

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Luke 1:46-56

Lesson Title: Mary's Song of Praise

Introduction

To connect the births of the forerunner John the Baptist and Jesus Christ together, Luke records Mary's visit to the home of Zacharias and Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-45). Immediately after Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel, she traveled south from Nazareth to a city in the hill country of Judea to visit and share the good news with her cousin Elisabeth. Luke doesn't reveal the details of the conversation between Mary and Elisabeth but it must have been a glorious time of sharing how God was working in their lives.

As a result of Mary's visit, Elisabeth's babe, "*leaped in her womb*" and Elisabeth was "*filled with the Holy Ghost*" (Luke 1:41). Elisabeth then "*spoke out with a loud voice*" (Luke 1:42) about what she knew about Mary's pregnancy and gave her honor as the bearer of the Messiah. Neither Mary nor Elisabeth understood the full significance of all that was taking place but Elisabeth knew the unborn Messiah had entered her home and that Mary was the mother of her Lord. Elisabeth also knew that everything taking place was "*...a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord*" (Luke 1:45).

Mary's response is the heart of our lesson text recorded in Luke 1:46-55. The name of her response has been given the Latin title Magnificat, based on the Latin translation of the first Greek word in verse 46, which means "my soul exalts" or "magnifies." These ten verses we are studying may not seem to be that amazing on the surface but they are deeply significant in the life of Mary and the Christmas story. Remember, when Gabriel told the Virgin Mary she was going to have a child who would be the Son of God, she responded with a question, "*How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*" (Luke 1:34). Now that Mary has trusted God and traveled to talk with Elisabeth, and since she has witnessed the response of Elisabeth's baby still in her womb, Mary needs no further confirmation. It's time to worship!

Mary's song is rooted in Hebrew Scripture. She reaches back into the Old Testament and blends quotations and prophecies together into a beautiful tapestry of worship and praise. Her song flows out of her heart and off her lips in a way that every person who knows the Lord should covet. God is about to change the history

of the world. The most important three decades in history have started and Mary realizes it has started with one old barren Hebrew woman and one young Hebrew virgin. Mary is so moved by it all that she can't contain her emotions.

Mary's Song of Praise is a Reaction to What God is Doing in Her Life (Luke 1:46-50)

Verse 46-47

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Everything that has happened in the life of Mary is directly connected to a word from God. Her life was that of a normal teenage Hebrew girl until God intervened and sent her a message through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-27). Mary is a model believer. She heard a word from the Lord, she submitted to it, acted upon it, and is now worshipping as a result of it.

Mary began her song by expressing just how exuberant her soul actually was. She said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." This aspect of her song is taken from 1 Samuel 2:1-2 and Psalm 34:2-3 where Hannah rejoiced over the birth of Samuel and the psalmist David was delighted to be out of enemy territory. "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" is taken from Psalm 24:5; 25:5; 35:9; Isaiah 12:1; Micah 7:7, and Habakkuk 3:18.

The word "magnify" means "to extol, laud, and celebrate." It also carries the thought of "making something or someone conspicuous." Mary wants everyone to know that what is happening here is not about her, Joseph, Elisabeth, Zachariah's or anyone else. This is about the "Lord!" Literally, Mary is saying, "My soul makes great the Lord," or, "My soul enlarges the Lord." She "rejoices" in the fact that "God," theos, the divine Trinity, is her "Saviour." The word "Saviour" is "preserver, deliverer." Mary is not singing about God being a "Saviour" in general, but she says, "God my Saviour." Mary was a sinner in need of God's saving grace as are all of us who were born in sin.

"Lord" is the Greek word *kurios* meaning "the master, controller, the possessor and disposer of all things." This title is given to God, the Messiah. When Mary references her "soul" and "spirit" she is speaking about her total self, all that she is. To combine the words "soul" and "spirit" is a powerful way of expressing that Mary's total being is consumed with the worship and adoration of the "Lord."

This type of worship is what our Lord desires. He alone is worthy of such a song of praise. May the Lord elevate our worship to that of Mary's and when we come together collectively as the church may Christ alone be magnified and praised!

Verse 48

"For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

This portion of Mary's praise comes from Psalm 138:6, *"Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off."* By identifying herself as a humble "handmaiden," Mary is confessing to the Lord that she knows she has not been chosen to bear the Christ child because she is an outstanding person deserving of heaven's attention. "Handmaiden" is nothing more than a "bondmaid, a female slave." Mary knew that she or no one else in the nation of Israel could do anything to bring or secure their deliverance. But God in His mercy and grace "hath regarded," or, "turned His eyes" upon the young Hebrew virgin and has chosen her to give birth to the Messiah.

Once again we are brought face-to-face with the truth that God is glorified when people realize and confess their unworthiness before Him. Mary was a nobody they could do nothing to save herself or her people and yet God "hath regarded" her. As a result, "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Because God has blessed Mary in giving her the honor of giving birth to the Christ child, generations after generations will identify Mary as one who is "blessed," or "one who has received favor from the Lord."

Don't think for a moment that there is one ounce of pride in Mary's words. The words, "For, behold, from henceforth" are words of exclamation and surprise. What we have here is a statement of wonder and surprise. Mary can't believe that generations to come would even acknowledge she was here on earth but because of what God is going in her and through her people will say, "Blessed" when they hear her name. If that seems shocking to you just remember what Jesus said about those of us who are saved by grace. He said, *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34). Just as it was fitting for Mary to worship and magnify the Lord for what the Lord was doing in her it is fitting to magnify and worship the Savior for our blessedness we have in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-12).

Verse 49-50

"For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation."

Mary quotes from Psalm 24:8, *"Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle,* and Zephaniah 3:17, *"The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."* She then uses the word "for" again which indicates she is giving another reason for her song of praise. She now sings of three divine attributes of God. First, "he that is mighty" is a reference to God's power. Mary is but a "handmaiden" (Luke 1:48) but the Lord is "mighty." God was certainly manifesting His power to both Elisabeth and Mary. God can do the impossible, therefore Mary sings and worships because of God's "might." Second, "holy is his name" is a reference to God's holiness. Gabriel had told Mary that the child she would conceive and bare was *"that holy thing"* (Luke 1:35). God's holiness, more than any other of His attributes describes His essence and being. Three, "his mercy is on them that fear him" is a reference to how God deals with His people. "Mercy" is the gracious undeserved forgiveness of God to sinful man. Mary could have possibly been thinking about the words of the psalmist when she praised the Lord for His "mercy." *"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children"* (Psalm 103:17).

It is interesting when speaking of God's "mercy" that Mary says, "his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation." Mercy offered is not always mercy received. Only those who "fear him from generation to generation" will be recipients of His "mercy." To "fear" God is to have a solemn reverence and respect for His person and a right estimate of His greatness.

Mary's Song of Praise is a Reflection of What God is Doing for His Own (Luke 1:51-55)

Up until this point in Mary's song she has focused on personal aspects making reference to "he" and "men." Now she focuses on national aspects with references to "he" and "them."

It is clearly evident from the following verses that Mary had knowledge of the history of Israel. She understood the covenant promises of God through Abraham to the nation. Once again the significance of knowing God's Word is presented. Pure worship is rooted in scriptural knowledge. Mary's parents must have taught

her the word of God and the history of God's people. Biblical worship is a result of biblical knowledge. Mary proves that to be true.

Something to Think About: Isn't it interesting that many people no longer attend Sunday School but will attend worship service. If Sunday School gives us a better knowledge of God's Word which is essential to worship, doesn't it make sense to believe that attending Sunday School will help our worship?

Verse 51-53

"He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

Mary's hymn changes from *adoration* to *celebration* of the mighty results to be brought about by the coming Messiah. Mary speaks in these verses as though the future had become the past; so Mary here speaks as though the unborn Babe had already lived and done his mighty work in the world. The phrase "shewed strength with his arm" was an expression in by gone days in Israel referring to God's delivering power. Here Mary uses the phrase and recognizes the "arm" of God as belonging to the coming Deliverer, her son, Jesus. His chosen instruments would be those of whom the world thought little, like herself. The "proud" and "mighty" would be put down; the men of low degree, and poor and humble, would be exalted. The "hungry" would be filled; and they who were rich only in this world's goods would have no share in the new kingdom. They would be "sent empty away."

When Mary's son is born there will be a social reversal of the human order of things. Mary is so convinced of this that she sings it in the past tense, "hath...hath...hath...hath...hath." Mary saw those who were strutting in pride being brought down. She saw those who had exalted seats and high positions giving way to those of "low degree." The "hungry" would be "filled" and those who were "rich" would go away "empty." Christ would reverse the order of everything.

Those who think they have arrived in this world without Christ will be found wanting, empty, and spiritually hungry. But those who are humble and lowly will find all the fulfillment and needs of life to be met in Jesus Christ.

Note: On what do you rely today? You may not speak of yourself as "mighty" or "rich," and yet you rely totally on personal success and things you can do for

yourself. Mary's song is a reminder that Jesus Christ came into the world to change everything. If we want to be blessed by His coming we must utterly depend upon Him for everything.

Verse 54-55

"He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

Finally, Mary looked back on God's covenant promise to Israel first given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and then repeated numerous times (Genesis 17:19; 22:18; 26:3, 4; 28:13, 14). Once again Mary makes reference to God's keeping His covenant in past tense: "He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." God's covenant is a "done deal." Add to that the fact that as Christians, we are the spiritual seed of Abraham through saving faith (Romans 4:9–12, 18–22). As such, his covenant mercy extends to us forever and forever. His mercy is an accomplished fact.

As Mary thought about her beloved nation Israel and the promises God had made to her through "Abraham," she praised the Lord that He had "helped his servant Israel." In the coming of Mary's son, all the promises God had made concerning Israel would be fulfilled. Every time a Jew or Gentile is saved by grace, Mary was right!

Mary's Song of Praise is a Relationship with Jesus (Luke 1:56)

Verse 56

"And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house."

This verse may at first seem like one of those verses that just tells us about people, a time period, and a trip somewhere. However, this verse is saturated with personal relationship. It is one thing to respond in worship with quotations of Scripture and shouts of praise. It is quite another to sit through "three months" of pregnancy in the stillness and solitude of the day. Remember, the rest of Nazareth didn't receive a visit from Gabriel. The rest of Nazareth didn't make a trip to Elisabeth's house, see John leap in his mother's womb or experience the fullness of the Holy Ghost. At this point in Mary's life she is the bearer of the most wonderful secret in the history of mankind. But for now, it is just between her and God.

Conclusion

Mary's song of praise is a reaction and a reflection of God's work in her life and the life of the nation of Israel. Her song is filled with reality, certainty and expectancy. The reality of her song is in knowing that we are merely weak and lowly creatures with no hope outside of Jesus Christ. The certainty of her song is in believing that no matter what the challenges of life may be that God is in control. Finally, the expectancy of Mary's song is in believing that God will do no less than what He promised to do through His only begotten Son.

Amen.