefit their neighbors. God can humble them and turn them into beggars. As the proverb says, the third heir never enjoys ill-gotten gains. If they already romp and carouse as long as they live, the third heir doesn't have anything left. And these are the three arrogant ones: first, the saints and the clever, then worldly authority, and finally riches. They are all proud over against God and other people.... Of the wealthiest families of sixty years ago, today the heirs are all beggars, because they did not fear God and misused their wisdom, power and riches. And in turn God has lifted up the humble, the insignificant and the hungry. And he carries out this work throughout the whole world. Afternoon Sermon on the Visitation (1535).

**The Rich Are Those Who Think They Deserve God's Grace.** Hans Denck: You say: We come therefore and seek Christ in order to find and learn such [truth] from him, but you hold [that] one should have it beforehand. How does that fit together? Response: The Word of God is with you before you seek it; gives to you before you ask; opens up for you before you knock. No one comes of himself to Christ except the Father draw him, which he then in his goodness truly does. But, whoever is not drawn by the mind of [Christ] and wants to come on his own initiative presumes to give God something which he has not received from him. He wishes to be deserving of God without needing to thank him for his grace. Abraham rejoiced in the day of Christ before he had seen it. Cornelius was a spiritual and God-fearing man long before he acknowledged Christ. Paul had a righteous and divine zeal for the law of God before the revelation of Christ. The disciples of Christ left house and home without delay, wife and child for Christ's sake, and did not yet know who he was. All the elect rejoice and seek, not knowing what and why, all of which is without detriment to the gospel of Christ. For such work has not gone forth from human beings but from God, from whom everything derives which may be truly identified as significant, as the gospel also bears witness. Therefore, no one can vaunt his works or faith before God as though they were [acquired] from himself. For he who boasts of himself in himself, being satisfied with himself, is one of the rich whom God leaves empty and unsatisfied. Whether God Is the Cause of Evil.

**God Is Merciful to Israel in Remembering His Promises.** Rudolf Hospinian: First in part, in this word *Israel*, she understood the Jewish people, as those who were born of Israel or Jacob. By the offering of God's hand, she understood his comfort, protection and shelter, help and salvation. Therefore she wants to say that God is come to comfort and help the people through his Son, our Lord Christ. Through these words she points to the miserable, lamentable condition of the entire Jewish people at that time, relative to both spiritual and to worldly matters. The religion and the external worship of God were everywhere under the control of the Pharisees, who had invented all sorts of human statutes with which they led away the simple people from the hope of their ancestors, and the promised Messiah,

our Lord Christ. Instead they were led to focus on sacrifices, donations and other works, which had made the temple into a shopping mall, and public worship everywhere into a trading and retail market. Outside of the kingdom and their authority, what is relevant is that about sixty years prior to this time, the Roman hero Pompey oppressed them, and they were brought under Roman rule. The Romans finally set Herod over them, who was a cruel tyrant and born of their ancient enemies, the Idumeans.... And now the holy Virgin Mary says, "God has offered his hand to the poor, oppressed, leaderless people; that is, he sends comfort and help to them through the real, true Savior and Redeemer, whom he has now sent." And here we can see how we will soon have a clearer understanding of the current situation, because the time was now at hand, that God would allow his Son, the promised Messiah, our Lord Christ, to be born a true human being....

But no one should presume that the Jews had been rewarded by God because they had somehow merited such a thing, and ascribe the great benefit of all humankind to such a thing. That is why the Virgin Mary relates the reason and cause why such a thing is done by God, and for whose sake. She said, "God did this to keep in mind his mercy, as he promised to our ancestors, namely, to Abraham and his seed forever." As if she would say, "God wants at this time to send the true and real Messiah, or Savior and Redeemer, to his oppressed and long-suffering people, not because they have in some way earned such a thing from him but because he considers his promise to their ancestors and before that to Abraham long ago to be lasting and permanent, which was said and promised out of his pure grace and mercy." The Sixth Sermon.

**The Promise of Grace Was Given to Israel.** Martin Luther: By this all merit and presumption are laid low, and the pure grace and mercy of God are exalted. For God did not accept Israel on account of its merits but because of his own promise. Out of pure grace he made the promise, and out of pure grace he fulfilled it. Therefore Saint Paul says in Galatians 3 that God gave the promise to Abraham four hundred years before he gave the law to Moses, that no one might boast or say that he had earned or achieved such grace and promise through the law or the works of the law. And so the Mother of God praises and exalts this promise above everything and ascribes this work of the incarnation of God to the divine, gracious, unearned promise alone, which he gave to Abraham. The Magnificat.

Kreitzer, B., George, T., Manetsch, S. M., & McNutt, D. W. (Eds.). (2015). [Luke: New Testament](#) (Vol. III, pp. 26–32). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

### *Magnificat*

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Luke 1:39–55

*And Mary said, "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." (Luke 1:46–48)*

The old woman was at home, waiting. She was waiting for God, waiting for the promise, and expecting her firstborn son. Who could believe it? An old woman like her—always childless—but now she was “starting to show.” The young woman was out on the road, heading up to the hill country. She too was pregnant, but no one else knew about it yet. Who would believe it? A young girl like her—still a virgin—but soon she would bear a son.

Two women touched by God: a senior citizen and a teenager. Old barren Elizabeth was six months pregnant, staying at home to rest while she waited for the birth of John. The young virgin Mary had only just conceived. Was it really true? Would she really give birth to the Son of God? To confirm the promise, the angel told her about Elizabeth. So Mary took the hint and went to see her old cousin—a dangerous journey through almost a hundred miles of rugged wasteland.

Theologians call their meeting “the visitation.” How precious it must have been for Mary and Elizabeth to embrace, share their good news, and discuss what God had done. What they shared was unique. They alone were chosen to bear the children of promise, and they were the first to know that God had come to redeem his people.

The visitation was not for Mary and Elizabeth alone, however, but also for their sons. John was the greatest prophet of the old covenant—the one called to announce the coming of the Christ. Jesus *was* the Christ, the Lord of the new covenant. So when Mary met Elizabeth, the covenants connected. Both sons were joined under one roof, and like the electrical contact between two power stations, the results were explosive. There was a spontaneous outburst of exultant joy, as the old covenant greeted the new. Poet Luci Shaw describes the encounter:

Framed in light,

Mary sings through the doorway.

Elizabeth’s six month joy

jumps, a palpable greeting,

a hidden first encounter

between son and Son.

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## Elizabeth's Song

Luke was more a historian than a poet, so his account is more prosaic:

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "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 fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:39–45)

These verses show the joy that comes whenever anyone recognizes that Jesus is the Christ. The first to recognize him was John, whose calling it was to announce Christ's coming. What is remarkable is that he began to fulfill this calling while he was still in utero. "Not yet born, already John prophesies," wrote Maximus of Turin, "and while still in the enclosure of his mother's womb, confesses the coming of Christ with movements of joy." John the Baptist was the only child ever to use a womb for a pulpit. In the liquid darkness of his mother's womb, the unborn child kicked for joy, leaping at the sound of Mary's voice, and in this way preparing people for the coming of Christ.

Elizabeth had felt John move before. The child was active, and at six months it was only natural for her to feel him kicking, as babies do. But this was different. Elizabeth could sense that her child was leaping for joy. She knew that a fetus is a person with emotions. She may also have known the angel's promise that John would "be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). By the inward witness of the Spirit, the child recognized the presence of Christ. Jesus was not yet viable—invisible in his mother's womb. Yet John knew him to be the Son of God. Later, when Jesus began his public ministry, John would testify that his joy was complete (John 3:29). But his joy began while he was still in his mother's womb.

The coming of Christ is a thing that makes a person leap for joy. This was true for John, and also for anyone who comes to faith in Christ. By the inward witness of the Holy Spirit we recognize that Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior from sin. When we recognize him, we rejoice in him, leaping for the joy of our salvation.

Elizabeth joined in the rejoicing. When John jumped, she shouted. And what was it that made the old woman shout? The coming of Christ. Like her son, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and like him, she recognized that she was in the presence of the Messiah. She lifted her voice and said, "Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43).

Notice Elizabeth's humility. For six months the big excitement in her life had been her own pregnancy. But rather than thinking of her own good news, she immediately praised God for what he had done for Mary. She was not jealous, but honored Mary as the mother of her Lord—the most blessed woman in the world. Like the angel Gabriel, she said that Mary was favored by God's grace.

Elizabeth was not worshipping Mary, of course, but blessing her faith. Mary was a woman who took God at his word. So Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). We may wonder whether Zechariah overheard this. If so, it was a rebuke to his unbelief, for although Zechariah also had a word from the Lord, he did not quite believe that God would fulfill his promise. But when Mary heard it, she believed it, and thus Elizabeth commended her faith. What an encouragement this must have been for Mary—a confirmation that she was right to believe in God. And what an encouragement it is for us to join her in believing that everything God has said about Jesus is absolutely true.

The most important thing Elizabeth said was not about Mary, however, but about Jesus. She referred to the child in Mary's womb as her Lord. What a remarkable thing for Elizabeth to say! She called the unborn child "my Lord" (Luke 1:43). This is a title from the psalms, where David referred to the Messiah as "my Lord" (Ps. 110:1). This was something that could have been revealed to Elizabeth only by the Holy Spirit. She had been resting quietly at home. How did she know that Mary was the mother of the Messiah? How did she know that she was even pregnant? Yet as soon as she heard her cousin's voice, she identified Mary's child as her Lord and God. By looking beyond his humanity to see his deity, Elizabeth was the first to confess her faith in Jesus as Lord.

This is how everyone should respond to Jesus Christ: by trusting in him as Savior and rejoicing in him as Lord. We have even better reason to believe in Jesus than John and Elizabeth had. They rejoiced over his conception, but we also rejoice for his crucifixion and resurrection. This is why Luke wrote his Gospel: so we would know for sure that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and was raised again to give us eternal life. Now everyone who believes in Jesus leaps for joy and calls him Lord.

### Mary's Song

Elizabeth and John were not the only ones who rejoiced in the coming of Christ. Mary also rejoiced by breaking into song. Her song is called *Magnificat*, a title taken from its first word in Latin: *magnificat*, or "magnifies." Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47).

Mary's song is the first of four nativity hymns in Luke's Gospel: Mary's *Magnificat*, Zechariah's *Benedictus*, the angels' *Gloria*, and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*. Graham Scroggie rightly identified these Christmas carols as "the last of the Hebrew Psalms, and the first of

the Christian hymns.” They appear only in Luke, which makes the good doctor the church’s first hymnologist. Luke included these lyrics because he understood that the gospel is and must be a musical. What God has done in Christ demands to be praised. It is not enough simply to say what God has done to save us—what he has done also needs to be celebrated in song. R. Tannehill has observed that the *Magnificat* “is like an aria in opera; the action almost stops so that the situation may be savored more deeply.” This is exactly what the *Magnificat* does. It is written in the form of a poem; since poetry is a heightened form of expression, it forces us to slow down. And when we slow down, we are able to savor and celebrate the salvation we have in Christ. Mary’s poem is a psalm that leads us into praise.

Some scholars have objected that a teenager like Mary could not possibly have composed a poetical and theological masterpiece like the *Magnificat*. They say that someone more sophisticated—like Luke—must have put these words into her mouth.

This objection overlooks the doctrine of inspiration, which teaches that Mary’s words came from God the Holy Spirit. It is also flatly contradicted by the words of the song itself. Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46–47). When she spoke of her “soul” and her “spirit,” Mary was referring to the very center of her being. This song came from her heart. Perhaps it was a spontaneous response to Elizabeth’s greeting, or perhaps she composed it on the way from Nazareth. But either way, it was *her* song. Mary worshiped God with all she was and everything she had, praising him with mind, soul, heart, and strength.

If we wonder how she was able to write such a famous poem, the answer is simple: Mary knew her Bible! Her song is similar to many songs from the Old Testament. It sounds like something from King David, or like something Hannah would have written. Hannah was another woman who was unexpectedly expecting. She said:

My heart exults in the Lord;  
my strength is exalted in the Lord....  
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. (1 Sam. 2:1, 7–8)

There are echoes from Hannah in Mary's song, but not just from Hannah. The *Magnificat* either quotes from or alludes to verses from Genesis, Deuteronomy, 1 and 2 Samuel, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Mary tried to put virtually the whole Bible into her song!

Mary was able to do this because the psalms and poems of the Bible were written on her heart. She had been raised on the Scriptures. She sang them at home and heard them at the synagogue. So when the plan of salvation intersected with her life, she was able to offer God the right kind of praise. Mary used the exalted language she had learned at her mother's knee by reading and singing the Bible. According to one literary scholar, "The style and language are those which would be natural to the speaker, as drawn from the storehouse of faith and piety, the sacred writings of her people, familiar to all by constant recitation, and dear to pious souls by use in their own devotions... So here the words as well as the thoughts are those of a high-souled Hebrew maiden of devout and meditative habit, whose mind has taken the tone of the Scriptures in which she has been nurtured."

From this we learn that the best way to train our children to glorify God is by studying and singing God's Word. When we know the Bible, it becomes the song of our hearts, and we are able to join Mary in saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46–47).

### **God Lifts the Humble**

Mary had good reason to magnify the Lord. She had been promised a son—not just any son, but the Son of God, conceived by the Spirit of the Most High God. Her *Magnificat* is a song of gospel joy. Yet in it Mary says nothing specific about her son. This is the reason for her praise, but she does not mention it explicitly. Why not?

The answer is that Mary had the godliness to look beyond her gift and praise the God who gave it. To magnify means to enlarge, and what Mary wanted to enlarge was her vision of God. Her goal was to show his greatness. She wanted to magnify *God*, not her own position as the mother of the Son of God. She knew that she was blessed because of who God was, not because of who she was. Therefore, she wanted God to be seen to be great, not herself. The way to show this was not by thinking only about what God was doing in her life, but by enlarging her vision to see the majesty of God.

In her song Mary praised God for many of his divine attributes. She worshiped his mighty power (Luke 1:49, 51)—the power that brought forth the virgin birth. She honored his pristine holiness (Luke 1:49)—the holiness of his sinless Son. She magnified his mercy for sinners (Luke 1:50). She praised his everlasting faithfulness in keeping his promises (Luke 1:54–55). This was real worship. Mary did not dwell on her own happy circumstances, but rejoiced in the being and character of God.

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It is right for us to praise God for what he has done, as Mary did. But sometimes even our worship of God can be somewhat self-centered, as if the really important thing is what God has done *for us*. We need to look beyond this to see God as he is in himself, and to praise him for being God. Then, when we speak about what God has done for us—as we should—it will be more about him and less about us.

Mary did this, and as she magnified God, there were two great themes to her praise. Why did God deserve her worship? Because he lifts the humble and humbles the proud. The first half of Mary’s song is about God lifting the humble:

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. (Luke 1:46–50)

The mighty God reaches down in mercy, lifting the humble to greatness. Mary herself was the perfect example. No one was lowlier than she was—a poor young peasant girl from Nazareth. She was nobody from nowhere, and she knew it. She was also a sinner, which is why she praised God as her Savior. This is one of Luke’s favorite titles for Jesus. Mary used it because she needed to be saved as much as anyone else. And by his grace, God saved her. He saw her lowly condition. He did great things for her, like putting a child in her virgin womb, and sending his Son to be her Savior. God reached down and saved her. This is why all generations call Mary blessed: she was blessed by the undeserved favor of a merciful God.

The way God worked in Mary’s life is the way he always works. Not that anyone else could have borne the Son of God, of course, but God always exalts the humble. He does great things for people who honor him. In every generation he shows mercy to those who fear him, which simply means to worship him with reverence and awe: “To ‘fear’ God means to cherish reverence and respect for Him—not to be afraid, but to honour Him lovingly by avoiding what is contrary to His will and by striving after what pleases Him.” God-fearing people like Mary will be lifted up, no matter how low their situation in life.

An American doctor traveled to mainland China to serve as a medical missionary. As he visited remote villages in mountainous regions, he was sometimes shocked by the appalling living conditions he saw. But he was also reminded of the elevation that comes through knowing Christ:

As I felt disgusted by the dirt and poverty, or felt anger as I saw begging street children with injuries or wounds likely inflicted by their “owners” so that they could get more cash, I also recalled that it was into a poor and backward corner of the Roman Empire that our Savior came. His arrival announcement was given to the marginalized, and He was accused of spending His time with the “wrong people.” The greatness of His heart’s love is seen in all this—for our nicest dwellings are a dump compared to His heavenly dwelling. But He bypassed all that and visited the neediest.

Perhaps you are young and poor like Mary. Perhaps you are struggling with sickness or some other physical limitation. Perhaps you are in a low condition spiritually or emotionally. If this is your situation, do not complain that you deserve something better. Do not grasp after a higher position. Do not rage against your misfortune. But humble yourself to the providence of God and recognize your lowly position before him as a sinner. The Bible gives this promise: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:10).

### **God Humbles the Proud**

The same God who lifts the humble also humbles the proud, and in the second half of her song Mary praises God for humbling the nations:

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 empty away.

He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

as he spoke to our fathers,

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to Abraham and to his offspring forever. (Luke 1:51–55)

Here the personal becomes national and international. Mary moves beyond what God has done for her to rejoice in what God will do for Israel and the world. What is strange about these verses is that they were spoken in the past tense. Why did Mary do this? She was praising God for the gift of her son, but at the time he was still only a child in the womb. No proud armies had been scattered; no thrones had been overturned; no tycoons had been sent away. When would these things happen?

It is possible that Mary was remembering the great acts of God in history. The lines of her song sound like echoes from the Old Testament: God showed the strength of his arm by drowning Pharaoh's army in the sea; he scattered the proud Philistines by striking down Goliath; he brought mighty Nebuchadnezzar down from his throne and sent Belshazzar away from his feast. God did these things to save his people. God humbled the proud to show mercy to Israel, as he promised Abraham in the everlasting covenant (see Gen. 12:2–3).

Yet Mary was also praising God for what he would do in Christ. She was speaking in the past tense, but she was making prophecies about the future. She could get away with this because when God says that he will do something, it is as good as already done. His promises come with the guarantee of fulfillment. Furthermore, with the conception of Christ, the great reversal had already begun. The choice of Mary proved it: God was lifting the humble, and soon he would humble the proud. So her song spanned the past, the present, and the future. It was about what God had done, what God was doing, and what God would do in days to come.

The Son of God had come to establish his rule with justice and his kingdom with might. This meant the overthrow of every proud nation and the humbling of every proud heart. God alone deserves the power and the glory. Therefore, he must subdue everything and everyone that opposes his will. To be specific, he must humble the pride of intellect (Luke 1:51), the pride of position (Luke 1:52), and the pride of wealth (Luke 1:53). "Can you not see," wrote Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "that everything that man boasts in, his intellect, his understanding, his power, his social status, his influence, his righteousness, his morality, his ethics, his code—every one of them is utterly demolished by this Son of God?"

Mary understood that the coming of Christ would turn the world upside down. He would be the exact opposite of anything anyone ever expected. Here is how Norval Geldenhuys summarized the message of Mary's *Magnificat*:

The proud, those who exalt themselves and take no account of God, He puts down—beaten by His mighty arm. The powers that be, oppressors who tyrannize the poor and lowly, are deprived of their power and high standing, while those who are truly humble are exalted to great things. The hungry, those who realize their own need and yearn for

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spiritual food, are blessed. But the rich, those who are self-satisfied and proud, are shamed in the imagination of their hearts.

In Christ, God takes the conventional standards of greatness and significance and stands them on their heads. The person he exalts is the humble servant who does his will. The person he humbles is the powerful leader who refuses to acknowledge his need for God. We see this happen all the way through the Gospel of Luke. The rich man goes to hell, while the poor man is carried home to be with the people of God (Luke 16:19–31). The prayers of the self-righteous Pharisee are denied, but the sinful tax collector goes home justified (Luke 18:9–14). As Jesus said, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11; 18:14). At the end of the Gospel comes the greatest reversal of all: God the Son—who had once humbled himself to become a man and then to endure the painful, shameful death of the cross—is raised from the dead in triumph. Having humbled himself, he is exalted.

Now Christ is busy turning things upside down in the world. He does not leave things as they are. He does not stand for the status quo; in that sense, he is not a conservative. He is radical, subversive, revolutionary. This is why it is so deadly for the church to follow the culture. Jesus opposes the pride that rules the world, and if we are on the side of injustice, he is opposed to us. The child who put the song into Mary’s heart was the world’s most dangerous baby!

Here is how Martyn Lloyd-Jones described the reversal that Jesus brings to human events, as Mary celebrated:

When the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords came into this world, he came into a stable. If you do not feel a sense of holy laughter within you, I do not see that you have a right to think that you are a Christian. Thank God, this is gospel, this is salvation. God turning upside down, reversing everything we have ever thought, everything we have taken pride in. The mighty? Why, he will pull them down from their seats. He has been doing so. He is still doing so. Let any man arise and say he is going to govern, to be the god of the whole world; you need not be afraid—he will be put down. Every dictator has gone down; they all do. Finally, the devil and all that belong to him will go down to the lake of fire and will be destroyed for ever. The Son of God has come into the world to do that.

This is the way God operates: the humble are shown mercy, while the proud receive justice. The lowly are lifted and the lofty are brought low. This is true for nations. The proud rulers who try to conquer the world always get destroyed in the end. It will happen to our own nation, unless we humble ourselves before God. The kingdoms of this world are temporary and transitory. God will not rest until Christ alone is Lord, and then he will see to it that justice is done, putting all wrongs to right.

God does the same thing with churches. Nothing is more deadly to spiritual health than spiritual pride. Churches that boast about their ministry will be humbled until they learn to give all the glory to God, while churches that humbly go about the Lord's work will see lives changed by the gospel.

What is true for churches and nations is also true for individuals: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). This is what Mary meant when she said that God "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Luke 1:53; cf. 6:21, 24). Of course this verse has implications for social justice. God does not leave the poor to look after themselves, but provides for them, and so should we. People who feed the hungry have God's priorities at heart, while those who ignore the poor are exactly the kind of proud people that God likes to humble.

But Mary was also speaking about our spiritual need for God. God only satisfies people who are hungry for him. When we get stuffed on the pleasures of this life, we do not feel our need for God, and then he has nothing more to give us. If we are too proud to admit that we need God the way a beggar needs bread, he will send us away empty. But if we have a heart that hungers after God—if we long for the forgiveness of our sins; if we thirst for the knowledge of God; if we crave eternal life in Christ—then God will satisfy us with his grace.

This was the God that Mary magnified: the God who satisfies. Martin Luther said that her song was about "the great works and deeds of God, for the strengthening of our faith, for the comforting of all those of low degree, and for the terrifying of all the mighty ones of earth. We are to let the hymn serve this threefold purpose; for she sang it not for herself alone but for us all, to sing it after her." Luther was right. The words of Mary's song strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ. They comfort us with the promise that God will lift us when we are low. They also chasten our pride, destroying the proud thoughts of our hearts.

As Mary's words do this sanctifying work, they teach us to sing a *Magnificat* of our own. God has done great things for us. We magnify him for the mighty deeds of our salvation—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we magnify him for the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, who humbles our pride so that God can lift us up to glory.

Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, pp. 41–53). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

## Mary's Praise

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(Luke 1:46–55)

**And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.” (1:46–55)**

Here is a rich offering of praise from Mary. It is remarkable for its theology and use of the Old Testament. She was a young girl, perhaps about thirteen years old who, like all the people of her day, had no personal copy of the Scriptures. Her familiarity with the Word of God must have come from hearing it read regularly in the synagogue (cf. 4:16). It settled in her heart and was readily on her mind when she opened her mouth in worshipful praise. What a benediction it would be for the church today if the young could be so biblically literate and devout.

The New Testament ultimately stresses the priority of worship. To Satan’s blasphemous temptation to worship him, Jesus replied, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’ ” (Matt. 4:10). Hebrews 10:24–25 urges believers to come together to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” since they, “as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Because God created them to worship Him, all people are inherently worshipers. The object of one’s worship determines his or her eternal destiny. The Old Testament condemns idolatry, that is, the worship of anyone other than the true God (e.g., Ex. 20:3, 23; 34:14; Pss. 81:9; 106:35–36), and makes it clear that it was Israel’s persistent idolatry (e.g., Judg. 2:12–13, 17, 19; 3:5–7; 10:6; 1 Kings 15:12; 16:13; 21:25–26) that eventually led to the nation’s destruction and captivity (cf. 2 Kings 17:6–12; 21:11–14). The New Testament reveals idolatry to be the inevitable response of those who deny the true God (Rom. 1:18–23). But the worship of false deities is not the only form of idolatry. There are idols in the heart of even the most hardened atheist, such as acceptance, fame, health, power, prestige, and wealth, among many others.

Idolatry, however, is not limited to the worship of false gods; it also encompasses attempting to worship the true God in an unacceptable manner. Moses’s receiving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai was interrupted by a shocking display of idolatry:

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Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ ” (Ex. 32:7–8)

The Israelites were not worshipping a pagan deity, but had reduced the true God to an image—something God strictly forbids (Deut. 4:14–18). The result was a threat of deadly judgment (Ex. 32:10) and its execution (vv. 28–35).

Instead of following the prescribed regulations for worship, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu (probably while drunk; cf. Lev. 10:9) “offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1). God was not pleased with their innovative worship, “and fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (v. 2).

After anxiously watching the Philistine forces mustering for battle while his own men were deserting him, Saul finally took matters into his own hands. Samuel had instructed the king to wait seven days, until he came to offer sacrifices (1 Sam. 10:8). But when the seven days were up and Samuel had not appeared, Saul rationalized that “the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord.” Therefore, usurping the role of a priest, Saul “forced [himself] and offered the burnt offering” (1 Sam. 13:12). That willful failure to worship God properly was to cost Saul everything:

Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” (vv. 13–14)

Twenty years after the Philistines returned the ark of the covenant to Israel (1 Sam. 7:1), David decided to transport it to Jerusalem. Ignoring God’s instructions on how to carry the ark (it was to be carried on poles; cf. Num. 4:5–6), the people placed it on an ox cart (2 Sam. 6:3) and celebrated as the ark set out for Jerusalem (v. 5). But the joyous mood was abruptly shattered when Uzzah “reached out toward the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen nearly upset it. And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God” (vv. 6–7). Uzzah’s seeming reverence for the Lord was actually a direct violation of His command not to touch the ark on pain of death (Num. 4:15). The drastic consequence of Uzzah’s disobedience graphically illustrates that God does not accept any variant or, self-styled alteration of His

instructions for worship (cf. Isa. 1:11–20; Amos 5:21–27; Hos. 6:4–7; Mal. 1:6–14; Matt. 15:1–9; 23:23–28; Mark 7:6–7).

The redeemed, on the other hand, manifest acceptable worship. They are, according to Philippians 3:3, those who “worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (cf. John 4:23). Worship that is acceptable to God has many elements. In Romans 15:16, Paul used the language of worship to describe his evangelistic ministry to the lost, calling himself “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that [his] offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Leading a “tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1 Tim. 2:2) is also an act of worship, since it is “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (v. 3).

Central to worshipping God is praise. The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15). Worship also includes “doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (v. 16). The apostle Paul notes that even the seemingly mundane act of meeting financial needs is an act of worship. Thanking the Philippians for their gift he wrote, “But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18).

True worship as defined by our Lord has two components: it is, He said, to be “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24). Worship in spirit is genuine, unfeigned, from the heart, as opposed to mere outward ritual. In his classic work *The Existence and Attributes of God*, the seventeenth-century English Puritan Stephen Charnock wrote,

Without the heart it is no worship; it is a stage play; an acting a part without being that person really which is acted by us: a hypocrite, in the notion of the word, is a stage player.... We may be truly said to worship God, though we [lack] perfection; but we cannot be said to worship him, if we [lack] sincerity. (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979, 1:225–26)

“Bless the Lord, O my soul,” wrote David, “and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Ps. 103:1; cf. 51:15–17). In Romans 1:9, Paul wrote, “God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.”

The Bible reveals a number of prerequisites for worshipping in spirit. First and foremost, a true worshiper must be controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. That, of course, presupposes salvation, since those who are not saved do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:5–9), and thus cannot worship God. Second, to worship in spirit requires that the thoughts be focused on God. Worship flows out of an undivided (Ps.

86:11) mind filled with and meditating on the truth of God's Word (Josh. 1:8; Pss. 1:2; 4:4; 63:6; 77:6, 12; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). Third, worship in spirit requires repentance, since sin hinders fellowship and communion with God. Thus David prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23–24). Finally, to worship God in spirit requires humbly accepting His will no matter what the circumstances (cf. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son; Gen. 22:1–18).

Worship must also be in truth. As noted above, God rejects self-styled worship that is inconsistent with His revealed truth. The only source of that truth is His Word (John 17:17; cf. Ps. 119:142, 160), so only worship consistent with Scripture is acceptable to Him.

Hebrews 10:22 summarizes the approach of true worshipers to God: They are sincere (they "draw near with a sincere heart"), faithful ("in full assurance of faith"), humble ("having ... hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience"), and pure (having "bodies washed with pure water"). As a result of such worship God will be glorified (Ps. 50:23), believers purified (Ps. 24:3–4), and the lost evangelized (Acts 2:47).

As noted in the previous chapter of this volume, Mary is an example to all believers of faith, humility, and submission to God's will. This section of Luke's gospel reveals that she also modeled true, acceptable worship. After hearing the astonishing news from the angel Gabriel that she was to be the mother of the Messiah (see chapters 4 and 5 of this volume), Mary immediately went to visit her older relative Elizabeth, who was six months pregnant with John the Baptist (1:36). There God confirmed that His promise to her through Gabriel would indeed come to pass (see the exposition of 1:39–45 in chapter 6 of this volume). God's confirmation erased Mary's doubts, answered her questions, and strengthened her faith. Verses 46–55, known as the Magnificat (from the first word of the Latin text), record her outburst of praise and worship in response.

Mary's hymn is filled with allusions to Scripture, revealing that her heart and mind were saturated with the Old Testament. It echoes Hannah's prayers (1 Sam. 1:11; 2:1–10) and prayers in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the writings of the prophets.

For example, Mary began in verse 46 by saying, "**My soul exalts the Lord,**" which echoes Psalm 34:2, "My soul shall make its boast in the Lord." Her reference to God as her Savior (v. 47) is reminiscent of such Old Testament passages as 2 Samuel 22:3; Isaiah 43:11; 45:21; 49:26; 60:16; and Hosea 13:4, while her statement, "**For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant**" (v. 48) reflects Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 1:11 (cf. Ps. 136:23). Mary's exclamation, "**for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed**" echoes Leah's words in Genesis 30:13. Her declaration, "**For the Mighty One has done great things for me**" has Old Testament roots (cf. Ps. 126:3), as does the following statement, "holy is His name" (cf. Pss. 99:3; 111:9).

Mary's hymn also reveals that she was well-versed in the history of Israel. She spoke of God's having **"done mighty deeds with His arm"** (v. 51), **including "scatter[ing] those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart"** (v. 51), **"[bringing] down rulers from their thrones"** (v. 52), **"exalt[ing] those who were humble"** (v. 52), **"fill[ing] the hungry with good things; and [sending] away the rich empty-handed"** (v. 53).

Mary also understood the rich theological truth of the Abrahamic covenant. She knew that God **"has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy,"** in keeping with the promise He made **"to Abraham and his descendants forever"** (vv. 54–55). Jesus taught that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34), and Mary's words were the outflow of a heart steeped in God's Word.

Mary's praise is the expression of her faith in God, her love for Him, and her deep understanding of Scripture. The result is an example of worship for all believers to emulate, as she displays the attitude, object, and motive of worship.

#### The Attitude of Worship

**And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; (1:46–48a)**

Mary's example of the proper attitude of worship unfolds in four points.

First, worship is internal. Mary's worship was with her **soul** and **spirit**. The two terms are interchangeable, and refer to the inner person. True worship, worship in spirit (John 4:24), involves the whole inner being—mind, emotion, and will. Like the instruments in a great orchestra, all of Mary's thoughts and emotions came together in a crescendo of praise.

On the other hand shallow, superficial worship is intolerable to God. In Isaiah 29:13, the Lord rebuked the people of Israel for their external, ritualistic perversion of true worship, declaring that they "draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote." Jesus applied this passage to the hypocritical worshipers of His day (Matt. 15:7–9). In Isaiah 48:1, God declared, "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel and who came forth from the loins of Judah, who swear by the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness." Jeremiah complained to God regarding his fellow Israelites, "You are near to their lips but far from their mind" (Jer. 12:2). "They come to you as people come," the Lord cautioned Ezekiel, "and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain" (Ezek. 33:31). Through the prophet Amos God declared to Israel,

I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21–24)

True worship is not only internal, but also intense. **Exalts** translates a form of the verb *megalunō*, which literally means, “to make great,” “to magnify” (hence Magnificat) or “to enlarge”; figuratively it means, “to extol,” “to exalt,” “to celebrate,” “to esteem highly,” “to praise,” or “to glorify.” **Rejoiced**, from the verb *agalliaō*, is another intense word. It is an expression of supreme joy; in Luke 10:21 and Acts 16:34, it is translated “rejoiced greatly” (cf. 1 Peter 1:6, 8). True worship is spontaneous, not staged; heartfelt, not artificial; God-centered, not self-focused; mental, not just emotional; it seeks to honor God, not to manipulate Him. Mary praised God not only for what He was doing in her life, but also for all that He was going to accomplish through the coming of Messiah.

A third characteristic of genuine worship is that it is habitual; it is a way of life. The present tense form of the verb *megalunō* (**exalts**) suggests that worship happened naturally, continuously in the flow of Mary’s life. Fluctuating circumstances do not affect true worship, because God does not change (Mal. 3:6), neither does His word (Mark 13:31), His purposes (Isa. 43:13), His promises (2 Cor. 1:20), or His salvation (Heb. 5:9; 7:25). Nor is believers’ responsibility to give thanks in everything (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18) contingent on satisfaction with life’s circumstances. No matter what was happening in his life, David could say, “I have set the Lord continually before me” (Ps. 16:8). No one exemplified that attitude of continuous worship more than Paul, whose goal, as he wrote to the Philippians, was that “Christ [would always] be exalted in [his] body, whether by life or by death” (Phil 1:20).

Finally, genuine internal worship is marked by humility. The two great hindrances of worship are ignorance, which makes it feeble and ineffectual, and pride, which renders it hypocritical. Those with a shallow, superficial knowledge of God cannot worship Him in the fullest sense because they do not grasp His greatness. But the proud cannot truly worship Him at all, since pride is in reality the worship of self. God tolerates no rivals, which is why the first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3; cf. Isa. 42:8). Thus “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6), because “everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 16:5; cf. 15:25; Ps. 31:23; Isa. 2:11–12; 13:11; 1 Peter 5:5).

Proud people find it difficult to be thankful because they always think they deserved better. They remember the wrongs (real or imagined) done to them and seek revenge. Constantly mulling over their alleged mistreatment fills them with a spirit of bitterness, which is incompatible with true worship.

The humble, on the other hand, knowing they deserve nothing, recognize their spiritual bankruptcy, mourn over their sin, and hunger and thirst for righteousness from God, knowing they have none of their own. They have a profound sense of gratitude toward and love for God, which results in worship.

Mary was such a humble person. Her exclamation, “**He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave,**” expressed her wonder and amazement that God would choose to bless her. She knew that she was a sinner, in need of God’s mercy and grace. Far from viewing herself as the exalted, quasi-deified queen of heaven Roman Catholicism imagines her to be, Mary viewed herself as a lowly **bondsslave** (cf. v. 38). The Greek word is *doulē*, the feminine form of the word meaning “slave.” She is the first in the New Testament to identify herself as the Lord’s slave—a designation that becomes the norm for the saints (cf. 2:29; 1 Cor. 7:22; Eph. 6:6; Rev. 1:1)

Giving further evidence of her humility, Mary expressed amazement that God would have **regard for her humble state**. Socially, she was an ordinary girl from an insignificant Galilean village (Nazareth) scorned by other Israelites (cf. John 1:46). Mary was thus far removed from society’s elite in Judea and Jerusalem. Even after becoming the mother of the Messiah, she never became prominent. Jesus treated her with respect, but made it clear that she had no special claim on Him (John 2:4; Matt. 12:46–50). Nor did the early church elevate her to a special position, or bestow any particular honors on her. The only New Testament reference to her after the scene at the cross (John 19:25–27) was as just another one of the believers gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14).

This ordinary young woman was engaged to a very ordinary young man. Though Joseph, like Mary, was of the line of David, he was merely a common laborer. It was because they viewed His family as nothing more than plain, average people that the villagers of Nazareth took offense at Jesus’ claims (Matt. 13:54–57).

But Mary’s **humble state** involved more than just her standing in Jewish society; it had to do with her spiritual character. She acknowledged that she, like everyone, was a sinner, in need of a **Savior**. Like all true worshipers, Mary had a lofty view of the Lord and a lowly view of herself. If she was the most exalted of women (cf. the exposition of 1:42 in the previous chapter of this volume), she at the same time was the most humble of women (cf. Luke 14:11). It is such humility that God requires and blesses (cf. James 4:6). In Isaiah 57:15 God said, “Thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, ‘I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

So Mary demonstrated the proper attitude in worship. She was joyful and grateful because of God’s mercy to her. Her humble awareness of her utter unworthiness and God’s marvelous grace to her produced praise and worship from her grateful heart.

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### The Object of Worship

#### **the Lord ... God my Savior (1:46b, 47b)**

Mary's worship of **the Lord** centered primarily on His role as her **Savior**. The central theme of all believers' worship must be the reality that God is the Savior from sin and judgment. If that were not so, it would be impossible to worship Him, as impossible as it is for all who live in eternal torment in hell. If God were not a saving, redeeming, forgiving God, people might dread Him and attempt to pacify or appease Him, but not worship Him.

Mary knew that the coming of Messiah marked the apex of redemptive history. Her Son would "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21; cf. John 1:29), because the purpose for His coming was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The thrilling reality that through her the Messiah would be born into the world prompted Mary to praise and worship her Redeemer.

### The Reasons for Worship

**For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever."** (1:48b-55)

Three reasons or motives for Mary's praise emerge from her magnificent hymn.

Mary was motivated first because **the Mighty One** had **done great things** for her (cf. 1:30-35)—things so staggering and wonderful that all succeeding **generations** would **count** her **blessed**. To be the mother of the Messiah was an honor greater than any bestowed on any woman before or since. And, as noted above, the reality that she, an unworthy sinner, saved only by God's grace could also bear the Son of God prompted her worship. That the One whose **name** is **holy** would condescend to save wretched sinners will be the theme of believers' worship throughout eternity (cf. Rev. 5:9).

Mary's praise went beyond herself to embrace all that God would do for others in the future. Once again demonstrating her familiarity with the Old Testament, she quoted Psalm 103:17: "**And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.**" She praised God for the common salvation (cf. Jude 3) offered to all who **fear Him**—the saved, who are filled with a deep, reverent regard for the person and will of God and are committed to glorifying Him.

The final section of Mary's hymn recounts what God had done for His people in the past (cf. the seven aorist tense verbs in vv. 51–54). Consistent with Jewish worship, which not only recited God's attributes, but also recounted His **mighty deeds**, Mary praised Him for what He had done for Israel. As she did so, she noted first that God had **scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart**. Perhaps she had in mind Pharaoh's arrogance (Ex. 5:2) and God's subsequent destruction of his army and deliverance of His people (Ex. 15:1–21). Mary may also have been thinking of Nebuchadnezzar, who "when his heart was lifted up and his spirit became so proud that he behaved arrogantly, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him" (Dan. 5:20). Afterwards the thoroughly chastened king acknowledged that the Lord "is able to humble those who walk in pride" (Dan. 4:37). God had also **brought down rulers from their thrones** (perhaps a reference to the Canaanite rulers defeated by Joshua; [e.g., Josh. 10:23–26; cf. Job 34:24; Ps. 107:40; Ezek. 21:25–26]), and **exalted those who were humble** (cf. 14:11; 18:14; Gen. 45:26; 1 Sam. 2:6–8; Job 5:11; Pss. 78:70–71; 113:7–8). In His mercy and grace, God **filled the hungry with good things** (cf. Pss. 34:10; 107:8–9; 146:7); in judgment He **sent away the rich empty-handed** (cf. 6:24; 18:24–25).

Mary's overview of Israel's history reveals that God repeatedly overturned the normal order, illustrating the truth He expressed in Isaiah 55:8–9: " 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.' " Throughout the nation's history, He gave **help to Israel His servant** (cf. 1:71; Pss. 98:3; 106:10) because of **His mercy** (v. 72; Isa. 63:9; Jer. 31:20; 33:25–26; Ezek. 39:25).

Mary viewed all of redemptive history as the outworking of the covenant which He **spoke to the fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever** (Gen. 12:1–3; Ex. 2:24; Lev. 26:42; 2 Kings 13:23; 1 Chron. 16:14–16; Ps. 105:9; Acts 3:25). The salvation promised in that covenant would be clarified in the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) and would be ratified through the death of the very Child she carried in her womb. For it is only through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ that all the sins of the redeemed—past, present, and future—are atoned for (Matt. 20:28; John 10:15; Rom. 3:24–26; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; 5:2; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 7:27; 9:26, 28; 10:12; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24; 3:18; Rev. 1:5). That covenant reality forms a fitting conclusion to Mary's hymn of praise.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2009). [Luke 1–5](#) (pp. 73–83). Chicago: Moody Publishers.