

## **Series: Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message Mary's Song of Praise**

#### **Scripture: Luke 1:46-55**

In his letter to the Galatian Church, Paul made the statement: "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law" (*Galatians 4:4-5*). In other passages, Paul wrote about "the times set by the Father." We don't know very much about why the Father chose a date about 2000 years ago to send His Son to earth. For reasons not revealed to us, the date for Jesus' birth fit perfectly into the Father's eternal planning.

We do have some limited information about how the incarnation occurred. Luke chapter 1 explains what happened. The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she would be the human parent of the Son of the Most High. Mary was told that the son she would conceive and bear would fulfill a promise made to David a thousand years previously. The LORD had promised David a descendent who would sit on his throne. We thought about this promise a few weeks ago. David was informed that his descendent would have a kingdom which would never come to an end.

After the angel announced her upcoming pregnancy, Scripture indicates that Mary went to the home of a relative, Elizabeth. In their exchange of greetings, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" and "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" (Luke 1:42, 45). Notice that Elizabeth's comments were focused on Mary's privilege of bearing the child.

In her response to Elizabeth's greetings, Mary changed the emphasis. She acknowledged her special privilege to bear the Savior, but her praise was directed to the Lord.

#### **Read Luke 1:46-55**

In her words, Mary acknowledged the unique privilege which was hers. She understood that she was blessed by God, and that she had a crucial and essential role in God's eternal purposes and, for this reason, all future generations would look upon her as a very blessed individual. In these ways Mary acknowledged with Elizabeth her unique role in human history, but you can recognize that Mary was focused on the Lord, rather than herself. Mary focused her words on the Lord, rather than herself. In fact, she was so filled with praise for God that she did not even mention the baby which would come from her body. She focused on the mercy and might of God which made the miracle of birth possible, and on the fulfillment of God's promises which would come about as the result of the birth.

Mary's words are in the form of a Psalm. This passage is commonly called the "Magnificat," which is the first word in the Latin translation of the passage. The word "magnificat" means "to glorify," "to exalt," "to celebrate," or "to magnify." Mary's emphasis is clear from the first two phrases: "My soul glorifies the Lord" and "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

It is difficult for us to imagine Mary's surprise and shock when the angel appeared in her presence. She was undoubtedly even more astonished by the incredible information that the angel conveyed to her. How would you have handled an encounter with a supernatural being? What would be your reaction to an announcement on the order of "you will be the human mother of God's Son?"

Few individuals in Old Testament history had seen angels. Those angels had sometimes announced miraculous events, but no one had ever been given the kind of information given to Mary. Virgin birth? Conception by the Holy Spirit? God coming to earth as a baby? Stunning, astounding words. Everything about Mary's meeting with the angel was extraordinary and unique.

Another surprising aspect about the encounter was God's choice of Mary. Out of all the women of the world, Mary was chosen by God to play a special role in His eternal plan. We know from early in Scripture that God had a plan to redeem humanity, and we know that God had been guiding and moving His plan along throughout the Old Testament.

We know that a number of individuals had been sovereignly chosen by God to help in this process of preparing for the Messiah's arrival, people such as Abraham, Moses, David, and other judges and prophets. From a human standpoint, each choice made by God was unexpected. Based on their backgrounds, none of them had obvious qualifications for the lofty responsibilities God had for them.

In many ways, Mary was the most unlikely person of all, and yet the responsibility she was to be given was the most significant of all. She was to physically bear in her body the Son of God from conception to birth. In her own eyes, she was a "humble servant." The word "humble" undoubtedly refers to her age, her background, her economic condition, her lack of social standing. Mary was astounded that God would choose her, of all people, to bear the Messiah.

The word "servant" is sometimes translated "slave." These two words, "humble servant" imply a lot about her relationship with the Lord. A servant must be submissive to the will of a master. It implies the lack of self-importance.

Mary was also a woman of faith. In verse 47 she "rejoiced in God her Savior." She had a spiritual perspective on life and had placed her trust in God, and God was "mindful" of her heart and mind.

Her words in this Psalm are filled with quotations and allusions to Old Testament Scriptures. This indicates that she knew God's word.

From a human standpoint, Mary was an unlikely candidate to be the human mother of the Son of God, but from a spiritual standpoint she was the kind of person that God could work with.

Mary was willing to accept as good whatever the Lord wanted to do to her. Her last statement to the angel was "I am the Lord's servant. May [everything happen] to me as you have said." She was willing to fit into God's purposes even though she was surprised and mystified by the angel's announcement.

Mary had been greeted by the angel with the words, "you are highly favored!" The Lord is with you." Mary was highly favored because she was humble and submissive and because she was a recipient of God's grace.

Her blessedness was the result of God's sovereign and gracious choice to use her as His instrument in the incarnation of His Son. For this reason, Mary declared that all generations would call her "blessed." In saying this, Mary was not claiming to be someone special. In the New Testament the word "blessed" is used to describe the well-being of an individual who shared in the benefits of the kingdom of God. Blessed people have a distinctive spiritual joy. Certainly Mary had this joy. Mary was blessed because the Mighty One had done great things for her, and through her was going to do great things for humanity. She knew that this would be recognized by all generations.

This Song is in two parts. In verses 46 through 49 Mary reflected on what it meant to her to be chosen to bear the Messiah. The second part of the Magnificat is focused on the "mercy" and "power" of God.

Prior to verse 49 Mary praised "The Mighty One" who had done great things for her. That was just one instance of God's grace. Beginning in verse 50, Mary's praise expands from what God was doing in her life to what God was willing to do for all people who fear Him. God, in His mercy, is mindful of all His servants and He performs mighty works for all who fear him, from generation to generation. In the final verses Mary puts the miracle which had begun in her body into the bigger picture of what God was doing in the world according to His eternal purposes. Mary did not lose sight of what God had done for others in the past or what He would do in the future.

Notice the list of God's activities throughout the Old Testament. God had "scattered those who had proud attitudes" and had "lifted up the humble." He had "brought down rulers from their thrones" and "sent the rich away empty" and had "filled the hungry with good things."

Scripture makes it clear that "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (*for example, see 1 Peter 5:5*). In God's eyes, there is one group of people who are characterized by their pride, power, and plenty. In His eyes there is another group characterized by humility, weakness, and poverty. Verses 51 through 53 explain how God actively opposes the people in the first group: He scatters them, brings them down, and sends them away. On the other hand, He extends His mercy to those who fear Him, lifts up those who are humble, and fills those who are spiritually hungry with good things.

God gave instructions about all of this to the people in the Old Testament through the Law and through the prophets. Based on her understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, Mary was aware that God was planning to continue and even strengthen His work in the future. She knew that the Messiah, the Holy One to be born from her, would reveal God to mankind in new and greater-than-ever ways, accomplish redemption for sinners, and bring justice to the earth and judgment to the wicked.

In verses 54 and 55, Mary specifically called attention to the mercy of God in His dealings with Israel. Israel was supposed to have a servant role representing God among the nations, just as Mary herself had been selected to be God's servant in bearing the Messiah. This servant responsibility was originally communicated to Abraham back in the book of Genesis (*see Genesis 12, 17, 22, etc*) when God promised to bless Abraham and his descendents so that they could be a blessing to all people on earth. The promise was later applied to the nation of Israel when the Law was given through Moses, but Mary did not include the Mosaic Covenant or Law of Moses in her praises. She only referenced the original promise of God God's to Abraham.

Mary understood that Israel's hope was rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, not in the Mosaic Law. She understood the great themes of the Old Testament, such as God's mercy and compassion, and His concern for the poor and the helpless. She also understood the purposes of God concerning the sin of humanity. She knew that God had been working out His plan throughout Israel's history, and she grasped the significance of her place in God's plans.

The Magnificat is evidence that Mary joyfully accepted her responsibility to be the human mother of the Messiah, which is remarkable in view of the cultural pressures she was going to face. Her thoughts in Luke 1 were not on the reactions of her friends and family. She was totally focused on her relationship to the LORD. She recognized her privilege to be the woman through whom God would fulfill His covenant promises. Mary was enthralled with her majestic and holy God and she was willing for God to use her in the next stage of His saving plan for humanity.

Like Mary, we must recognize and acknowledge the magnificent greatness of God and be thankful for His mercy towards us.

## **Some Thoughts for Reflection**

Mary was an example of a true worshiper. She offered praise to God for Who He was and what He was going to do. She recognized her status a humble servant. There can never really be true worship of God until we understand what God has done for us personally.

We can magnify the Lord in the context of our lives. God has a plan for mankind and eternity. All believers are a part of that plan, and all of us are called to be part of God's work in achieving His plan.