



3. He exalts the Humble (Luke 1:46-55)

Luke 1:46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

We saw last time how that the prophecy of Zechariah lays foundations for the gospel of Luke as it underlines that our God is a redeeming God. What unfolds in Luke is a work of sovereign grace. That comes clearly from that prophecy. It's an important fact to take on board as we come to our second character in this first chapter of Luke. That character is Mary and today we are going to look at her.

Mary. How many times have we heard a sermon on her? A few more times than one on Zechariah's prophecy I think. Why? Is it fear that we will be seen as Catholic to do so? If that's the case then that's silly. The story of Mary has been related to us for our instruction – so we should learn from her.

Did you know that Mary was a cat lover? She did have a Magnifi Cat you know! But seriously, the message that comes from Mary's story is that God chose just an ordinary person like you and me to bring conception and carry His Son. And it's a pity that in the nonsense that 20 centuries has produced about Mary, that we so rarely hear what God is teaching through here, even though as I suggested, Luke's source is very close to the family if not the family itself.

So who was Mary? Her "real" name was Miriam - a common name in those days. All we know of her is that she was living in Nazareth at the time Gabriel visited her. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." You have found favour with God? Why? No reason is given. It was just a work of grace. God had chose her.

Was she specially moral? Catholics suggest she was. When they don't suggest that then they suggest she was perfect, herself being immaculately conceived as sinless – a doctrine someone thought up in 1854. And that's the nonsense of it. The Gospel of Luke goes out of the way to stress her ordinariness, her poverty, her humble position in life – God made somebody special who wasn't in order to serve His purposes. She wasn't different to other people. She was the same. Just a typical person. God takes typical people and makes them special.

Mary never needed to be different to others, or live a life morally superior to other people. She just

needed to be a typical human. It wasn't Mary, the human being that made Jesus sinless, but the fact that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit. She was a typical sinful human and God chose to bring His sinless, spotless Son into this world.

But how could One so holy be carried by a sinful human being? This is the other point that is part of the error of the Immaculate Conception. So how could the holy Eternal Son be carried as a foetus in a woman. For the same reason that the Holy Spirit indwells each of us. Because of His love for us, the dwelling of God is with men and He chose to become part of our race to redeem us. What a wonderful God we have!!

So Mary was a typical example of the human race, except of course she was a member of God's earthly chosen people and had the right tribal lineage. The only thing we know about her faith is that she feared God and was clearly open to God in a way that allowed Him to work in the amazing way through her. We know she feared God because she says so in this remarkable piece of what is again prophetic speech – the Magnificat which reflects that she understood the manner by which God works amongst His people. She wasn't a sinless paragon or the greatest A1 believer but she displayed two characteristics which allowed God to use her – and they are basic – and we should also have the same two characteristics if we want God to work in our lives.

So what are they?

- She feared God

"My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

Here we had someone who put God first. She glorified Him because she realised how gracious God had been to her. She didn't deserve the fame she knew she was going to get down the generations. He was holy - set apart, different. And she recognised that He was merciful to those who fear Him.

God has shown His grace towards us because that Saviour she bore is now our Saviour because of his death and resurrection. God worked in her life because she was ready to put God first. Do we want to see God glorified in our lives and our church? Then He needs to be first. First in the decisions we make. First in our attitudes in life. First in our worship.

If He's not being glorified in our lives and in the church, then we need to ask the question: where is He? Where is He? He's not first.

- She understood humility

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Mary knew her place before God. She was from a humble home. She seems to have lived a quiet life. She was just an unassuming person. And God used her. In this word she recognises that God did not choose her because of how important she was, but just that she was humble and ready to listen to His voice.

So who aren't those who God does not provide mighty deeds for? Who does He destroy? It's the proud and it's the rich. We live in the fifth largest economy in the world. We are the rich in the world. We are the ones in plenty as others go starving. We are the ones who use up the resources so others can't get them. We are the ones who exploit resources so that they destroy the environment. So who do you think God is going to bless? You may think that we are blessed because we have nice houses, nice belongings, nice cars. But the basic rule of scripture is that God exalts the humble but brings to nothing the rich. Look at the church in this land. It's contracting, its dying. People are no longer desiring to be part of it. And we think that we are OK?

I think not. We have a God who does show mercy. But not to the proud and not to the rich - only the humble in heart. It's an abiding OT theme that Mary understood and acted accordingly.

What she said reflected the truth of God as revealed in scripture *Ps 146:7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed, He gives food to the hungry* or *Ps 147:11 the Lord delights in those that fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love* or *Ps 94:2 rise up O Judge of all the earth, pay back the proud what they deserve* and *Micah 7:20 You will be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.*

He is a God who does not bless the rich. He is also a God who brings down the proud. We live in a society of self-importance, where people promote their own dignity and self worth. Yet God shows mercy to the humble because He knows that it is the humble heart that receives form Him.

You you want to receive form God this morning. Then it's time to put God first and yourself last. It's time to be humble and ready for Him to use you. You've had the challenges over my time here. Now the message is simple. God gave you the challenges so you should be changed. That means fearing God, that means coming before Him in humility; ready and waiting for the Spirit to change you.

Prayer

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Scripture Quotes NIV*