

“SINGING OF WHAT GOD HAS SPOKEN”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the distinguishing features of Luke’s account of Jesus’ nativity is that it is peppered throughout with five hymnic exclamations by Elizabeth, Mary, Zechariah, the angels who appeared to the shepherds, and Simeon.
1. It was fitting for the birth of Christ to be celebrated in such a jubilant manner, for his coming marked the close of the old covenant era and the dawning of the new covenant era.
 2. One commentator explains this by using the metaphor of birdsong, saying, “At the end of the day when twilight falls, and again at the beginning of a new day when the lustre of the rising sun becomes visible, the beautiful song of the birds is heard in the open. Accordingly it does not surprise us that in the twilight of the Old Testament dispensation and in the morning splendour of the New Testament dispensation we hear various persons, favoured by God, bursting forth in song.” [Geldenhuys, 81]
- B. The exclamations of Elizabeth and Mary in our text make it clear that the gospel is not about things that we do for God but about what God has done for us in his Son.
1. Both of these songs end with a reference to the fulfillment of the word that God has spoken.
 2. Here we see that the songs of the redeemed are brought forth as a response to the glorious promises that God has spoken in his Word.

II. Singing of God’s Blessings

- A. Our text begins by telling us that Mary made the trek from Nazareth to the town in Judah where her relative Elizabeth lived.

1. The angel Gabriel told Mary about Elizabeth's pregnancy in order to provide a sign to help her believe what God had told her, even though Mary did not ask for a sign.
 2. In going to see Elizabeth, Mary was making use of this God-given sign to strengthen her faith.
 3. Luke tells us that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby leaped in her womb.
 4. While such movements are an ordinary part of pregnancy, Elizabeth was made aware that this was something extraordinary.
 5. The Holy Spirit revealed to her that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah and that this was the reason for her own baby's sudden movement.
 6. Even though he was still in the womb, John was already carrying out his office as the forerunner of Christ, preparing the way of the Lord.
- B. Notice that the Spirit causes both John and Elizabeth to shine the spotlight on Jesus.
1. This is what the Holy Spirit does.
 2. He does not call attention to himself.
 3. His focus is upon directing people to Christ.
- C. Elizabeth's pronouncement of blessing upon Mary was prophetic speech, speech that was inspired by the Holy Spirit.
1. Elizabeth was not just expressing her joy and excitement about Mary's pregnancy.
 2. She was declaring the word of God.

3. She was identifying Mary as the one graciously chosen by God to give birth to the seed of the woman promised in Genesis 3:15, the offspring who would crush the serpent's head.
4. The child that Mary brought into the world is the source of all of God's redemptive blessings.
5. Mary was blessed because she believed what God had told her about this child.
6. That same blessing rests upon everyone who believes that God's promise of redemption reaches its fulfillment in Jesus.

III. Singing of God's Greatness

- A. Mary responded to Elizabeth's Spirit-inspired utterance by singing her own song of praise to God, the song that is known as the Magnificat, after the song's first word in the Latin Vulgate.
 1. The Magnificat is a beautiful song of praise that is filled with language and allusions drawn from the poetic literature of the Old Testament.
 2. It bears an especially close resemblance to the song of Samuel's mother Hannah, recorded in 1 Samuel 2.
 3. Mary was able to compose this song because she had become well-versed in Scripture through her upbringing in a home where the Word of God was frequently heard and sung.
 4. She was just an ordinary girl from an obscure little town, but the simple piety in which she was nurtured caused God's Word to dwell richly in her heart.
 5. This is why it is so important for us to be immersing ourselves in the language and imagery and doctrine of the Bible.

6. This is how we can equip ourselves to respond to whatever happens from the standpoint of God's revealed truth.
- B. Mary begins her song by praising God for the things that he has done for her personally.
1. She declares God's greatness and she rejoices in him because he is her Savior.
 2. The fact that Mary refers to God as her Savior shows that she understood that she was not without sin.
 3. She knew that she needed a Savior.
 4. We can never truly rejoice in God until we look to him as our Savior.
 5. And the only way we can see God as our Savior is to come to him through Christ.
- C. Mary also praises God for looking on her in her humble estate.
1. She knows that she is just a young girl from an insignificant little town.
 2. Here is a reminder that God often carries out his purposes through people and things that are inconspicuous and unimpressive in the eyes of the world.
 3. God inverts the natural order of things.
 4. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Cor 1:27-29 ESV)

5. No matter how powerful, influential, successful, or admired a person may be in the eyes of the world, that person has no grounds for boasting before God.
 6. The Lord only looks favorably upon those who are humble and contrite in spirit, those who tremble at his word, those who admit their spiritual poverty and put their trust in Christ alone.
- D. Mary also rejoices in the fact that God's name is holy.
1. It is interesting that she would say this, since people in the Bible always tremble when they are given a glimpse of the holiness of God.
 2. God's holiness is so pure that it causes all of our pretended holiness to vanish.
 3. God's holiness is like the brilliance of the sun, in whose light the stars that shine so brightly in the night sky utterly disappear.
 4. The reason why Mary can rejoice in God's holiness is because she looks upon the Lord as her Savior.
 5. Only a forgiven sinner can delight in the holiness of God.

IV. Singing of God's Mercy

- A. In the next part of the Magnificat, Mary shifts her focus from the great things that he has done for her to the mercy that he extends to all of his people.
1. On the one hand, God's dealings with Mary were unique.
 2. She received the unparalleled blessing of being the mother of our Lord.
 3. On the other hand, the Lord also extends his mercy to all of those who fear him.

4. It is important to understand that the fear of the Lord is not a slavish kind of fear that dreads punishment.
 5. Instead, it is the respectful and reverent fear that is born of saving faith.
 6. Here is how John Bunyan describes it in *Pilgrim's Progress*: "True or right fear can be known by three things. First, by what causes it: the right kind of fear is caused by a saving conviction of sin. Secondly, a good fear drives the soul to quickly lay hold of Christ for salvation. And thirdly, this fear begins and sustains in the soul a great reverence for God, His Word, and His ways. It keeps the soul tender, making it afraid to turn right or left from his Word and ways. It makes the soul sensitive to anything that might dishonor God, grieve the Spirit, or cause the enemy to speak against God." [206]
 7. Your Christian life is to be characterized by this godly fear.
 8. God's mercy is not extended to everyone.
 9. It is only for those who fear him.
 10. Each generation, each individual, needs to trust in Christ and walk in the fear of the Lord.
- B. Mary's mention of God's mercy underscores the fact that salvation is a gift of God's free and unmerited grace.
1. As John Calvin reminds us, "What else does God's mercy imply, but that we are poor and wretched?... the word 'mercy' overthrows all men's claims to be able to put God in their debt... All our works would be seen to be, not righteous, but rotten, were it not that God buries our sins and always receives us in mercy. So whenever we make it our aim to serve him and obey his pattern of righteousness, he must still show us pity, since we continually fail in our duty toward him." [Calvin, *Songs of the Nativity*, 37, 38, 39]

2. In extending his mercy, the Lord shows kindness to those who deserve nothing but wrath and punishment.
 3. This is closely related to the theme of reversal that is so prominent in verses 51 through 53.
 4. God scatters the proud and brings down the lofty.
 5. God puts to shame those who are self-satisfied and those whose confidence rests in the things of this world.
 6. But God exalts those who humble themselves before him and place all their hope in the mercy that he promises in Christ.
- C. Notice that Mary speaks of this reversal in the past tense, even though it has not yet taken place.
1. She does so because she is confident that the Lord will accomplish everything that he has promised in his Word.
 2. We need to cultivate the same confidence in our hearts.
 3. There are many people in the world today who do not fear the Lord who nonetheless experience a great deal of happiness and fulfillment in their lives.
 4. And there are many Christians whose lives are hardship, suffering, and sadness.
 5. We need to remember that a day of reckoning will most assuredly come.
 6. In God's appointed time, everyone who exalts himself will be brought to nothing, and everyone who humbles himself before the Lord will be brought to glory.

V. Singing of God's Faithfulness

- A. The Magnificat concludes by rejoicing in God's faithfulness to the promises that he made to his people Israel.
 - 1. Mary praises the Lord as the one who helped his servant Israel.
 - 2. Think for a moment about that word "help."
 - 3. It is a wonderful thing to receive help.
 - 4. We especially appreciate the help that others give us when we are desperate and helpless.
 - 5. That is the kind of help that the Lord provides for his people.
 - 6. He helps us when we are utterly unable to help ourselves.

- B. The Lord helped his covenant people in an especially amazing way.
 - 1. He provided it by humbling himself and becoming a helpless baby.
 - 2. He helped his servant Israel by descending to earth to become his servant Israel.
 - 3. When God saw that Israel could not fulfill the requirements of his law, his own arm brought salvation by sending his Son as the faithful, suffering servant, the one through whom many would be accounted righteous.

- C. Mary says that God did this in remembrance of the mercy that he promised to Abraham and his offspring.
 - 1. When the Bible speaks of God "remembering", it is not suggesting that some things occasionally slip God's mind.
 - 2. Instead, this is a way of saying that God is about to act upon his promises.

3. From our perspective, there can be times when it seems as though God is not remembering the things that he has promised.
4. When we experience sadness or suffering or distress, we have a tendency to think that God is far from us.
5. But that mistaken line of thinking is proven wrong time and time again, as the Lord preserves and delivers his people through trials of many kinds.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1 that “all the promises of God find their Yes in” Jesus Christ.
- B. Then he says that when God graciously enables us to lay hold of Christ by faith, “we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”
- C. This is what Elizabeth and Mary are doing in these verses.
- D. They are uttering their “Amen” to God for his glory.
- E. This is how we should respond to all that the Lord has accomplished in Jesus Christ.
- F. We too should magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our Savior.