

Sermon 7, The Magnificat, Pt. 1, Luke 1:46-56

Proposition: Mary's response of praise celebrates, describes, and interprets God's work in sending His Son into the world.

- I. Celebrating God's Work, vv. 46-47
 - A. Magnifying God, v. 46
 - B. Rejoicing in God, v. 47
- II. Describing God's Work, vv. 48-55
 - A. God Is the Subject of Every Verb in these Verses
 - B. God's Work Is Marked by Reversal
 - C. God's Work Is Thoroughly Biblical
 - D. God's Work Hallows His Name, v. 49
- III. Interpreting God's Work, vv. 48-55

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come on this final Sunday of the old year to Mary's song. This song shows that she was no longer confused; instead, she describes and interprets the coming of Jesus for us in this song. What happened in the Incarnation of the Son of God, and what did it mean? We will see Mary's extended answer to that question in this song, which celebrates, describes, and interprets God's work of saving Israel through His Son in fulfillment of His promises.

I. Celebrating God's Work, vv. 46-47

The Virgin (as we will call her at this time, before Joseph knew her) begins her song, her own prophetic response to Elizabeth's prophetic speech, by celebrating God's work. She ascribes two works in particular to her soul. It magnifies God, and it rejoices in God. In other words, her whole self, her whole being, magnifies God and rejoices in Him.

A. Magnifying God, v. 46

As I write this, I am listening to Bach's glorious setting of Mary's hymn, and I highly recommend it to all of you. It is a great model of glorifying God by singing to Him in the way that Mary did. She begins by saying that she magnifies the Lord. Now, you are familiar with this verb from the magnifying glass. This is a handheld lens that makes the object on the other side of it look big. To magnify God is not merely to hold up a lens that makes Him look larger, of course. It is to explain at length, with joy, how great and wonderful He is. The word "magnify" or *megaluno* in Greek means "to make great."

How can you magnify God? You can do it with words, by talking about His wonders. You can do it with song, by singing about His greatness. And you can also do it with actions, by expressing your trust and love in, say, showing up for worship, or training your children to love and trust God. In all of these ways, you should be magnifying God every single day.

B. Rejoicing in God, v. 47

You should also rejoice in God. This refers more to an internal, heart attitude, while the other referred more to words and actions. To rejoice in God is to carry around a spirit that is happy, that is exultant, that is delighted and eager to celebrate the goodness of God in Jesus Christ. Are you down in the dumps? Then consider the mighty works of God at Christmastime! This is what we're referring to when we say to have a Merry Christmas. You should be full of rejoicing in God your Savior as you celebrate, both with action and attitude, what He did in sending His Son into the world. It is indeed a time for making merry and being merry. Mary was.

II. Describing God's Work, vv. 48-55

She continues to magnify God and rejoice in Him through a description of what He has done.

A. God Is the Subject of Every Verb in these Verses

The first thing to recognize as you read the rest of the Magnificat is that it is an unabashed description of God's work. The Almighty is the subject of every verb in these verses (except for "all generations" in v. 48). Everything Mary celebrates is something that God has done directly. I'm not sure I can think of a good parallel passage, or any other poem in which verb after verb has God as its subject. Hannah's prayer says many things about God, but much of it is in the passive voice, and in other lines the wicked or the pillars of the earth take the stage as the subject of the sentence. No so in Mary's song; the only change of subject is from God to God's mercy, which is on those who fear Him and thus simply a periphrasis for "God shows mercy to those who fear Him."

Are you used to thinking and speaking and celebrating in this way? Are you able to get your eyes off secondary causes and talk about what God has done directly for Himself in the world? "He who is mighty has done great things." That sums up Mary's point. The work of redemption is a work of Almighty God. We are going to look in more detail in a moment at what God did to save His people. Right now I want us to simply focus our minds on the truth that God did it. This salvation was not the work of God + Mary, at least not as Mary tells it. "He who is mighty has helped me do great things." No. That's not how she put it. The Mighty One is the doer of deeds, the one who has accomplished great things for Mary and for the whole world.

B. God's Work Is Marked by Reversal

The second thing to notice about the Magnificat as a whole is that God's work is marked by reversal. We have spoken extensively about that theme in the last few weeks, but Mary repeats it three or four times in this short poem. Notice the first reversal: the lowly maidservant has been noticed by the high and lofty God. Mary specifically references her social status in v. 48, calling attention to it to highlight the glory of the God who looks upon the lowly.

Are you on top of the world right now? Beware. Those who walk in pride, He is able to humble. Are you in the depths of despair? Rejoice! Your lowering is temporary; after three days He will revive you, raising you up so that you can live before Him.

Understand that you serve a God of reversals. You were born naked, and you will take nothing physical out of this world. In between, you may own or control billions of dollars and

millions of people. You are sinful and miserable here on earth; in heaven, perhaps 20 minutes or 20 years from now, you will be neither.

All you have to do to know that your Father loves a good plot twist is to read the news. The world is wide, and wilder than it is wide. The lowly will not always be so, and the elite will not always be exalted. You may be close to despair over the habits and actions of our wicked leaders. God isn't, because He understands that their day is coming.

God's work is most certainly characterized by the lifting up of the lowly. Hannah perhaps put it most simply: "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up" (1Sa 2:6 KJV). The child appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel exalts Mary, even while He humbles Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, and many more. In this very chapter, Zachariah is humbled while Elizabeth and Mary are exalted. Mary is exalted far higher than Elizabeth, who was previously much superior to her in age and status. All three born human characters change in status relative to one another, and among the unborn ones, John makes the declaration that I think I've mentioned in every sermon on Luke 1: He must increase, and I must decrease.

If you really believe that, to return to the point I was making a moment ago, then you will not freak out when Washington's idiotic policies impoverish you. You will not say "I'm decreasing! What's happening to me? I don't deserve this!" You will say, "May Jesus Christ increase! And if He chooses to increase by my decreasing, that's OK. I am willing to suffer any reversal for the sake of His glory, for it is what I live for. Worthy is the Lamb!" You know, to say "Worthy is the Lamb" and mean it is to say "Worthier is the Lamb. He's worthier than me. I don't deserve all the good things I like. I'm not entitled to any of them. He is entitled to all of them."

So this Christmas, take heart from the reversals of the Magnificat. And if, like most in this church, you are actually very comfortable in worldly terms — maybe too comfortable — understand that impoverishment and lowliness is not some kind of divine betrayal or judgment. God sends reversals; He loves reversals. His own Son left infinite wealth in Heaven to come to earth and be a working-class fatherless kid. If the crew in Washington manages to impoverish us all in 2024, to get us owning nothing, we can be happy — not in poverty, but in Christ, the God of reversals.

C. God's Work Is Thoroughly Biblical

This is not a new feature of His character, of course. God's concern for the lowly and love for reversals is evident from the opening pages of Genesis. One can think of His personal attention to Hagar, who is just a slave in Abraham's household, or of His announcement to Samuel that because He looks on the heart, He doesn't choose David's good-looking older brothers. The Bible speaks directly of this many times as well. Just a couple of cross-references:

Psa 138:6 For though the LORD is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly; But the haughty He knows from afar.

Psa 136:23 Who remembered us in our low estate, For His lovingkindness is everlasting,

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

God's work is thoroughly Biblical. What He did for Mary was done completely in line with what He had already promised. Indeed, most of the Magnificat is simply a tissue of biblical quotations. Let's take it line-by-line to see that. Magnificat text is in **bold**:

**"My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.**

This couplet has a host of forebears. Some of the closest parallels:

1Sa 2:1 Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD . . . I rejoice in Thy salvation.

Psa 34:2-3 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear it and rejoice. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.

Hab 3:18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Isa 61:10 I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, Psa 35:9 And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD; It shall exult in His salvation.

**For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.**

1Sa 1:11 And she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy maidservant and remember me, and not forget Thy maidservant, but wilt give Thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."

Mal 3:12 "And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

**For He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.**

Psa 111:9 He has sent redemption to His people; He has ordained His covenant forever; Holy and awesome is His name.

Psa 126:2-3 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with joyful shouting; Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; We are glad.

**And His mercy is on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.**

Psa 103:17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children,

He has shown strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Psa 89:10 Thou Thyself didst crush Rahab like one who is slain; Thou didst scatter Thine enemies with Thy mighty arm.

Isa 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not Thou who cut Rahab in pieces, Who pierced the dragon?

Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,

And exalted the lowly.

Job 5:11 So that He sets on high those who are lowly, And those who mourn are lifted to safety.

Psa 147:6 The LORD supports the afflicted; He brings down the wicked to the ground.

Psa 107:40-41 He pours contempt upon princes, And makes them wander in a pathless waste.

But He sets the needy securely on high away from affliction, And makes his families like a flock.

He has filled the hungry with good things,

And the rich He has sent away empty.

Psa 107:9 For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.

Psa 34:10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good thing.

Luk 6:21, 24 "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

He has helped His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy,

As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

Mic 7:20 Thou wilt give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which Thou didst swear to our forefathers From the days of old.

Jos 21:45 Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.

Psalm 3:5 I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.

Gal 3:16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Psa 105:6, 42 O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! . . . For He remembered His holy word With Abraham His servant.

I don't typically just read Scripture to you as part of my sermons, for you ought to be reading it to yourselves on a daily basis. But I trust that these verses have allowed you to see the obvious: that Mary was saturated in the word of God. Almost every word of her poem explaining what happened in the Incarnation of the Son of God within her womb — a poem that she worked out without the benefit of hearing her Son's teaching, assuming Luke has put his account in chronological order here — is a direct quote from Scripture. The word of God was such a part of her that she automatically interpreted her unprecedented experiences in its light.

Is that true of you? Are you constantly working to assimilate the world and your experience into Biblical categories? Or do you let the world assimilate you and your Bible into its categories? Are you a far-right populist voter, or are you a servant of God and slave of Jesus Christ? Are you sustained by God? When you heard all of these Biblical antecedents to Mary's song, did you nod along and say "Yes, I was already thinking of that text?" I didn't. But we should all know Scripture inside out and backwards, better than we know our way around Gillette and certainly better than we know what happened in the news this week. Mary was confused in the first moment of the angel's announcement. But she pulled herself together, got out her scrolls, and started piecing together the true interpretation of what had happened to her. This poem — the longest speech by a woman in the New Testament — summarizes her views on what God was doing through her pregnancy and gift of birth to the Messiah.

D. God's Work Hallows His Name, v. 49

Well, for now I want to leave you with this: God's work hallows His name. We will have to come back next week and talk about how Mary interpreted God's work in the Incarnation in more detail. But for now, notice that through His Biblical work of reversal, God hallows His name. He is doing what we pray for in the Lord's prayer. He is showing His character to be set apart from common use. He is demonstrating that He lives to glorify Himself, to show His own unique and glorious ways to His people.

Christmas means holiness. God showed His holiness by sending His Son into the world. He answered the prayers of His people. Trust Him; praise Him; delight in Him. Learn His word. Pray for His name to be hallowed. As we finish our Christmas celebrations for the year, as you understand the theme of reversal and Bible and Divine action, see that what motivates God is His Holiness. Adore Him for it; be holy as He is holy.

Christ the Savior was called by Gabriel "that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luk 1:35 NKJ). Gabriel literally named Christ as "that Holy One." Will you do that today? The reason you can submit to God's reversals in your life is that He is holy. He expresses that holiness by lifting up the lowly and casting down the mighty. He expressed that holiness by leaving His mightiness and coming in lowliness so that He could save the lowly. Know, then, that your socio-economic status is not set in stone. It is in the hand of the God who gave it all up to save you, to hallow His name, to make you holy as He is holy. Submit to Him; rejoice in Him. Amen.

