

JESUS: BORN OF MARY TO SAVE

SERIES: THE MESSIANIC PROPHECIES OF JESUS

by Ron Ritchie

Philip Yancey wrote a book a couple of years ago called *Disappointment with God*. He said that he found he needed to get away from the normal pressures of life for a couple of weeks in order to prepare his mind and heart for this difficult subject. He secured a cabin in the mountains of Colorado just as the snow began to fall. He writes:

I brought along a suitcase full of books to study, but during my entire time there I opened only the Bible. I started at Genesis late the first afternoon, a day of heavy snowfall. It was a perfect setting for reading the story of creation. Clouds lifted in time for a spectacular alpenglow sunset, with puffs of snow pluming off the tops of the mountain peaks, like pink cotton candy. At night the clouds closed in again, and snow blew furiously. I read straight through the Bible, slowly, cover to cover. By the time I reached Deuteronomy, snow covered the bottom step; when I hit the Prophets it had crept up the mailbox post; and when I finally made it to Revelation I had to call for a snowplow to unbury the driveway. It struck me forcefully there that our common impressions of God may be very different from the God the Bible actually portrays.

Yancey concluded that the God of the Bible is a God who cares for us and wants to have a love relationship with us. That is, not only does he love us, but he wants us to love him.

In Luke 1:46-55 we will discover from the song of the virgin Mary two things it means to be in a love relationship with God: First, she knew who God was (my savior) and what his purposes were for her and the people of Israel from his word, and second, she was available to serve him in whatever way he wanted.

God's love for us and his offer of salvation is beautifully revealed in the messianic prophecies that span thousands of years of human history. We can see his love in Genesis 3:15 when God told Satan after the temptation and sin of Adam and Eve,

"...I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

This prophecy not only informed Satan of his downfall, but it also placed in the heart of Eve the promise of a savior out of her womb who would defeat Satan.

We can see God's love in Isaiah 7:14 when he promised the house of David a sign: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

We can see his love some 750 years later when he sent the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary to say, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David...." (Luke 1:30-32.)

His love for us translates into salvation.

Mary has given us a wonderful example of loving God in return in the song she sang to him, when she realized that he had blessed her with a son who was the fulfillment of the hope of generations of faithful men and women who were looking for God's promised Savior. His name would be Jesus, and he would be born to save.

The Song of Mary

Luke 1:46-55

My soul exalts the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave;

For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name.

And His mercy is upon generation after generation
Toward those who fear Him.

He has done mighty deeds with His arm;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
And has exalted those who were humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things;
And sent away the rich empty-handed.
He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy,
As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his offspring forever.

Six months before Mary composed this song, during the final days of King Herod's reign in Palestine, our loving God had sent an angel named Gabriel to Jerusalem to bring good news to a righteous couple who were advanced in years. Zachariah was a priest married to a cousin of Mary's named Elizabeth, who was barren. This priest had been asking the Lord to bless his wife with a child. Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, Zachariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John." We now know that he would become the forerunner of the Messiah and would fulfill two prophecies, one given some 750 years earlier through the prophet Isaiah (40:3) and the other given 400 years earlier through the prophet Malachi (4:5).

Then Gabriel had visited Mary and given her the great news that she would become the mother of God Incarnate and fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would give birth to a son and call him Immanuel. Mary's response was, "Behold the bondslave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word."

On hearing Gabriel's word that Elizabeth was also with child, Mary immediately made a journey to Elizabeth's home in the hill country of Judah. As Mary greeted her, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth addressed Mary in a loud voice as a prophetess and said, "Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Ever since God had spoken the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, every woman of God had hoped that she would become the mother of the Messiah and Savior of mankind. Now for the first time in all those thousands of

years, a young virgin woman from Nazareth was selected by the one and only God of Israel to be the vessel of the Incarnation.

I was raised in a religion in which blessing Mary was overdone. But the more I read this passage, the more I realize that the Lord is asking us, as we will see here, to bless Mary and hold her in high esteem, to honor her, to be thankful that she had this kind of spirit. We are not to worship her or turn her into a co-savior or a mediator between us and God. But we are to really respect who she was, because through this passage God has told us to.

Now as we examine in detail the song of Mary to magnify the Lord God in response to Elizabeth's blessing, we will discover the depth of this young woman's knowledge of the word of God from the Law to the Prophets to the songs of her forefather David in the Psalms. From her song of praise we will find that she understood the love and power of God toward her as well as his wonderful plan of salvation for his people Israel and all who are willing to place their faith in him and in his Son Jesus the Messiah. It is a song of great humility.

God is My Savior

(Luke 1:46-48)

"My soul exalts the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has had regard for the humble state of his bondservant;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed."

The first line of Mary's song is found in 1 Samuel 2:1-2, which is the prayer of a woman named Hannah who had been barren. She and her husband had been praying for a child, and in time the Lord answered their prayer and she gave birth to a son named Samuel ("Because I Asked of the Lord"). Then when he was weaned she took him to the high priest, Eli, and dedicated him to the Lord. At that point Hannah broke out in the most wonderful prayer:

"My heart exults in the LORD,
My horn is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,
Because I rejoice in Thy salvation.
There is no one holy like the LORD,
Indeed, there is no one besides Thee,
Nor is there any rock like our God."

Mary and Hannah were both blessed by the loving God of the impossible.

Then Mary's spirit rejoices in God her Savior. In the wider context Mary and Joseph and all of us who are born in Adam need a Savior to save us from our sins. Once we place our faith in God to do this, we become his spiritual children, and the sin that separated us from God is forever erased. This was already true for Mary, so now when she speaks of a Savior she is thinking of the One who can deliver her from her invisible and visible enemies.

Mary reaches back to words written a thousand years earlier in Psalm 34 by her forefather David. God had anointed him to be the king of Israel even while Saul was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. This situation caused the jealous Saul to pursue David in the wilderness of Judah, and during that time David found himself in the camp of the Philistines, the enemies of Israel. He cried out to the Lord to save him, and God was his deliverer. As a result of his deliverance he wrote this song of praise (Psalm 34:2):

"My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
the humble shall hear it and rejoice.
O magnify the LORD with me,

and let us exalt His name together."

Through the Holy Spirit, Mary chose this psalm to praise the Lord because it was a well-known messianic psalm. As she recalled it, she may or may not have realized at this young age that her joy would one day turn to sorrow because also in Psalm 34 were the words,

"He keeps all his bones;
Not one of them is broken."

To be chosen of God so often means at one and the same time a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow.

Then Mary went on to quote verse 9 of Psalm 35, another song of David's written in the same season, when he was being pursued by Saul to the death:

"And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD;
It shall exult in his salvation."

In his humility David was calling on the only one who could save him from this great and deadly trouble: "Lord God, please fight on my behalf against those who are fighting me. Put on your uniform and take up your weapons, the buckler and shield, the spear and the battle-ax and help me, for they are pursuing me. You are my salvation! Please deal with my enemies as a holy, righteous, and just God. And may the angel of the Lord [the preincarnate Christ, mentioned twice here and also in 34:7] drive them like the chaff before the wind. Let their way be dark and slippery, for they have sought to kill me without cause. Let destruction come upon my enemies. Dear Lord, you are the only one who can save me, and in that salvation my soul shall rejoice in the Lord; it shall exult in his salvation. For all my bones will say, 'In the most terrifying moments of my life you saved me.' And now I will say, 'Lord, who is there anywhere on this earth like you?'"

Psalms 34 and 35 were not only messianic psalms about the coming Savior and the struggles he would have with his enemies as symbolized by David's experiences (and later by the remnant of Israel in the great tribulation). But remembering them, Mary could look at her own circumstances as well as the days and years ahead of her and cry out to God to save her and her son. For as David did, she also needed to pray that God would deliver her from her enemies. She would need a Savior against those who would try to inflict emotional harm on her by spreading gossip that she had had a sexual affair with another man and Joseph had married her to cover up her mysterious pregnancy (see John 8:41), and other gossip that she was raped by a Roman soldier. In Psalm 69, another messianic psalm, she and her Son would become "the song of the drunkards" and the subject of the condemnation of "those who sit in the gate" (verse 12), and Joseph would be seen as a fool to marry her.

She would need a Savior against those who would try to have her son killed, from King Herod to the pockets of the religious among the "seeds of Satan" including Judas and the high priest, as well as the Roman governor.

She would need a Savior against those who would have her believe her son had died on the cross with no hope of a resurrection, even though he had told his friends Mary and Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25-26.)

Mary recognized that God was her Savior as he had been to all his people in every generation, especially Hannah and her forefather David. As a result, her heart was filled with a desire to magnify the Lord God of Israel, and she rejoiced in God her Savior, her deliverer, her help, her security and victory over all her enemies visible and invisible. Her song also recognizes that God is the Savior of the Jews, who had hoped that God would deliver Israel from their hated Roman enemies. In reality the Savior was more interested in delivering men and women from the kingdom of darkness and the power of sin and death authored by Satan.

Mary's heart was filled with humility. This young Jewish woman now pregnant with the Savior of the world could not get over how God loved her and was placing her in a position of such honor. His love humbled her,

and all she wanted was to be his bondservant. Yet she also saw clearly that this promised Messiah within her womb would place her in a position in which generation after generation of the faithful remnant of Jews and Gentiles would understand that God had greatly gifted her and would count her blessed for being chosen to bring forth "...a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

According to all the research done on the life of Mary, she could not have been more than sixteen or seventeen years old at this time. As the choir was singing this morning, I was looking at several of the young women and trying to visualize one of them as Mary. Where did Mary get this amazing maturity? No one can be as mature as she was at that age---unless they have steeped their life in the Scriptures and believed the God who has revealed himself.

A little girl was sitting near me this morning. Her name was Kelly, and she was six years old. Her father said to her, "Tell Ron what happened this week." And she said, "I finished reading the whole Bible." That represents Mary's quality of life. She understood her forefather David's songs; she sang them and absorbed them. When the angel came and revealed what was about to happen, it all fit. That was how she could say, "I am the bondservant of the living God. Whatever You want to do, do it."

Many of us struggle with an attitude that whines, "Why me?" And God always wants to reply, because he loves us, "Well, why not you? Don't we have a love relationship, and didn't you say your life was no longer your own, it was bought with a price? And didn't you say I could express myself through your life? When you were in real trouble and you wanted a savior, I made myself known to you immediately, forgave your sins, and gave you new life and my Holy Spirit. I gave you joy, comfort, and security in a relationship with the living God, and filled your heart with love and mercy. I gave you spiritual gifts and the hope of eternal life and a taste of it now. So when I ask you to participate in ministry, don't say, "Why me?" Be like Mary, who said, "I am your bondservant. Whatever you want to do, dear Lord, help yourself to my life."

As Mary prepared to give birth to the Son of God, she also realized from the word of God that her God was one of great strength.

God Is My Strength

Luke 1:49-50

"For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name.
And His mercy is upon generation after generation
Toward those who fear Him."

As Mary thought over the events that had occurred in the weeks before her visit to Elizabeth, she was overwhelmed that the Mighty One had done great things for her. She recalled once more the angel's words, "For nothing will be impossible with God." This was the Mighty God of Isaiah 9:6 that she was dealing with and she had nothing to fear.

"His name is holy," Mary continues, quoting from another great messianic psalm. Psalm 22:3 says,

"Yet Thou art holy,
O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel."

His name was to be set above all names in heaven and earth.

Then she quotes verses 17 and 18 of another of David's songs, Psalm 103. This was a song of praise from David based on all that God had done and for all that God is:

"But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him,

And His righteousness to children's children,
To those who keep His covenant,
And who remember His precepts to do them."

This Mighty God was very much involved with his people. He showed mercy to Abraham's wife Sarah when she was barren, and she gave birth to a son named Isaac (see Genesis 17:19). Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren, but Isaac prayed and God gave her a set of twins named Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25). Manoah had a wife who was barren but God blessed her with a son named Samson (Judges 13). Then there were Elkanah and Hannah who prayed that barren Hannah would have a child, and she bore a son named Samuel. Mary's cousin Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah were well beyond child-bearing years when an angel of the Lord foretold of the birth of their son John. And for Mary, just as for these others, the impossible was about to happen. She, a virgin, would bear a son and call him Jesus.

I know from personal experience here at PBC, especially in the Couples Class, that many of our mothers could write a song of praise to our loving and gracious God for the gift of a child that they never thought they could have. Within the last two years I have been walking alongside a couple who were once fearful that it would be impossible for them to have a child. Yet in spite of the temptation to give up, they took to heart the words of Gabriel, "For nothing will be impossible with God." God not only blessed them with a beautiful little girl, but the wife is about to give birth to another baby in a few weeks.

Then Mary realized from the word of God that her God was her warrior-judge.

God Is My Warrior-Judge

Luke 1:51-54

"He has done mighty deeds with His arm;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things;
And sent away the rich empty-handed.
He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy...."

Mary's mind and heart turned to the works of her mighty God. She uses seven verbs in the past tense to encourage her heart for the present as well as the future. She understood based on the Scriptures that God (1) did mighty deeds with His arm (Psalm 98:1):

"O sing to the LORD a new song,
For He has done wonderful things,
His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.

The LORD has made known His salvation;
He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations."

(2) He scattered the proud (Deuteronomy 4:27; 7:6-11). (3) He brought down ungodly rulers from their thrones. Mary remembered his holy arm over Pharaoh in Egypt; over the enemies in Canaan; over the wicked kings of Israel and Judah; and over the kings of Assyria and Babylon, Persia, Greece, and now, as Israel hoped, Rome. At the same time (4) he exalted humble men and women like Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Esther, David, Isaiah, Daniel, and Elizabeth, to mention but a few, all of whom led up to her yet unborn Son Jesus. (5) He filled the needs of the hungry, both physically and spiritually (Psalm 107:9). (6) He sent the rich away empty-handed. And (7) he gave help to Israel his servant, in remembrance of his mercy (Psalm 98:3).

Finally, Mary realized from the word of God that her God was her faithful promise-keeper.

God Is My Promise-Keeper

Luke 1:55

"...As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his offspring forever."

Mary sings that God is faithful and merciful in keeping his promises. Now, Mary recognized that in the past as well as the present, Israel was being judged of God. According to Deuteronomy 28 he was allowing the Roman heel to be placed on their necks for their disobedience and apostasy. But if they would repent of their sins, God would extend mercy to them and fulfill the covenant he had made with Abraham (Genesis 17:19). This covenant was the foundational hope of Israel, for God had promised to bless the people of Israel by the seed of Abraham, the coming Messiah (Psalm 132:11-12). Abraham placed his faith in God and believed, based on God's word, that his barren wife Sarah would one day give birth to a son. He believed that he would have a great name, a land, and a multitude of descendants (see Deuteronomy 7:6-11). Mary understood the Son within her womb to be that very one in whom all the blessings that God promised Abraham would be fulfilled! And these blessings would also be upon all within the Gentile nations who believed in him as their Savior.

The God of the Bible is a God who loves us and wants us to love him, as Philip Yancey found. Mary had already understood that spiritual reality, and it was fully expressed when she broke out in song in the presence of her cousin Elizabeth. Based on her understanding of the word of God and especially the songs written by her forefather David, she sang a new song to the God who was her savior, strength, warrior-judge, and keeper of promises. And she was about to meet this personal loving God in the form of her newborn baby whom she was to call Jesus. This Jesus would be born to die and then to be raised from the dead in order to save us from our sins, rescue us from the dominion of darkness, and bring us into his wonderful kingdom.

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