

My Soul Praises the Lord (The Song of Mary)  
Luke 1:39-56  
Key Verse: 1:46,47

"And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior....'"

This passage tells us what happened after Mary accepted the angel's message. First, Mary made an act of faith to visit Elizabeth based on the word of God. Second, Elizabeth encouraged Mary through the Holy Spirit. Third, Mary burst into a song of praise to God. As we listen to Mary's song we discover God's best blessing for us. We find that this blessing is the source of true and everlasting joy. This blessing is free of charge and available for us today. Let's accept God's best blessing through this passage.

#### I. The beautiful spiritual fellowship of Mary and Elizabeth (39-45)

Mary had just heard from the angel that, at last, God was sending the promised Messiah into the world. His name was Jesus. He would be great because he is in very nature God. He would reign on David's throne with peace and love, justice, truth and righteousness. His kingdom would never end. God had chosen Mary as the mother of the Messiah. Mary accepted this great grace with faith and obedience. What an experience Mary had with the angel! What should she do next? Go to Joseph and try to explain what had happened? Go to her local Rabbi and ask his help? Begin to tell her friends and neighbors that she was the one chosen by God? Or should she just calm down for a while until she could digest all of this?

Look at verses 39-40. "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth." These verses tell us that Mary knew exactly what to do. She got ready right away and went to visit Elizabeth. She remembered the angel's message that Elizabeth was going to have a son. She took this as God's invitation to visit Elizabeth. In this way, Mary sought to follow the word of God. Sometimes, we don't know what to do. But when we listen to the word of God, we find wisdom and clear direction to guide us. Mary prepared for an extended visit by packing enough clothes and other things she would need. She must have obtained permission from her parents and her fiancé. If she were a contemporary girl, she might have had to withdraw from her classes or take a leave of absence from work. Then, as quickly as possible, she went to Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

Mary's act was an act of faith based on the word of God. This kind of act of faith is most precious in the work of God and for one's own spiritual growth. This year about 40 student disciples of Jesus in the Chicago area have been preparing for Christmas worship service in a special way. To know the spiritual meaning of the baby in a manger, we have visited other chapters: West Loop, NIU, and Wright College, to have group Bible study, spending much time and effort during the last three Saturdays. This act of faith has been enlightening and helped us understand the baby in a manger better. Many have tasted the joy of the baby in a manger in their souls. For the last week, we at the Chicago center have prayed for our precious sheep to attend the Christmas worship service. Now we must perform acts of faith by visiting them. Then we can understand Jesus who came to visit us.

Mary's greeting was not just a lame, "Hey, Aunt Liz." We don't know exactly what Mary said, but we know that it was a very powerful greeting. Look at verse 41. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." Two things happened at Mary's greeting. First, baby John the Baptist leaped for joy (44). Maybe he began doing somersaults in the womb. In this way, John testified that Jesus is the Messiah even before birth. John's testimony must have had a great impact on his mother and helped open her spiritual eyes.

Second, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth, an older woman, received the Holy Spirit through the greeting of Mary, a younger woman. Elizabeth, the wife of a devout priest, received the Holy Spirit through the greeting of Mary, an ordinary unwed country girl. How was this possible? It was because Mary had the word of God in her heart through the angel's message, and Mary had received the Holy Spirit from above. The Holy Spirit works through faith and through the word of God, regardless of human conditions. This past week, many have presented messages from the word of God at our nightly prayer meetings. Through their faith, both young and old, the Holy Spirit worked among us. Some people think that blessing only flows from older to younger. But this is not true. The Holy Spirit works through faith, regardless of human condition. When young people believe the word of God in

their hearts and receive the Holy Spirit, they can be a tremendous blessing to older people. History proves that many spiritual revivals were kindled by the Holy Spirit through the faith of young people. Some examples are the Cambridge Seven, the Student Volunteer Movement, and UBF missionaries who went into mission fields all over the world at a young age. The USA can be changed by young people who believe and obey God's word.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth, in turn, blessed Mary profusely. Look at verses 42-43. "In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'" Elizabeth's blessing of Mary is remarkable. Elizabeth had experienced the mighty work of God to conceive a son in her old age. As John grew in Elizabeth's womb day by day, the evidence of God's love was manifest so plainly that Elizabeth could not but praise God for granting her a son. And what a son he was: John the Baptist! We would expect her to talk with Mary all about John. However, Elizabeth immediately began to speak about Mary's blessing and Mary's child. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth was deeply aware of God's presence. She was a God-centered woman, not a self-centered woman. Some women cannot rejoice over the blessing of others because of jealousy. But Elizabeth was free to bless Mary with a loud voice. Elizabeth did not feel compelled to maintain a superior position over Mary as her senior. Elizabeth took a lower position, acknowledging Mary as the mother of her Lord. She could do so because the Holy Spirit was with her. The Holy Spirit loves to exalt and glorify Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of freedom (2 Cor 3:17). The Holy Spirit enabled Elizabeth to encourage Mary when she needed it.

Why might Elizabeth's words of affirmation be important to Mary? Mary had already received God's favor directly through the angel. The angel had been very clear and uncompromising, but not very understanding of a mere teenage girl. Mary needed a human friend and shepherd, especially an older woman. Elizabeth, who had experienced the power of God in a similar way, could uniquely understand and encourage Mary. She was the best person for Mary to meet and have fellowship with at this time. God raised Elizabeth as Mary's best friend and shepherd, and entrusted Mary to her care. Elizabeth was not only understanding and kind, she was also absolute about God's work. Her strongest affirmation is in verse 45. "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" Elizabeth emphasized that Mary was blessed by God. Elizabeth did not talk about Mary's inexperience or the difficulty of the mission. Rather, she emphasized God's blessing. This really strengthened Mary at a crucial time.

We live in a society that is particularly centered on self and marked by nasty competition. To promote oneself, many are willing to put down others, often by speaking critically and cynically. This can be terribly damaging. In order to raise many women of faith who can be used by God, we must create a spiritual atmosphere in which encouragement and affirmation are showered on those who sincerely struggle to serve God. Then we will hear many songs of praise by young American women in our midst. In this part we learn that young people can bless older people when they have the word of God in their hearts. Older people can encourage younger people when they are full of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray for and practice such beautiful fellowship in our ministry.

## II. Mary's song (46-55)

Encouraged by Elizabeth's spiritual blessing upon her, Mary burst into a song of praise to God. This famous song is known as "The Magnificat." This comes from the Latin, "My soul magnifies the Lord." We can divide this song into two parts. In verses 46-49 Mary praises God for his personal grace of salvation. In verses 50-56, Mary praises God for his divine character.

First, "my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (46-49). Look at verse 46. "And Mary said: 'My soul glorifies the Lord....'" Other translations say, "My soul magnifies the Lord." To magnify is to make something larger and more clear. Mary was making God's presence in her life and in the history of her people more clear and apparent. It was because God was in her soul. Through the word of God, the Lord himself came to live in her soul. She had become the temple for God to dwell in. This was the source of her blessing, and this is how she could bless Elizabeth. In a sense, this blessedness is unique to Mary, who bore the Son of God in her womb. However, spiritually speaking, it is for all who obey God's word by faith. Jesus said John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." God comes to dwell in those who love Jesus and obey his teaching. When we struggle to obey the command to love one another, Jesus comes into our hearts. When we struggle to obey the world mission command, Jesus comes into our hearts to live.

Look at verse 47. "...and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...." When God was in her soul, Mary's spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. God became her source of joy that overflowed in her spirit and burst out into a song of praise. This joy was not just an emotion. It was deep and abiding in her soul and it was rooted in the eternity of God and the truth of who he is and what he had done for her. So this joy is an abiding and constant joy. It does not change according to our situation, but is always welling up in our souls.

Mary calls the Lord "God my Savior." This particular phrase, or its equivalent, appears about 25 times in the Bible, and is used most often by David in the psalms. This phrase refers to the God of Israel as the one and only true God who meets his servant personally to save him and his people. David sang about God his Savior who delivered him from all of his enemies and gave him victory and peace (Ps 18:46; 24:5; 25:5; 27:9). Mary knew that she needed a Savior. She was not free from the power of sin or the reality of death. She had an adversary Satan who was stronger than she. She would face many practical problems as she tried to realize the blessing God had given her. However, in all these things, God her Savior would liberate her and give her victory. Mary had absolute assurance of this. Mary's spirit rejoiced in God her Savior, who had given grace to her.

David called this "the joy of salvation" (Ps 51:12). This joy is in God himself and we receive it in our souls when God dwells in our souls. It is different than the joy of receiving many kinds of blessings from God. The prophet Habbakuk expresses this joy in 3:17-18, saying, "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior." This joy is freely offered to all who believe in Jesus. When we confess Jesus as Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we are saved (Ro 10:9). God brings us into a personal relationship with him which is characterized by joy (Ro 5:2-3). That is why the angel said the birth of Jesus is good news of great joy. When we believe the good news we have great joy, joy that wells up from our souls simply because God is there. This is the best gift of God to us. Let's accept it at in Christmas season.

Mary knew that she had received grace because God was mindful of her (48a). Humanly speaking she was just a humble maiden. But she was known by God and favored by God. God takes personal notice of humble people. Mary was very confident about her blessed life and future. She was sure that all generations would call her blessed. This conviction comes to those who surrender their lives to the Mighty God. When the Mighty God, who is eternal, uses a person, it brings everlasting blessing and glory. Mary knew that she would face difficulties. Yet this was insignificant compared to the everlasting glory that she would receive. Mary reminds us of St. Paul, who said in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

Second, the Lord has performed mighty deeds with his arm (50-56). In this part, Mary praises God because of his most excellent character. We learn several things about God. God extends his mercy to those who fear him (50). God understands our weakness and our need. When we come to him in reverent fear, he does not rebuke us, but accepts us as his precious children and helps us in the best way according to his wisdom. God performs mighty deeds with his arm (51a). God exercises his almighty power in two ways. God scatters the proud, deposing them; and, at the same time, God lifts up the humble (51b-52). When we consider powerful oppressors, such as those in Zimbabwe or North Korea, we shudder at how their tyranny damages their people and nation. We may want to depose these rulers and restore health and prosperity to their people. However, this requires great power. Weak and sinful human beings cannot bring about true justice. Yet Almighty God can and he does. God brings down rulers from their thrones. At the same time, God exalts and blesses the humble, and makes them prosperous and fruitful. When Moses was broken by failure and humbled by obscurity, he became useful to God as the deliverer of his people. When David was disregarded as a mere youngest son, he was useful to God and God raised him as the shepherd of his people. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. When we humble ourselves before God, he will raise us up. God's equity is revealed, not only in terms of power to rule, but also in regard to the distribution of wealth, according to verse 53.

One of the most important attributes of God is his faithfulness. Look at verses 54-55. "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." God remembers his people, to whom he makes promises. The promises made to Abraham were still effective in the time of Mary. The promises God made to Jesus are still effective for us today. I believe God has given us a promise to establish a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God made this clear through the ministry of his servant, Dr. Samuel

Lee, and many of us have this conviction in our hearts. When we see the current condition of our nation, we may feel that this prayer topic so too difficult. However, God is faithful, and he will do as he has said.

Today we have thought mostly about Mary's song of joy that came from her soul when God was there. Man must have a kind of joy to be happy because God made man to be joyful. Everyone is seeking some kind of joy, especially at this Christmas season. However, what kind of joy we seek makes a great difference in our lives. Some people seek the fleeting joy that comes from holiday parties. This leads to despair and meaninglessness. Others anticipate the joy that will come from finishing final exams. But another semester or a lifelong career of work follow that. Still others look forward to the joy that comes from spending time with loved ones. Yet none of these joys can last forever. Moreover, none of these joys makes us 100% joyful; tinges of sorrow remain in our hearts. However, the joy that Jesus gives is pure and everlasting. Let's accept God's best blessing for us, the baby Jesus, at this Christmas season.