

A Beautiful Song from a Humble Servant
(The Magnificat of Mary)
Luke 1:46-55

Introduction

- 1) She is the most famous woman in history, and yet the mixing of fact and fable, truth and tradition, leaves many people with an unclear picture of her person and importance. In recent years people have claimed to have seen her in Lourdes, Fátima, Portugal; Bosnia and even Conyers, Georgia (*U.S. News & World Report*, October 27, 1999). In fact more than 400 reported “apparitions” in the 20th Century, more than the three previous centuries combined, has caused some to refer to the 20th Century as “Mary’s century.” And in August 1997, *Newsweek* reported of “a growing movement in the Roman Catholic Church [that] wants the Pope to proclaim a new, controversial dogma: that Mary is a Co-Redeemer” (*Newsweek*, August 25, 1997; p. 49).
- 2) To separate fact from fiction we must give our attention to the only sure and certain source for truthful information: the Holy Scriptures. Here we learn that:
 - she was wonderful but is not to be worshiped.
 - she was a virgin when Christ was conceived but she was not immaculately conceived, that is conceived and born without original sin, as proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854.
 - she indeed gave birth to the Saviour of the world but she herself was not sinless and needed a Saviour.
 - she was a virgin when Christ was conceived but not perpetually so as confirmed at the Lateran Council in 649.
 - she was with her Son when He ascended (Acts 1) but did not ascend bodily herself as taught in the Middle Ages and made official Roman Catholic doctrine by Pius XIII on November 1, 1950. Indeed Pius stated, “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever-Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”
- 3) However, we must not allow all of this misinformation and confusion to blind our eyes to the crystal clear fact that Mary of Nazareth, the mother of our Lord, was a great woman, a godly woman, a blessed lady, the best lady. We see her greatness, in part, in a song we call the *Magnificat*, which means “to make great” or “magnify.” Here Mary praises her Lord, her God, her Saviour (1:46-47) because He has honored her with the privilege of giving birth to a Son named Jesus, one who “will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; ‘one’ the Lord God will give . . . the throne of His Father David,” one who “will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (1:31-33). As a virgin she wondered how this could be, and the angel Gabriel informed her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (1:35), “For with God nothing will be impossible” (1:37).

- 4) Mary accepted and submitted to this word from Gabriel, and went quickly to share and hear the good news with her relative Elizabeth concerning both surprising pregnancies. Thinking and reflecting on all of this Mary's heart is stirred, and she sings a song of praise to the Lord, rejoicing in His grace and in His goodness.

Transition

There are three movements to the song as Mary considers 1) God's grace toward her, 2) His reversal of the ways of the world, and 3) His covenant faithfulness to Israel and His people. Mary draws freely from the song of Hannah found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and with majestic melody sings the first song of the Incarnation.

I. God regards the humble servant 1:46-49

In verses 46-49 Mary considers what God has done for her. However, rather than drawing attention to herself she focuses primarily on the character of the God who regards and honors the humble servant before Him. Called the *Magnificat* from the Latin phrase that begins the hymn, Mary praises her God, pointing out five remarkable characteristics of His person and power.

1) See God in His greatness 1:46-47

Verse 46 literally reads "magnifies continually the soul of me the Lord."

Emphasis falls on her magnifying, glorifying, praising the Lord. The word means to enlarge or make great. Mary makes the Lord great in her soul, her spirit. Why? Because He is her Saviour and such knowledge inspires praise and rejoicing. He is Lord, God, and my Saviour.

2) See God in his kindness 1:48

God is great (1:37) but He is also kind. He has "been mindful" (*NIV*), taken notice of the lowly or humble estate of His servant (*doules*). God owes her nothing, she owes Him everything. He did not need her, but He chose to use her, she who is possessed of a servant's heart. The nation of Israel lived in humiliation under Roman rule. Mary likewise suffered under the tyranny of a cruel oppressor. But God had not forgotten His people. Just as Hannah was childless and waited upon the Lord and was remembered, so childless Israel was now remembered as her Messianic deliverer was about to come. Isaiah's promise was on the way, "For unto us (Israel) a child is born..." (Isaiah 9:6).

3) See God in His goodness 1:48

God is great but He is also good. Despite Mary's nobody from nowhere status, all generations will call her blessed. She will be honored, and honored above every other woman. "Behold" expresses surprise, wonder. Who would have ever thought such a thing. A tender teen somewhere around the age of 14 living in obscurity in a back-water town would become the most blessed and the most famous woman ever. She was not a princess or queen, a noblewoman or a person of position. She would, however, give birth to the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Why? Because of the greatness, kindness, and goodness of God.

4) See God in His awesomeness 1:49

Our God is the God who does the great and the powerful, the *megala* and the *dunatos*. Mary had experienced an up close and personal touch of the omnipotent God. He had conceived in her womb the seed of Abraham

(Genesis 12), the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49), the prophet greater than Moses (Deuteronomy 18), the Son of David (2 Samuel 7), the virgin-born Messiah (Isaiah 7), and the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53). Only an awesome God could do all of this, and this God was her God, and He can be your God as well.

5) See God in His holiness 1:49

This great, kind, good, and awesome God has many names. One of them is *hagion*, “holy.” This name describes His character and His essence. He is the unique one, the separate one, the morally perfect one. He is righteous and just, utterly different than anyone or anything. Only this God is worthy of our worship. Only this God is worthy of our service.

Transition

God, this incredible God, regards the humble servant.

II. God reverses the world’s standards 1:50-53

Mary now turns to rejoice in how God deals with the peoples of the world, noting that God’s ways are not man’s. He is the God of grand reversals, turning upside down the perspectives and priorities of the world.

1) God honors the humble 1:50-51

- God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance. His mercy and compassion flows to those who fear Him. Further, the mercy is never-ending, going “from generation to generation.” God’s mercy has no limitation in time, no restriction in space. Those who love, respect, and honor Him, He blesses and shows compassion without failure or disappointment.
- God also flexes His mighty arm, again a picture of His omnipotence. On the one hand “His mercy extends to those who fear Him” (*NIV*), but on the other hand “He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” (*NKJV*). Eugene Peterson paraphrases saying, “He bared His arm showed His strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts” (*The Message*). Looking into their hearts, God sees their arrogance and pride, their hubris and haughtiness. Such persons are nothing before Him and so he scatters them about as a farmer sows His seed.
- Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, and 1 Peter 5:5 all remind us “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:10 adds, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

2) God helps the helpless 1:52-53

- The Lord’s divine reversal continues. Though verses 51-55 are best viewed as prophetic, we should note that everything is stated in the past tense. Mary in a sense looks both backward and forward, and sees the events of the future as certain as those of the past.
- “God has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly” (*NIV*, “humble”).
 - God takes down a Saul and raises up a David
 - God takes down a Nebuchadnezzar and raises up a Daniel
 - God takes down an Alexander, Herod, and Nero, a Napoleon and a Hitler, a Stalin and a Lenin, an Amin and a Hussein, and he raises up a

Peter, Paul, and John, a Whitfield and a Wesley, a Moody and a Graham.

- As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:27-28, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are.” God also “has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.” Both physically and spiritually God has vindicated the oppressed and judged the oppressors. Darrell Bock points out, “Often it is those in need who are the most spiritually sensitive to God and who are gifted with faith by Him. God promises them that despite their current deprivation, they will experience great reward in the future” (Bock, IVP, 47).
- Hannah’s song reads in 1 Samuel 2:7-8, “The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.”

III. God Remembers the Chosen Seed 1:54-55

Our God is a covenant keeping God, a God who keeps His Word. God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 (Abrahamic Covenant), David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 (Davidic Covenant) and the Hebrew people as a whole in Jeremiah 31:31-34 (New Covenant). Paul reminds us in Romans 11:29 concerning the Jewish people, “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” Mary understands better than many the faithfulness of Israel’s God and knows to be true this precious truth! God is not through with the Jew. God has and will remember His chosen seed and His promises to them.

1) God will always help His people 1:54

God has helped His people, His servant Israel throughout her history, but never like now in sending His Servant, His Son. He did not do this because Israel earned or deserved it. He did it “in remembrance of His mercy” (cf. v. 50). His mercy is on those who fear Him and His mercy is to those whom He has promised. They may fail Him but He will not fail them. They may be unfaithful but He will be forever faithful. God cares for Mary and blesses her, He has made a pledge to care for the godly remnant in Israel, the godly remnant in the world.

2) God will always keep His promises 1:54-55

God helps His people and keeps His word. This is the emphasis of verse 54. In verse 55 the emphasis shifts to the duration of His promises: forever. God spoke to the Fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave them His Word and His Word to them and their descendants (“seed”) is forever. What God says, He will do. What He promises, you can count on. Silent for 400 years with the completion of the Old Testament, God has not forgotten His people. He is again speaking through a humble servant a word, The Word (John 1:1). The world after this, will never be the same.

Conclusion

His name is Bob Longaere. He is not widely known, though his writings in the area of linguistics has earned him a degree of respect in the academic community. He drives an old car he does not own and lives in an old trailer he does not own on land that does not belong to Him. He mixes his plaids and stripes and often adds a sweater. Usually you see him slowly moving about in his sneakers. Who is he? Just a godly and faithfully Wycliffe Bible Translator and missionary who has been used by God to get the Bible into the hands of people groups around the world who had never even heard the name of Jesus, who knew nothing of the gospel, Mary and the Christmas story. The world would say he is a nobody from nowhere who has done nothing of any real importance. Heaven, however, sees it differently. To our Lord, he is somebody from somewhere who has done something awesome and magnificent for the honor of his King. Such a life is much like Mary's. Such a life should be our goal as well. May we never magnify ourselves, but like Mary of the Bible, and my friend Bob Longaere, let us magnify the Lord, our God, our Saviour.