



Christchurch, Ilkley

Notes for Adult discussion groups at On-Line@9 Worship Service on
22 February 2009

Luke 1:46-55

Mary's Song of Praise – The Magnificat

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 for ever, even as he said to our fathers.

1 Samuel 2:1-10 Hannah's Prayer

¹ Then Hannah prayed and said: My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. ²There is no-one holy like the LORD; there is no-one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. ⁴The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. ⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. ⁶The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. ⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. ⁸ 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 honour. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. ⁹ He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰ those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

*Scripture quotations taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.
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See over for discussion notes

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Background

This song is often called the *Magnificat*, the first word in the Latin translation of this passage. Mary's song has been used in church's liturgy for many centuries, and has often been used as the basis for choral music and hymns. Like Hannah (see 1 Samuel 2:1-10 – a passage with which Mary would have been familiar), Mary glorified God in song for what he was going to do for the world through her. Notice that, in both songs, God is pictured as a champion of the poor, the oppressed, and the despised.

Discussion

When Mary said "From now on all generations will call me blessed" was she being proud?

No! She was recognising and accepting the gift God had given her. Note her positive response (v38); it was not just a simple acceptance of what God was offering. What if Mary had said NO! (Discuss)

Summary

If Mary had denied her incredible position, she would have been throwing God's blessing back at him.

Pride is refusing to accept God's gifts or taking credit for what God has done; **humility** is accepting the gifts and using them to praise and serve God.

Application

- What are your God-given gifts?
- Do others see gifts in you that you cannot see in yourself?
- Are you too proud to acknowledge your own gifts? If you are, then you are denying God and His will with you and for you.
- Don't deny, belittle, or ignore your gifts. Thank God for them and use them to his glory.
- Thanks for God acting in our own lives leads to thanks for how God can act in the lives of others.

Theological comment

Perhaps it is possible to become so caught up in thought and discussion about the "problem of pain" and the question marks that this sets against the power and purpose of God that we forget altogether about the experience of joy. For us there is no "problem of joy," since this represents a side to life that we welcome and will actively seek. Joy and sorrow, however, are two edges of a spectrum which has many colours, and we cannot properly and fairly consider one without paying attention to the other. They both belong to the world of human relationships and of human experience. It is a very fitting and memorable tribute to Mary, therefore, that through her prayer of overwhelming joy and delight in God, she should constantly bring our attention back to a recollection of the spiritual dimension of human happiness.

Concluding thought:

Human joy can never be a merely profane and secular experience when it is interpreted in the light of Mary's "**Magnificat**".