

The unfolding of your words gives light.

To Seek and to Save

An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

- ⁴⁶And Mary said^a:
“My soul exalts the Lord^b,
⁴⁷And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior^c.
⁴⁸For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave^d;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed^e.
⁴⁹For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name^f.”

^a 1:46 **Mary said.** Compare this text with the judgment earlier on Zechariah. He disbelieved Gabriel and became mute. Mary believed Gabriel and her tongue was loosed. Commentator John Lange writes, “Faith is already singing for joy, while unbelief is compelled to be silent.” Mary responded to Elizabeth’s blessing with a hymn of worship.

^b 1:46 **My soul exalts the Lord.** Mary started by saying that her *soul* magnified the Lord. She certainly had Psalm 34:1-3 in mind, which says,

I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice. O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

Why not just say, “My mouth exalts the Lord”? Because your soul is the real you. When your soul magnifies the Lord, the rest of you has to come along for the ride. Hannah, whose prayer in 1 Samuel 2 is remarkably similar to Mary’s, must have been on Mary’s mind as she worshipped here.

The soul of Mary was not to accomplish its magnificent mission, however, by sailing smooth seas. The word translated “exalts” is used eight times in the New Testament (Matthew 23:5; Luke 1:46, 58; Acts 5:13; 10:46; 19:17; 2 Corinthians 10:15; Philippians 1:20). The last one (Philippians 1:20) reveals Paul’s desire that Christ would be magnified in his body whether he lived or died. That is what would happen with Mary. Her soul—even her grieving soul—would make her God big in the eyes of men.

^c 1:47 **And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.** The girl you see here would have bristled at the adoration so many give her in our day. Mary’s spirit rejoiced in her Savior. Only sinners need one of those, so do not make Mary more than she was. Having a Savior means you are rescued from eternal punishment and stand in a forgiven state before God. Mary fits very well with Luke’s theme of weak and sinful people who need to be rescued. She evidently knew that “saved” can be a present condition and not simply a future wish.

^d 1:48 **For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave.** Mary’s comment about God looking on His servant’s humble estate does not simply mean He watched her from a distance. His countenance shone on her. She considered herself His slave, just as her son James did (James 1:1).

^e 1:48 **For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.** Mary knew that people would forever consider her “blessed.” Everyone would know what a privilege Mary had to carry and mother the Son of God. This is not the word we pronounce *blest*, which means “to be given favor.” This is the word we pronounce *bless-ed*, and means “to be in a happy condition.”

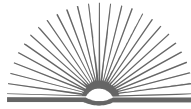
^f 1:49 **For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name.** This song is not a recitation on Mary’s part. In fact it is difficult to nail down precise Old Testament references in this prayer. But that is not the point. Mary was so full of Scripture at her tender age that the character of God and His words spilled freely from her lips. This first half of the statement sounds

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Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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⁵⁰ AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION
TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM^a.

⁵¹ He has done mighty deeds with His arm^b;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart^c.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
And has exalted those who were humble^d.

⁵³ HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS;
And sent away the rich empty-handed^e.

⁵⁴ He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy^f,

⁵⁵ As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever^g.”

⁵⁶ And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home^{h a}.

like Psalm 126:3: “The LORD has done great things for us; We are glad.” The second half sounds like Psalm 103:1: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

^a 1:50 **AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.** Psalm 103:17 says, “But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children’s children.”

^b 1:51 **He has done mighty deeds with His arm.** The arm of the Lord is a picture of His strength, often a picture of the power that rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15; 26:8; Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 51:9; 52:10; 53:1). It is fitting that Mary would equate the incarnation with Israel’s redemption. Remember that this was not a girl rejoicing in her own exaltation. She called herself a slave. Even without knowing the full story, Mary knew that she was bearing the Deliverer of Israel.

^c 1:51 **He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.** This could be a reference to God’s judgment on the rebels at Babel, “So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city” (Genesis 11:8). It echoes Hannah’s thankful prayer about God vindicating her:

Those who contend with the LORD will be shattered; Against them He will thunder in the heavens, The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; And He will give strength to His king, And will exalt the horn of His anointed. 1 Samuel 2:10

Somehow Mary knew that along with the rescue of sinners comes the judgment of sinners.
^d 1:52 **He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.** Mary’s warrior God had raised up and dethroned many earthly rulers, but would conquer ultimately through the holy embryo in Mary’s womb.

^e 1:53 **HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; and sent away the rich empty-handed.** Hannah said, “Those who were full hire themselves out for bread, But those who were hungry cease to hunger” (1 Samuel 2:5). Mary understood that God is most glorified when He helps those who cannot help themselves.

^f 1:54 **He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy.** This statement recalls Psalm 98:3: “He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel.” It also sounds like the prayer of Habakkuk (3:2), “In wrath remember mercy.” God’s best servants remember His character and call on Him to act accordingly (Genesis 18:24-25; Exodus 32:11-14).

^g 1:55 **As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.** Mary connected the events surrounding the conception of Jesus with the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham recorded in Genesis 12 and 15.

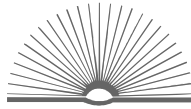
^h 1:56 **Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.** So Mary stayed out the first trimester of her pregnancy with Elizabeth and Zacharias, leaving just before

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the birth of John. There Mary went through the morning sickness and the physical adjustments to carrying a child in the presence of someone who was thrilled to share the experience with her.

^a 1:46-56 The first three chapters of this gospel do not introduce the heroes of the letter that Luke wrote to Theophilus. They introduce the forerunners to the *only* hero of this letter to Theophilus. Zacharias, Elizabeth, John, Mary, Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, Simeon and Anna all had one purpose: focus everyone's attention on the Savior.

Mary was a theologian. Don't conjure up mental images of this girl locking herself away with dusty volumes, never to enrich the lives of others. Theologians hunger to know the One Who rescued them from wrath. They keep a list of all that can be known about Him. They cannot help but overflow when they realize how much they have been given. The worship that sprung from Mary's magnifying soul testifies to the identity of the One Who saved her from her sins. You should be that kind of theologian, too.

Your purpose in life is not to achieve something great to justify your existence. It is not your chief end to find a way to pay for the amount of space you take up. You exist to do just what Mary was doing here. She was more like a mirror than a source of light. Collect all the light you are given and reflect it. You should work hard, do good and love much because that is what your Redeemer has done. Let all of your life to be a reflection of the Savior who rescued you.

Simply put, your purpose in this world is to make God big in the eyes of others. The best way to accomplish this is twofold:

1. Make it your goal to learn all you can about Him. This is called theology. It is not a pointless exercise, because you cannot know God without knowing about God. Since we usually hear more from the opening chapters of Luke at Christmas, call it Christmas theology. Before you call the study of God irrelevant to the Christian experience, ask:
 - What about all the messianic prophecies? Do the specifics of fulfilled prophecy matter? What is the big deal if Isaiah was off a little on the circumstances of conception or if Micah was a few miles off on the place of Messiah's birth? You can delight in someone who keeps his word, but you should be afraid to trust someone who does not. Messiah was prophesied to come from a woman alone (Genesis 3:15), from a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), from the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), descended from Judah (Genesis 49:10), descended from David (Psalm 132:11-12), born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9), rejected, silent before his accusers, killed with criminals, buried with the rich (Isaiah 53), pierced in death (Psalm 22), bearing sins in death (Isaiah 53:6),—just to name a few.
 - Does the virgin birth matter? Yes, because the Bible links the virgin birth to the deity of Christ (Matthew 1:23). If Jesus is less than God, he is just another sinner. As just another sinner he is less than a suitable sacrifice and you are yet in your sins.
 - Does the kenosis and the incarnation of Christ matter? This means he emptied himself and had a human body. What is so dangerous about believing, as did the first century Gnostics, that Jesus was truly God, but did not have a human body? It certainly helps to explain a scientifically unverifiable resurrection. If he never had a real body, they could not really kill him. He is the conqueror of death because he could not die. But the Bible says he died and rose in a body. The Bible says you must believe this theology or you are not of God. Theologians say that in the incarnation Jesus laid aside the independent exercise of some of his attributes some of the time.
2. Put your theology where your life is.
 - To embrace the messianic prophecies is to believe that you can hear God's fully accurate message from Scripture. You can stake your eternal destiny on what God says to you there. What a different, holy life is lived by people who know and trust God's book. What a difference has been and is being made in this world by people who know God's word is true.

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- To embrace the doctrine of the virgin birth is to delight in the forgiveness that comes from a sinless sacrifice. Knowing biblical forgiveness changes the way you worship God, treat others and view yourself.
 - To embrace the self-emptying incarnation of Messiah is to become a good spouse, parent, child, church member, employee, employer, friend and neighbor. The Scriptures use the kenosis of Christ as the pattern for Christian living in Philippians. Because Jesus set aside his splendor, we should follow Paul's counsel:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:3-4

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