

**Mary's Magnificent Praise**  
**Luke 1:46-55**  
**ABC 11/29/20**

We've moved into the season of Advent. How do I know? Because Christmas music has been playing everywhere, even at our home, before Thanksgiving, which is just wrong. Most of us have playlists of some sort, music that's carried us through life. & so it's not unusual to find that in Luke's gospel he sprinkles throughout the story of Jesus' birth a series of songs. It's almost like a musical. Nearly every character in Luke's account bursts forth in song. I say *song* but the text doesn't actually say that but it's the kind of poetry that might well have been sung. The 1<sup>st</sup> is the *song* of Mary. The 2<sup>nd</sup> is Zachariah's song. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is perhaps the most familiar, the song of the angels. & the 4<sup>th</sup> is the song of Simeon. Over the Sundays of Advent we'll be looking at these songs because they're here for a reason. In Mary's song we learn about Mary & about her God. For background, pretend I'm Mary.

*My name is Mary. I was brought up & lived in Nazareth in Galilee. I was engaged to a man named Joseph. He came from the family line of King David. According to Jewish law we were married, but our wedding day was still to come & so I was still living at home & still a virgin.*

*One day an angel came to me & said, "Shalom! The Lord's grace is on you; He is with you!" I was stunned. My mind was racing. What did this mean? Then he said:*

*"There is no need to be afraid, Mary, for God has engraced you. You will conceive & have a Son. You must give Him the name 'Jesus.' He is going to be great & will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father, David, & He will reign over the house of Jacob forever & there will be no end of His kingdom."*

*Immediately I asked, "How will this happen? I'm a virgin." His reply was:*

*"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, & the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the Child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. &, Mary, you aren't the only one who's going to have a baby. Your cousin, Elisabeth, even at her age, has also conceived a son. She's already 6 months pregnant, even though she's been barren for all these years. Remember, nothing is impossible with God."*

*All I could think to say was, "I'm the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." & then he left.*

*I thought there was only one thing I should do, so I went to spend the next few months with her.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Sinclair B Ferguson, *Child in the Manger: The True Meaning of Christmas*, pp 107-108

I encourage you to read Lk 1 on your own. As you do you'll notice that Mary was a sinner in need of God's grace, just as we are, & yet God freely gave her His favor & blessing (Lk 1:28, 30), just as He does us. Mary knew she didn't deserve God's grace, so she praised Him & called Him, **God my Savior** (47). As you read it you'll also notice a combination of the natural & supernatural. It's the interweaving of things that are ordinary with things that are extraordinary. For example, the news of a girl expecting a baby is ordinary news. But the way in which this baby is conceived is extraordinary. You find that Mary, in response to the arrival of the angel, is greatly troubled (29). She's naturally fearful & confused because she's had no physical relationship with the one who's going to be her husband. The answer comes: **The Holy Spirit will come upon you, & the power of the Most High will overshadow you; & for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God** (Lk 1:35). This is entirely supernatural. She responds, **Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word** (1:38), which is a pretty supernatural response. Would we have responded that way? Following that, fairly routine & ordinary events occur. Mary goes to her cousin, Elisabeth, to share the news. Mary believed the angel, but it's easy to understand she'd welcome anything that might boost her faith. So Mary travels to Elisabeth, carrying the Son of God in her womb. When Elisabeth sees her, her baby (little John the Baptist) gives Elisabeth a good kick. Luke says Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit & cries out, *Mary, my child is leaping for joy. The Holy Spirit has helped him before he can even speak to bear witness to the Lord in your womb.* As Mary hears & is encouraged by this, she launches into song & sings, **My soul exalts the Lord, & my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior** (46-47). As John Piper puts it, she magnified God like a telescope magnifies stars so we can see how vast & majestic & beautiful they are.

*That's why we exist, why we were saved, as Peter says, **You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light** (1 Peter 2:9). The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, & act in a way that will make God look as great as He really is. Be a telescope for the world of the infinite starry wealth of the glory of God.<sup>2</sup>*

That's what Mary does here. Her song is one of overflowing thankfulness & praise to God. She's not singing about herself & how great she is. She's singing about who God is, what He's done, &

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<sup>2</sup> [www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-magnify-god](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-magnify-god)

how great He is. It's remarkable for its theology & use of the OT. She was a young girl &, like all the people of her day, had no personal copy of the Scriptures. Her familiarity with God's Word had to have come from hearing it read regularly in the synagogue & repeated at home. It settled in her heart & was on her mind when she opened her mouth in song. It's filled with allusions to Scripture, revealing that her heart & mind were saturated with it. It echoes Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 1:11; 2:1-10) & prayers in the Pentateuch, the Psalms, & the writings of the prophets.<sup>3</sup> Mary praised God not only for what He was doing in her life, but also for He had done & would do through her Son, the promised Messiah. Mary's an example to us. She's modeling for us a mind saturated with Scriptures & a love for God's Word of God. What was Mary's response to the unexpected? Scripture. How do you react to the unexpected? How would you react if an angel showed up & told you that you're going to bear the Messiah? When Elisabeth greets you at the door & says, *I'm not worthy to be in the presence of the mother of my Lord*, in those kinds of moments, how do you respond? A Scripture-saturated mind reacts in a scriptural way & that's what we see Mary doing. There's a lot in this short song & this morning we'll focus around 3 words: *mindful*, *mighty*, & *merciful*. God is mindful. God is mighty. & God is merciful.<sup>4</sup>

**1. God is Mindful** Mary speaks at 1<sup>st</sup> in terms which are personal. In vs 48 she says, God **has had regard for or been mindful of (NIV) the humble state of His bondservant**. God's choice of Mary to be the mother of Jesus is astonishing. Out of all the women He could have chosen, He picked an unknown, young woman from an obscure village. Mary appears to be amazed at God's choice of her for this role. She says, **He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant & the Mighty One has done great things for me** (48-49). God had spent centuries preparing for this day & now His eternal plan of redemption is going to go through a, poor, pregnant, still-unwed teenage girl. She's been given an overwhelming job; she's to be the Messiah-bearer & the mother of God in human flesh. For hundreds of years the Jewish people had been waiting for this. Since the days of Abraham & before, stretching all the way back to the days of Adam, Israel has been waiting for the

<sup>3</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Luke 1-5](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary, p 77

<sup>4</sup> Allistair Begg, *Christmas Playlist*, pp 18-25

seed that would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). That time had now come. Mary's purpose has been revealed to her & it's a part in the redemptive work of God. She says God **has regard for** her, He's **mindful of** her. Webster defines **mindful** as *bearing in mind, aware*.<sup>5</sup> It's *to take special notice of something... to concern oneself with*.<sup>6</sup> Mary says, *My spirit rejoices in God my Savior because He's taken thought of & noticed me. I'm in His remembrance*. But she doesn't just sing in personal terms. She also sings in corporate terms. In vss 54–55 she says, **He has given help to Israel His servant**, not just to His servant, Mary but also to **Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy**, which has the similar meaning of *to recall or think about again*.<sup>7</sup> & who is God mindful of here? **Abraham & his descendants forever** (55). God is mindful of Mary as an individual because He's mindful of His people as a nation. Mary's significance in the scheme of God's plan of redemption is entirely related to the purpose of God to choose out for Himself a people for Himself. & that people is the focus of His love & concern. They are the *apple of his eye* (Ps 17:8; Zech 2:8). The wonder of what it means to be in the remembrance of God is directly tied to being part of God's people. Apparently, Mary's mind goes back to Gen 12 where God is speaking to Abraham & calls him out from his people, his country, his family, & tells him to go to a place that He'll show him. & the promise of God to Abraham is, **I will make you a great nation, & I will bless you, & make your name great; & so you shall be a blessing; & I will bless those who bless you, & the one who curses you I will curse. & in you all the families of the earth will be blessed** (Gen 12:2-3). Did you catch that? All the people of earth will be blessed through Abraham. At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, that's a strange statement. How odd of God to call Abram from a pagan background & then make this amazing promise to him. Abraham must have been excited & marveled at it. But as time went by, he & Sarah remained childless. They wondered how God could fulfill a promise through their offspring when they didn't have any. Of course, we know of God's wonderful, miraculous intervention in that & they had a son. God was *mindful* of them. All through the OT, God is saying again & again to His

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<sup>5</sup> [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindful](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindful)

<sup>6</sup> Johannes P. Louw & Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#), p 354

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 346

people, *I am mindful of you. I will fulfill the promises I've made.* He sent them judges & prophets who continually repeated that God would do as He'd promised. For example, Isaiah told them,

**A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; & the government will rest on His shoulders; & His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David & over his kingdom, To establish it & to uphold it with justice & righteousness From then on & forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.**

At least some heard this & must have concluded, *This must be part of God fulfilling His promise to Abraham.* Maybe they pondered the mystery that was contained in the words **a child will be born to us.** That's pretty natural, isn't it? **A child will be born,** humanity. Then, **A son will be given,** deity. Jesus, the Son in Mary's womb, revealed in Bethlehem, is the eternal Son, the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity. In Israel's dark & difficult days, when the promise of God appeared to have dimmed & seemed unlikely, the people of God may have said to one another, *Don't forget, God is mindful of us.* Generations would rise & generations would pass. & the people of God were holding on to this promise God had made to Abraham. God's mindfulness of us is revealed through the giving of His Son to us. CS Lewis explained that this earth is *enemy-occupied territory, & Christianity is the story of how the rightful King has landed, you might say in disguise.... God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.*<sup>8</sup> Why would He do that? Because He is mindful. At the perfect time, Mary has an angel come to her & say, *Mary, you're highly favored by God (Lk 1:30) & will bear His Son, your Savior.* What must she have thought? *Who, me? Why me? Why is God mindful of me? This must be the fulfillment of His promise! A child is to be born & a Son is to be given.* & she responds, *My soul magnifies God. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior because He's been mindful of me.* She doesn't say, *I deserve it! God finally figured out how great I am!* No, she says, *He's been mindful of the humble state of His slave (47-48).* & He's mindful of each one of us. He's personally involved with humanity. Mary knew the coming of the Messiah marked the peak of redemptive history. Her Son would **save His people from their sins** (Mt 1:21; cf Jn 1:29), because the purpose for His coming was **to seek & to save that which was lost** (Lk 19:10). The thrilling reality

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<sup>8</sup> *Mere Christianity*, pp 46, 52

that through her the Messiah would be born into the world prompted Mary to praise & worship her Redeemer who was mindful of her. 2<sup>nd</sup>...

**2. God is Mighty** Mary describes God as **the Mighty One** (49) who **has done mighty deeds with His arm** (51), which is simply describing God in human terms so we can understand it. It's a picture to help us understand that this mighty God has stepped forward & acted. We find that again & again in Scripture. From Gen 1 on, the Bible speaks of the great & marvelous acts performed by the mighty arm of God. No tower of Babel can dare Him. No Pharaoh can resist Him. No Sennacherib can defy Him. No Belshazzar can best Him. No Herod can outmaneuver Him. No Caesar can withstand him. He alone is mighty & Mary knew it. Her song mentions this as she reflects on what God has done throughout history. She realizes He's mindful of His promises & mighty in His deeds. As a mighty Warrior, He turns human attitudes upside down. What has He done? **A. He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart** (51). He's reduced them to nothing. **B. Vs 52, He has brought down rulers from their thrones.** The proud empires of the world eventually crumble into nothing. God raises up kingdoms & brings them down. **C. Vs 53, He has ... sent away the rich empty-handed.** Do you see the paradox here? The rich are empty. Is it possible to be rich & empty? Obviously. The more the rich have the more they want & the emptier & more hollow things seem to be. We must all find that true riches are found only in Jesus. Paul tells us, **You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that we through His poverty might become rich** (2 Cor 8:9). That's the riches Mary's Baby came to bring. God scatters those who are proud (51), not vindictively but purposefully. He sets people down so they might be delivered from their arrogance & pride. That's the story of Saul of Tarsus, isn't it? He obviously had some influence & was on his way to deal with this Jesus movement & stamp it out. But then he meets Jesus & ends up groveling on the ground before Him. In his blindness on the dust of the road, he hears a voice from heaven saying, **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?** (Acts 9:4). You know the story. Eventually he comes to write much of the NT. In his letter to the Philippians, he writes, *You know all the things I used to prize, all the things that made me who I*

*was, all the things I thought gave me significance? I regard all of them now as nothing. Why? For the sake of knowing Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8). In other words, he says,*

*I've experienced a revolution. I once would've explained my life in terms of being powerful, intellectual, & all that goes with it. But now I'm here to tell you that none of that matters to me. All that matters is knowing Jesus. That's immeasurably better. All I once held dear & built my life upon, all the things I yearned for, all these things, I count as absolute nothing in comparison to knowing Jesus.*

That's why, in God's might, He scatters the proud, reduces rulers to nothing, & sends the rich away empty. Remember the rich young ruler? Why does he go away sad, especially when he approached Jesus with a great question? Mark tells us he **ran up to Jesus & knelt before Him, & asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** (10:17). That's a great question. But at the end of the conversation, **he was saddened, & he went away grieving** (22). Why? Because **he was one who owned much property** (22). Though rich, he left Jesus empty-handed because he valued wealth to be everything.

At 1<sup>st</sup> glance, scattering the proud, bringing down rulers, & sending the rich away empty seems at odds with the idea of a mindful God who cares about people. But it's because God cares that He uses His might in this way. When life is good, successful, & comfortable, it's easy to think we don't need Him. When life is good, it's easy to kid ourselves that we're mightier than we truly are & to forget the God who's truly mightier than we are. He has toppled the mighty from their thrones. Remember Nebuchadnezzar? He was the most powerful man on earth in his day & he knew it. Daniel chpt 4 tells of God's humbling of this mighty man. When God's judgment on him was lifted & Nebuchadnezzar returned to his senses, he immediately declared, **Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt & honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true & His ways just, & He is able to humble those who walk in pride** (Dan 4:37). How many times throughout history has God toppled the Herods & Hitlers & Husseins of the world? He brings them low.

In His might He also **D. Exalts the humble** (52). Mary herself shows us this. Vs 48 tells us God **had regard for the humble state of His bondservant & all generations will count me blessed**. Mary's humble state involved more than just her standing in Jewish society. It had to do with her spiritual character. She acknowledged that she, like everyone, was a sinner, in need of a Savior. Like all

true worshipers, Mary had a lofty view of the Lord & a lowly view of herself. If she was the most exalted of women (cf 1:42), she, at the same time, was the most humble of women (Lk 14:11). It's such humility that God requires and blesses (Js 4:6). **E. God fills the hungry** (53). Those who truly hunger & thirst for righteousness are filled (Mt 5:6; Ps 34:10). As Jesus told the woman at the well, **whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a fount of water springing up to eternal life** (Jn 4:14). Then Mary says that... **E. God has given help to Israel** (54). We see this throughout Scripture & we'll see it in Zechariah's song (Lk 1:71). God is mindful of us & God is mighty for us because ...

**3. God is Merciful** God is merciful, then & now. Vs 50 says, **His mercy is upon generation upon generation toward those who fear Him**. To fear God is to trust, love, & obey Him. Vss 54-55 say, **He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham & his descendants forever**. This is the Readers Digest condensed version of the story of God's people. It's a summary of God's absolute commitment to & His persistent refusal to wash His hands of His rebellious people. Why has anyone ever been saved? Because God's mercy has been upon them. We will all one day stand before the throne of God & say, *Our God is mighty to save. Your mercy has been given to me*. That's why, in the midst of all of the darkness in the days of Lamentations 3, with all the bad things happening, Jeremiah suddenly bursts forth & says, **The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness** (22-23). By the time the angel visited Mary, 2,000 years had passed since God made His promise to Abraham. The kingdom of Judah had ceased to exist 600 years earlier & there'd been no prophets for 400 years. All this time passed, yet God's promise remained unfulfilled. & yet His mercy continued. The words of the psalmist describe this dark time as he asks, **Has God forgotten to be gracious or merciful? Has he in anger withdrawn His compassion?** (77:9). No, of course not. & in the fullness of time, God was merciful & sent a Savior. God cannot lie. What He promises He will do. In 2 Cor 1:20 Paul writes, **For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ** (NIV). All of God's promises to us are fulfilled in the indescribable gift of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Mary clearly had some inkling that what was



happening within her was the fulfillment of the age-old promise to Abraham, that God was sending the divine Messiah, Jesus the Savior, the eternal God incarnate. So she sang, **He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham & his descendants forever** (55). Mary sees that God is fulfilling all the promises He's made. The people of Israel had been cast down; they needed Someone to come & rescue them. So Mary says, *When I give birth to the Son, I'm giving birth to the Savior, the One prophesied, predicted, & promised. He's coming. All that was promised to Abraham, all this great mercy is coming into play. That's what my Son is all about.* The whole of the OT is looking forward to this event. God had promised Abraham, his seed, & all the peoples of the earth that there would be mercy & compassion. Their sins would be forgiven & blotted out. Mary's Son would be the fulfillment of all God's mercies because there's no forgiveness of sins apart from Jesus & Him crucified. There's no true knowledge of God apart from Jesus. All the OT prophets & psalmists pointed to this. They know this is what will fulfill all the promises of God & bring the mercy of God into the personal experience of mankind. It's all in & through our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ & what He did when He was in this world. & what God did when He sent His Son into this world is an absolute guarantee that He'll do everything He's ever promised to do.

It's because of God's mindfulness that He's kept a remnant of His people throughout all generations. Because God is mighty, we need to bow before Him. Because He's merciful, we ought to trust Him. The birth, life, death, & resurrection of Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Every one of us as a Christian is converted because God is fulfilling His promise to Abraham. This is why Joseph was in Egypt. Because God is mindful, mighty, & merciful, He wouldn't allow His people to be cut off & killed by famine. He put Joseph in a place in Egypt where he could rescue them. This is why out of the tragedy of Naomi's loss of her husband & 2 sons, we have the bloodline through which we get not only King David, but more importantly, King Jesus. Why? Because God is mindful & God is mighty & God is merciful. What's He doing? He's fulfilling His promise to Abraham, that through him **all the families of the earth will be blessed** (Gen 12:3). Paul tells the Galatians, **Abraham BELIEVED GOD, & IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, be sure that it is those who,** & notice what he says here, **it is those who are of faith who**

are sons of Abraham (Gal 3:6-7). The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.

Paul says those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham. Gal 3 continues,

**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. & if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise (26-28).**

Does that mean there are no longer gender differences? Nope. Does it mean there are no longer different nationalities? Nope. That there are no longer employers & employees? Nope. It means that the gospel transforms all of those relationships. That all those who are the true children of Abraham in terms of their faith (male, female, Jew, Greek, slave, freeman), have the privilege of being in that great company of oneness in Christ. **If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise (29).** What promise? The promise to Abraham. Mary viewed all of redemptive history as the outworking of the covenant which He **spoke to the fathers, to Abraham & his descendants forever** (Gen 12:1-3). The salvation promised there would be clarified in the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34) & would be ratified through the death of the Son Mary carried in her womb. It's only through the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ that all the sins of the redeemed (past, present, & future) are atoned for (Mt 20:28; Jn 10:15; Rom 3:24-26). The mindful, mighty, & merciful God has kept His promises. Like Mary, we, too, need to learn to trust God's promises. We walk by faith but faith leans on promises. The whole focus of Mary's song is on our promise-keeping God & His faithfulness in fulfilling the promises He's made to His people. But this Christmas carol of Mary won't make any difference to you unless you believe what Mary is saying. She's saying that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Savior of the world, promised in God's covenant with Abraham, & that to believe on Him is to have eternal fellowship with Him. No matter how many times you might have heard this song, if you've never trusted in the Savior of this song, if you've never trusted in the God this song is about, trust Him now. God has mercifully reached out with His mighty arm in His Son & saved the people He's mindful of from their sins. In Him we're forgiven & justified forever. In Him we find mercy. That's why Mary was singing this song. She was saying that her son, Jesus Christ, was her Savior. Is He yours? God is mindful, mighty, & merciful. He was to Mary & He is to us. In the words of Kittie Suffield's hymn:

*God is still on the throne,  
& He will remember His own.  
Though trials may press us  
& burdens distress us,  
He never will leave us alone.  
God is still on the throne,  
& He will remember His own,  
& His promise is true,  
He will not forget you,  
for God is still on the throne.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> *God is Still on the Throne*, 1929, [www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/g/o/d/s/godstill.htm](http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/g/o/d/s/godstill.htm)