

MARY'S SONG

Introduction: Today we are looking at the Song of Mary or *Magnificat*, as we Anglicans know it from the service of Evening Prayer. It is her response to the news that she would be the mother of the Messiah and that *this* child would be conceived without a human father.

Exactly why this should be so is not explained, but it has been suggested that is highly appropriate given that Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was coming *into* the world from outside and not someone arising *out* of this world.

It should be noted that Mary's song is part of a wider story in Luke's gospel outlining the events leading up to and including the birth of Jesus.

1: God fulfils his Promises

In these chapters the focus is on the idea of *fulfillment*. That is to say, God made promises to Abraham that through his offspring all the world would be blessed and these promises were supplemented by promises through the prophets that a descendent of David would be the Lord's Anointed and rule over God's Kingdom. The events recorded by Luke are explained as fulfilling all these promises.

Mary's song also reflects this idea of fulfillment also; for example in Luke 1:54 she says that what was about to happen to her was God 'remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever.'

For Mary, God's faithfulness in the past is proof that God will be faithful in the future, especially with regards to the child she will bear.

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2: History repeating itself

Another important element to the story of Mary is that it fits into a pattern of events going back to Abraham and Sarah whereby certain women were chosen to bear sons who would fill special roles in God's unfolding story of how he was to bring salvation to the world.

First there was Sarah and Isaac, and then there was Hannah and Samuel. In Chapter One of Luke there is Elizabeth and her son to be, John the Baptist, and now Mary. All of these involved some form of special visitation. The first three concerned women who had been unable to have children. In Mary's case, her baby was conceived without a human father, but in every case they involved some form of supernatural intervention.

As the angel said to Mary, 'nothing is impossible with God.'

So, God's intervention with all these women demonstrates his determination to create the circumstances that will result in salvation coming to the world, and in the process do so in ways that show his tender mercy towards the women involved.

Now we come to the particular situation of Mary. This song teaches us quite a lot about Mary, and quite a lot about God.

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1: What this song tell us about Mary

Luke 1: 46 to 49 contain Mary's reflections on what God is doing through her, and her reaction to it.

Firstly she gives glory to God. She praises him. She accepts that what has happened is a sign of his grace. She no doubt found the circumstances of Christ's conception very daunting and puzzling, even more so when she is told that *her* baby will not have a human father and that *he* will be the 'Son of God.' Furthermore, she was to conceive this child while she was yet unmarried.

Nevertheless, the quality of her character is shown in her response to this news; Luke 1:30, 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.' It is further shown by her frank admission that this privilege is a matter of *grace*, not reward, Luke 1: 46, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God *my Saviour*, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.'

In recognizing the Lord as her saviour means that there is no basis for thinking that Mary is in some special category different from us; she, one of us, has been chosen to be the instrument of God's saving purposes for this world. She attributes all this to God; verse 49, 'the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.'

What all this tells us is that there was something about this young woman that made her eminently suitable to give birth to, and to bring to adulthood, the one who was destined to be the saviour of the world. That something was, trust, trust in God.

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As much as any descendent of Adam is fit to be an example for us to follow, Mary stands with the other great ones of biblical times as a beacon of godliness and humility. This is an example we should all seek to follow in our daily lives.

2: What this song tell us about God

In this beautiful song, so reminiscent of the psalms and Hannah's song at the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 2), Mary tells us how powerful and good God is; as if we needed to be reminded.

Looking back to the time of Abraham onwards, there is ample evidence of his saving power. The birth of Isaac tells us that. The exodus from Egypt tells that. And the tender and righteous ways he dealt with a rebellious Israel tells us how good he is.

Verses 50 to 53 reflect this understanding of God's character:

His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things but he has sent the rich empty away.

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That is the kind of God you can believe in. That is the kind of God you can go to for help in times of trouble. That is the kind of God who sent his *Only Begotten Son*, born of a woman, to come and save us from our sins.

As we prepare ourselves for this coming Christmas season, we can do no better than adopt the same attitude of humble acceptance and steadfast faith as we see demonstrated in Mary, the author of this beautiful song.