

The song of Mary in verses 46-51 is sometimes called the Magnificat (from its opening word in the Latin translation- "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*" - "My soul *magnifies* the Lord") and is a spontaneous outburst of praise. God is the subject of every verb except in verses 47 and 48b. Plummer cites 12 different OT passages within it (pp. 30-31). Such a knowledge of scripture demonstrates what a suitable mother she would be for the Lord.

"During troubled times, it is hard to believe that God will actually return to save and guide his people as He did in the past " (Garland, 97). The opening chapter of Luke demonstrates that though centuries of silence had passed since the last prophet had spoken to the people of Israel, that did not mean that God had forgotten His people. In Mary's song she dwells upon God's power, holiness, and mercy. Thoughts about God capture her whole being. Though she sees herself as insignificant, that doesn't matter, for the Mighty One is at work (Morris, 84).

**1:46 And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, (Hab. 3:18)**

**1:47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.**

**1:48 "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.**

**1:49 "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name.**

**1:50 "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.**

The narrative stops as Mary reflects on God and His working. She is responding to what God has done for her.

Mary's spiritual beauty is obvious from the first part of her song where she responds from the heart to all God had done for her, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." "Exalts" is a present tense verb and therefore indicative of a habitual act. It means to "make great, glorify, magnify, extol." The expression means that Mary continually glorified the Lord.

In one sense she is ordinary, for she is just a teenage peasant girl; in another sense she is extraordinary, for she has been chosen by God to bear the Messiah. Though she has a unique place in God's kingdom and plans, she remained humble.

First, she calls God her Savior – a recognition of her own sinfulness and need (1:47). Secondly, she also freely admits that her social position would not (by human standards) gain God's attention (1:48). "She belongs to 'the little people, of modest circumstances,' in contrast to the lofty rulers and the arrogant (v.52)" (Garland, 94). Thirdly, even though she was greatly honored by God, she recognizes that what God has done for her is just a display of His mercy, and His mercy does not just rest upon her, but upon all who fear Him in every generation (also note the plural "our" fathers in verse 55).

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 Paul says in a similar manner, "consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the

things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

Mary was blessed but God has uniquely blessed us all – He has hand-picked us as His servants. He has become our Savior. He has shown us mercy. He has included us in His glorious salvation plan. Who we are has been touched by the grace of God. God's mercy is found in generation to generation.

Do we remember that and praise God for it?

NOTE: When Mary says, "from this time on all generations will count me blessed" she isn't pointing to her own significance but to God who has shown her grace. God's grace to her is a picture of what God does for many. To look at Mary and say, "she is blessed" is to praise God for what He has done.

**1:51 "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.**

**1:52 "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.**

**1:53 "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; and sent away the rich empty-handed.**

In verse 50 Mary reflects upon God's ways of extending grace to every generation; in verses 51-53 she reflects upon what God has done for Israel in the past. At the same time, her words are "a warning to Theophilus and to us not to make the common mistake that because God is great, he is partial to great men, or because God is exalted, he favors what is exalted among men. Just the opposite is the case. God's holiness has expressed itself and will express itself by exalting the lowly and abasing the haughty" (Piper, sermon).

The arm of God refers to His power. Paul says in Acts 13:17, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and *with an uplifted arm* He led them out from it." In these verses it is the arm of God who conquers the proud and raises up the humble.

In these verses there is a complete reversal of human values. It's normal to think that the rich are filled with good things and the poor are empty-handed. Men naturally admire celebrities; they look up to the rich, and value the opinions of the famous. But God looks upon the lowly. The proud, the rulers, and the rich will all be cast down from their high positions.

The orientation of the proud is directed against God. They are so consumed with looking down on others that they don't have time to look up toward God. In Psalm 147:10-11 it says that God does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. God isn't impressed with the strong; rather, He favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness. He turns society upside down and exalts whomever He desires. He levels the playing field so that all are equal in His sight.

Garland comments, "The pregnant Mary anticipates Christ's birth with some fiery political theology - potentates tossed from thrones, the haughty humbled, the rich made bankrupt, the lowly exalted, and the hungry fed. These words from Jesus' mother should keep this baby from simply being gazed upon and adored. They create disturbing ripples that rock the placid waters of the comfortable who think all is right with the world, with God safely tucked away in heaven and oblivious to injustice on the earth. Through Mary we hear the incessant voice of the marginalized ringing out a challenge from on high to those entrenched in their seemingly impregnable seats of temporal power. . . Mary's words prepare for Jesus' announcement of good news for the poor (4:18-19) and his beatitudes for the poor, hungry, and weeping (6:24-25) and the woes on the rich, well-fed, and laughing (6:24-25)" (Garland, 98, 99).

***1:54 "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy,***

***1:55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever."***

***1:56 And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.***

Although verses 51-55 are primarily a reference to Israel, it is also prophetic in speaking of the things that God will do in the future through Christ. The future being spoken in the past tense is very common in the Bible. Mary is so sure that He will bring these things to pass that they can be spoken of as having already been accomplished (Morris, 85).

Although Israel was under the oppression of Gentile nations, she would experience the joy of God's salvation. The mercy in redeeming the believer that God is beginning to display in Messiah is in reality the same mercy extended to Abraham and all who have faith in God. Israel, like Mary, and like Jesus was despised; it was lowly, small and insignificant; but God had chosen it and made it His servant. The Savior who has been conceived in Mary's womb is really a continuation of the promise God had made to Israel years ago. The past, present, and the future are all understood in the context of God's grand plan for humanity. The conception within Mary has cosmic implications.

***1:57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.***

***1:58 Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.***

***1:59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.***

***1:60 But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John."***

***1:61 And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."***

***1:62 And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called.***

***1:63 And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.***

***1:64 And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he began to speak in praise of God.***

***1:65 Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.***

***1:66 All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child turn out to be?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.***

Luke 1:57-80 completes the story begun in 1:5-25. The birth of John the Baptist happened as it was predicted by the angel (Lk. 1:13). The fulfillment of God's purposes brings joy to the people and the birth of John is no exception (Lk. 1:14, 58; cf. Jesus in Lk. 2:10 ff.). The rejoicing focuses on the mercy of God: "the Lord had displayed His great mercy."

The naming of the child emphasizes that John was destined to have a significant ministry in service to God. At the same time it points forward to the birth of Jesus, for Zechariah's song which closes this section speaks of the redemption and salvation in the One who was to come from the house of David. John was the prophet who would prepare the way for Him.

Circumcision identified the child as a descendant of Abraham and heir of the covenant blessings. The law stipulated that boys should be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3; cf. Jesus, Lk. 2:21; Acts 7:8; Phil. 3:5). It was also at that time when friends and relatives gathered to celebrate the birth of the child (Marshall, 88). It was Roman custom to name the child on the ninth day; the Greeks did so on the seventh. The Jews, however, usually named their own children at birth (Morris, 86; Marshall, 88). Luke offers no explanation as to why family and friends had assumed that John had not yet been named or why they were trying to name him, but their suggestion is emphatically rejected by Elizabeth (Lk. 1:60). Therefore, they appeal to Zechariah, the head of the house.

Although Luke 1:22 only says that Zechariah was unable to speak, he may have been deaf or at least hard of hearing as well, for the relatives made signs to oppose Elizabeth's name selection (Lk. 62). Zechariah simply wrote, "His name is John" (Lk. 1:63). The boy *had already been named* by the angel and the name had been accepted by the parents (Morris, 87).

Immediately Zechariah's tongue was freed and the first words from his mouth were praise to God. Such a dramatic recovery caused wonder in the peoples' hearts and anticipation as to what this child who was surrounded with supernatural phenomena would become.

1:66 says, "all who heard them kept them in mind." Literally, this means "placed in their hearts," that is, all who heard these things stored them in their hearts. Garland says that "storing things in one's heart" implies incomprehension with an openness for clarification in the future; they knew all this meant something and they hoped that the meaning would be clarified as time went on (105). They wondered *what* (not who) he would become; he was a child with a destiny.

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Zechariah's joy overflows in an inspired song (known as the *Benedictus* from its opening word in Latin – [Morris, 87] that translates the Greek, *eulogetos* [εὐλογητός], or "blessed"). Though Zechariah had faced the judgement for His unbelief (Lk. 1:20), once the chastisement was over he could again be used by God.

Like Mary, Zechariah anticipates the redemption and salvation of Israel and freedom from oppression (Lk. 1:68-71). Most of Zechariah's song is taken up not with his own son, but with the salvation the Messiah would bring.

The song can be divided in a number of ways. Two major divisions are (1) praise for messianic deliverance (Lk. 1:68-75) and (2) the celebration of John's role in that deliverance (Lk. 1:76-79). Included in his song are three prominent OT covenants that God had made with Israel; the Abrahamic covenant (Lk. 1:72-74; cf. Gen. 15:12-21; 17:7; Psa. 105:8-9), the Davidic covenant (Lk. 1:69-71; cf. I Sam. 2:10; II Sam. 7:8-17; Psa. 89), and the New covenant (Lk. 1:77; cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

***1:67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:***

***1:68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,***

***1:69 And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant--***

***1:70 As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old--***

Jesus' coming is a visitation of God to our world.

Zechariah praises God for visiting mankind. "To visit" means to look upon with special concern, like a doctor visiting the sick (Matt. 25:36, 43; Ja. 1:27). God visits His people both in grace and in judgment (Exo. 4:31; Zech. 10:3; Lk. 19:44; cf. TDNT II, 599-605). In this case, God comes to bless and save us. In Luke 1:78 the same is said of Messiah: "the Sunrise from on high will visit us." In other words, the visitation of God is the visitation of Christ. God has visited us in Christ through the incarnation.

Jesus brings redemption.

Secondly, Zechariah praises God for redeeming mankind. To redeem something means to save it at a cost. It was a price paid for a ransom or the act of buying back something (TDNT IV, 351). Spiritually, God has purchased us with the price of the death of His Son. Just as God visits us in Christ, so He redeems us through Christ.

In Luke 1:68 it is difficult to discern whether physical redemption of the nation of Israel or personal spiritual redemption is in view. Both will ultimately come true. Verse 71 seems to indicate that the former is foremost in Zechariah's mind. Yet in verse 77 we see that Messiah visits "to give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins." His redemption is clearly spiritual. Ultimately, God will save His people both physically and spiritually from their enemies; one "type" of salvation does not exclude the other.

Jesus is the horn of salvation.

Thirdly, Zechariah praises God for raising up a horn of salvation in the house of David. The horn was a symbol of strength (like the horn of a bull). "Horns are emblems of power, dominion, glory, and fierceness, as they are the chief means of attack and defense with the animals endowed with them (Dan. 8:5,9 1Sa 2:1 16:1,13 1Ki 1:39 22:11). To have the horn "exalted" denotes prosperity and triumph (Ps 89:17, 24). To "lift up" the horn is to act proudly (Zech. 1:21). Horns are also the symbol of royal dignity and power (Jer. 48:25 Zech. 1:18 Dan. 8:24)" (Easton's Bible Dictionary). The expression, "horn of salvation," applied to Christ, means a mighty salvation (Lk. 1:69). The power of salvation resides in the

Savior who has been raised up by God (Liefeld, 840); the means of redemption is that God has brought a "horn of salvation" on to the stage of human history (Marshall, 91).

The reference to the house of David shows that Zechariah is speaking about Messiah (Psa. 132:17) not his son, John. The fact that the holy prophets have spoken of this from long ago reveals that God is working out His plan of salvation.

**1:71 Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US;**  
**1:72 To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,**  
**1:73 The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,**  
**1:74 To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,**  
**1:75 In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.**

Jesus brings political and spiritual deliverance.

The salvation that Messiah will bring is spoken of as political deliverance, then as mercy to the forefathers (not only to the living) and in terms of the Abrahamic covenant.

The oath is an important part of any covenant, and the emphasis here is that God will not go back on what He has sworn to do (Gen. 22:16-18). By bringing salvation to His people God has shown that He has not neglected His promises to Abraham.

The reason that God will deliver His people from their worldly enemies is spiritual in intent; it is so that they can serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness.

**1:76 "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS;**  
**1:77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,**

Zechariah's song begins with praises for the coming of Messiah. He now focuses his thoughts on the role his own son will play. The description given clearly links John to Elijah in Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1; 4:5. "Messiah's political deliverance (Lk. 1:68-74) is inseparable from the moral preparation of the people (Lk. 1:75-79). Zechariah's son, the forerunner of Messiah, was commissioned to accomplish the latter task (Lk. 1:76-79)." (Thomas, Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels, 25, note 1).

Zacharias remembered and believed the words that the angel had spoken to him in Luke 1:14-17 nearly a year before: "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The last prophet to appear in Israel was Malachi. For 400 years the nation had not heard a word from God. But the silence was about to be broken. John would be a prophet of the Most High. He would also be a man whom God would use to prepare the way for the Lord. Specifically, he would do this by telling the people about the coming of salvation through forgiveness of sins. John would not save people; rather, he would lead the people in repentance and point them to the One who could.

As Garland says,

Jesus will affirm that John is more than a prophet (7:26) and the last of the prophets (16:16), but Zechariah makes clear that "the prophet of the Most High" is subordinate to the "Son of the Most High" (1:32). His prophetic hymn has a christological slant, and it becomes clear that the main reason for blessing the God of Israel is what He has done for His people in Jesus the Messiah.

In that regard, Zechariah says more than he knows. To go before the Lord from Zechariah's point of view would not be the Lord Jesus but the Lord God. Elizabeth's greeting in 1:43, however, introduces another Lord, and the narrative makes clear that John will prepare the way for Jesus. The ambiguity has theological consequences and is deliberate. John does not prepare the way for either the God of Abraham or Jesus but both. Schweizer scores the point: 'the eschatological coming of God is identified with the coming of Jesus.' The meaning of 'the Lord' is therefore transformed to include Jesus, whose mission and person is the incarnation of God's visitation. (Garland, 110)

***1:78 Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, 1:79 TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."***

Jesus' coming is like the rising of the sun ushering in a new day and dispelling the darkness.

Salvation comes because God is tender in mercy. God turns to us because He has compassion for those in need. In the most beautiful language he likens the coming of Messiah to the rising sun that sends forth its life-giving rays upon a cold dark world. Jesus is the dawn of salvation upon a world living in darkness and the shadow of death. He will guide our feet down the path of peace.

The reference to the darkness and the shadow of death are images of ignorance and sin, the existential plight of every human being. Humans cannot save themselves from this predicament because they live in darkness. Living in darkness means that one makes all the wrong choices that inevitably lead to spiritual and physical death. . . The coming of Jesus promises to cast light into the darkness and banish the shadow of death (Garland, 111).

"Arise, shine, for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." (Isaiah 60:1-3)

***1:80 And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.***

In this very brief description of John's life the imagery is sent for the prophetic ministry that John would have, for the wilderness is "the traditional home of prophetic inspiration" (Caird).

A number of scholars speculate that John lived among a strict Jewish sect known as Essenes who set up home in the desert. This is interesting to think about, but is unsupported biblically.

Note: Zechariah's praise forms a chiasm

A<sup>1</sup> visited (68b)

B<sup>1</sup> people (68b)

C<sup>1</sup> salvation (69)

D<sup>1</sup> prophets (70)

E<sup>1</sup> enemies (71)

F<sup>1</sup> hand (71)

G<sup>1</sup> our fathers (72)

G<sup>2</sup> our fathers (73)

F<sup>2</sup> hand (74)

E<sup>2</sup> enemies (74)

D<sup>2</sup> prophet (76)

C<sup>2</sup> salvation (77a)

B<sup>2</sup> people (77a)

A<sup>2</sup> visited (78b)