

Chapter 3: The Magnificat of Mary

Luke 1:39–56

When Gabriel announced that Mary was about to conceive and bear a son, Gabriel insisted that this child will eventually become a king: “And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32b–33). Within the overall remarkable nature of this announcement that a virgin will conceive and bear a child, we may miss the equally remarkable reversal of power in this promise. In that story, God’s messenger promised a powerless, teenage girl from insignificant Nazareth that her son would eventually become the heir to the throne of David, king over the whole house of Jacob, and eternal ruler over an endless kingdom.

Only with this point in mind can we understand the reactions of Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1:39–56. Elizabeth rejoices that her Lord has come to visit her in utero, and Mary rejoices that God *has* overturned, and *will continue* to overturn, worldly power structures in human kingdoms. The advent of Jesus into the world signals more than a head start on a family for Mary and Joseph. The birth of this baby will mark the dawn of a new age that will be characterized by a new empire. In this passage, we see that *God sent Jesus into this world to overturn the kingdoms of this world.*

Rejoice Over the Advent of Jesus (Luke 1:39–45)

Beyond telling Mary that *she* was about to have a child, Gabriel also confirmed the promise by telling Mary that her relative Elizabeth had conceived and was in the sixth month of her pregnancy (Luke 1:36). Gabriel did not, however, explicitly tell Mary to visit Elizabeth. Nevertheless, Mary rushes “in haste” to visit Elizabeth:

[39] In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,
[40] and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39–40)

Although Gabriel did not explicitly instruct Mary to go to Elizabeth, it is probably right to recognize Gabriel’s words as an “implicit command.”¹ If Elizabeth’s pregnancy confirmed the miracle of Mary’s conception, how would it profit Mary’s faith if she did not go to see the sign of her elderly relative’s miraculous pregnancy with her own eyes? For Mary to ignore Elizabeth’s pregnancy would be like a Christian who refused to touch, taste, and see the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, being content only with hearing the words of institution. Certainly, the bread and the wine in themselves are nothing apart from God’s word telling us that the bread is a participation in the broken body of Christ, and that the wine is a participation in the shed blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). Even so,

¹ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 77.

when God gives his people a sign, he does so to confirm his word. True faith, therefore, does not treat such signs dismissively. Rather, true faith arises with haste to take advantage of God's signs for the strengthening and establishment of our faith. John Calvin puts it this way: "though believers are satisfied with the bare word of God, yet they do not disregard any of his works which they find to be conducive to strengthen their faith."² For this reason, Mary arises with haste to visit Elizabeth.

The Witness of John

After Mary greets Elizabeth, both Elizabeth and John, the baby in Elizabeth's womb, respond to Mary's presence. More specifically, John and Elizabeth respond to the presence of Jesus, the baby in Mary's womb:

[41] And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, [42] and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! [43] And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:41–45)

Gabriel prophesied that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, "even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). When Jesus enters the room in the womb of Mary, unborn John leaps in his own mother's womb, apparently guided by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). Indeed this is "the beginning of John's witness to Jesus."³ John cannot help but to bear witness to Jesus' greatness even as an unborn child. Throughout his whole life, John will not be able to do anything other than to bear witness to, and to prepare the way for, Jesus. Ultimately, John's faithful testimony and faithful preparation for the Messiah will cost him his life.

The language of John's *leaping* in the womb of Elizabeth uses the same verb that appears in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) to translate the *leaping* of Jacob and Esau in Rebekah's womb (Gen. 25:22).⁴ Previously, we noted the ways that Luke portrays the similarities between Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Abraham and Sarah. Now, Luke is demonstrating the similarities of this elderly couple to Isaac and Rebekah. In the case of Jacob and Esau, those two boys *leaped* (or, in the original Hebrew, they *struggled* or *wrestled*) because from the womb they warred against each other as two enemy nations (Gen. 25:23). Clearly, this is not the reason for John's leaping when Jesus enters the room, for John leaps with joy at the presence of Jesus (Luke 1:44), not as an act of aggression. Even so, the Lord explained to Rebekah the leaping of children in her womb by prophesying that "the older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23), which is precisely what the elder John will do for the younger Jesus.⁵ Once again, Luke is demonstrating to us how closely the

² Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, 48. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.viii.html>>

³ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 77.

⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 363.

⁵ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 80.

birth narratives of Jesus both follow *and* break the patterns of the most important stories from the Old Testament. Jesus is inseparably connected with God’s covenant people; however, his entry into the world is entirely different from anything the world has seen.

The Witness of Elizabeth

John is not the only one filled with the Holy Spirit to bear witness for Jesus. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth prophetically speaks. Just as it is impossible (apart from the Holy Spirit) for a child to leap in the womb to celebrate the entrance of *another* child in *another* womb, so it is impossible (apart from the Holy Spirit) for Elizabeth to realize that her virgin relative has conceived a child. Luke tells us only that Mary “greeted” Elizabeth; Elizabeth’s knowledge of Mary’s pregnancy comes exclusively from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁶ So, when Elizabeth also is “filled with the Holy Spirit,” she loudly exclaims a declaration of Mary’s blessedness and the blessedness of the child within her.

In fact, the blessedness of Mary and the blessedness of Jesus are related: “Since according to contemporary Jewish ideas a woman’s greatness was measured by the children that she bore, the mother of the [Lord] would naturally be said to surpass all others.”⁷ First, then, Elizabeth blesses Mary: “Blessed are you among women!” Not only will the elder John serve the younger Jesus, but the elder Elizabeth blesses the younger Mary. Second, Elizabeth clarifies the reason for blessing Mary—not because of the superiority of Mary over Elizabeth, but because of the superiority of Jesus over John: “blessed is the fruit of your womb!”⁸ Many years later, during the public ministry of Jesus, a woman will cry out a similar blessing from the crowd: “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” (Luke 11:27).⁹ Remarkably, however, Jesus insists that the greater blessing is for “those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:28). In the same way, Mary truly is blessed to be the mother of God’s only Son; however, she is more greatly blessed by the faith that she expressed in her conversation with Gabriel: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).¹⁰ Elizabeth closes her exclamation with an affirmation of the greater blessing of Mary’s faith: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45). Mary is blessed because she *believed*.

⁶ “Second, how does Elizabeth know about the child that Mary bears? It is possible that Mary’s greeting included more than a mere hello. Perhaps Mary said something that suggested she bore a special servant, a special dignitary of the Lord....If so, Luke chooses not to narrate it. Rather, he literarily leaves the impression that it is by the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth perceived who was visiting her.” (Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 136.)

⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 364.

⁸ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 132.

⁹ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 364.

¹⁰ “To carry Christ in her womb was not Mary’s first blessedness, but was greatly inferior to the distinction of being born again by the Spirit of God to a new life. Yet she is justly called blessed, on whom God bestowed the remarkable honor of bringing into the world his own Son, through whom she had been spiritually renewed. And at this day, the blessedness brought to us by Christ cannot be the subject of our praise, without reminding us, at the same time, of the distinguished honor which God was pleased to bestow on Mary, in making her the mother of his Only Begotten Son.” (Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, 49. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.viii.html>>)

The Mother of the Lord

Elizabeth's next question is remarkable: "And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). What does Elizabeth mean when she calls Mary the mother of her "Lord"? While this word *kyrios* is the standard word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew name *Yahweh*, some argue that Elizabeth only means that Jesus is her *Messiah*, without any intention to speak to Jesus' divine nature as God the Son.¹¹ There is perhaps some precedent for this interpretation in a similar expression from the Old Testament from Araunah to King David, expressing surprise over a royal visit: "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" (2 Sam. 24:21).¹² Certainly, Araunah does not mean to suggest that he believes David to be divine. As the king, David is his *human* lord—not *Yahweh* the LORD, but *Adonai*, a lord. Does Elizabeth also intend to limit the scope of her exclamation to reverence for a human lord?

In fact, the context of the rest of this passage suggests that Elizabeth means more than Araunah meant. At the end of her exclamation, Elizabeth uses the word *Lord* again: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the *Lord*" (Luke 1:45). There, *Lord* (*kyrios*) clearly refers to God. In some way, Elizabeth can speak of God *and* of the baby in Mary's womb with the same word, *Lord*, without in the least suggesting that she serves two gods. Somehow, the *Lord* who sent Gabriel and the *Lord* in Mary's womb are distinct, but both are her *Lord*.¹³ Importantly, we should also remember that Elizabeth utters these words as she is filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41). Therefore, even though it would be impossible for Elizabeth to understand on her own that the baby in Mary's womb is God incarnate, the Holy Spirit is the one directing her prophetic speech. By inspiring Elizabeth to call Jesus *Lord*, the Holy Spirit causes Elizabeth to announce prophetically that Jesus is the Son of God (cf. Luke 1:35).

The Mother of God

Because Elizabeth calls Mary the "mother of my Lord," Christians over the centuries have called Mary the "mother of God." This title is not so much a description about Mary as a crucial definition about Jesus: Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is God the Son. By saying that Mary is the mother

¹¹ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 137.

¹² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 81.

¹³ "What is also of doctrinal significance is that Elizabeth, having professed that Mary is 'the mother of *my Lord*,' calls her blessed because she believed that what was 'spoken to her from *the Lord*' would be fulfilled. The term 'Lord' is employed to designate two distinct identifiable subjects. The identity of the one referred to in the first use of the term is different from the identity of the second. Because 'Lord' was used exclusively to designate YHWH, both the Lord of whom Mary is the mother and the Lord who spoke to Mary, while possessing distinct identities, must both be God. Not only is Elizabeth the first to give expression to the doctrine of the Incarnation, but also she is the first to express the truth that both the Son, the one whose mother is Mary, is God, and that the one who spoke to Mary is God. And she has done so, in keeping with the Old Testament revelation of the one God, without implying that there are two existing gods, both of whom can be called 'Lord.' Elizabeth has implicitly confirmed that both God the Son, of whom Mary is the mother, and God the Father, who spoke to Mary through the angel Gabriel and so is the initiator of all that has taken place, are, while distinct in identity, the one God, for both are simply in an unqualified manner, designated 'Lord.'" (Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus*, 24–25.)

of God, we are not saying that Mary mothered Jesus in his divinity. That is, Mary is not the mother of God the Son in the way that God is the Father of the Son. What we are claiming, then, is that the child in Mary's womb is not only fully human from the humanity of Mary, but that he is also fully God, the Son of the Father, and conceived by the Holy Spirit.

But if Mary only contributed the *humanity* of Jesus, how can we say that she is the mother of *God*? The answer is that we cannot separate the two natures of humanity and divinity that are united in the one Person of Jesus. Jesus is fully God and fully human; he is not half of one, half of the other. His humanity is united with his divinity as thoroughly as heat is united with iron when you see an iron gleaming red in the fire. Anyone who thought he could touch *only* the iron, avoiding the heat, would be burned for his foolishness. In the same way, it is impossible to separate out fully the parts of Jesus that are human, compared to the parts of Jesus that are divine.

The this reason, the Scriptures sometimes apply attributes of God to Jesus' humanity, or aspects of humans to his divinity. So, Paul can say that the rulers of this age "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). Now, God *as God* cannot be crucified, nor can he suffer, and much less can he die. By taking on a human nature through the incarnation, however, the Lord of glory *was* crucified, he *did* suffer, and he *did* die—not in his divinity, but in his divinity as it was united to humanity. Alternately, it is at the *human* name of Jesus that every knee should bow in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, for every tongue must confess that the *human* Jesus Christ is *Lord* (*kyrios*) to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10–11). To worship a creature is idolatry; however, because Jesus is a created human being whose humanity is fully united to God the Son in one Person, to worship the human Jesus is to worship God. Therefore, because we cannot draw stark contrasts between the humanity and divinity of Jesus, the Scriptures use divine language to speak of his humanity, and human language to speak of his divinity. Theologians call this the *communicatio idiomatum*, a Latin phrase meaning "communication of properties." This is how we understand what we mean when we say that Mary is the mother of God: we are ascribing a divine name ("God") to the human being inside Mary's womb. Because Jesus is fully God *and* fully human, we can rightly say that Mary is the mother of God.

This does not mean that Jesus' humanity has destroyed or lessened his status as God, and neither does it mean that Jesus' divinity has transformed Jesus into something different from the same human nature that we experience (except that Jesus is without sin). The two natures of Jesus are united, not confused, mixed, or confounded. As the early church wrestled with how to explain these complicated issues, they came to this definition in 451 AD at the Council of Chalcedon:

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together

to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.¹⁴

While this definition is *not* Scripture, the Christian church has recognized this definition as a *faithful exposition* of Scripture for more than 1500 years, to this very day. Jesus is fully God and fully man, and therefore Mary is the mother of God.

Respond with Humble Faith (Luke 1:46–49)

Mary responds to these extraordinary reactions of Elizabeth and John with an extraordinary speech that has come to be known (and *sung*) as the *Magnificat*, the first word of this song in its Latin translation. Just as John and Elizabeth were “filled with the Spirit” (Luke 1:15, 41), we should remember that Gabriel told Mary that “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35). Mary also is filled with the Holy Spirit, but in a deeper way, since the child she carries in her womb is conceived by the Holy Spirit, so that he himself is “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). What was momentary and sudden for Elizabeth upon Mary’s entrance seems to have an ongoing quality with Mary for the duration of her time carrying Jesus in her womb.¹⁵

As all commentators note, Mary’s words are adapted from Hannah’s prayer after giving birth to Samuel (1 Sam. 2:1–10). The major difference between the two comes in the way that Hannah prays generally about God’s protection of his people, while Mary first rejoices in the Lord’s favor toward *her*, and then afterwards expands in a second section toward the Lord’s favor toward *all* his people, “to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Luke 1:55).¹⁶ Every young Israelite knew the words of the Old Testament by heart (including this one), since God’s people sang them in their homes, on their way to the feasts in Jerusalem, during the morning and evening sacrifice, and during the passover meal.¹⁷ Let’s begin by looking at this first section of Mary’s *Magnificat*, where she rejoices in God’s favor toward her:

[46] And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

[47] and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

[48] for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

[49] for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

¹⁴ The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). Available online: <<https://reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html>>

¹⁵ Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, 63.

¹⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 77.

¹⁷ Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, 62.

and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46–49)

Again, notice the occurrences of “my” and “me” in this section. These personal notes are different from the more general statements she makes in the next section.

Soul/Spirit, Magnifies/Rejoices, Lord/God my Savior

The first two lines offer a parallelism, a key feature of Hebrew poetry that expresses the same idea in two ways to bring out subtle nuances: “My soul magnifies the Lord / and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” In regard to our earlier comments on the identity of the *Lord*, notice that here Mary puts *Lord* (*kyrios*) in parallel with “God my Savior.”¹⁸ The *Lord* is God her Savior, but by using these two different descriptions, she brings out different aspects of how she relates to him: first, as a servant in obedience to her Lord, and second as the recipient of the salvation of God her Savior. As a servant, Mary *magnifies* the Lord; as the recipient of God’s salvation, she *rejoices* in God her Savior. Both her *soul* (personality, individuality, and character) and *spirit* (deepest, spiritual nature; point of contact with God) rise up to celebrate what God has done.¹⁹

Mary’s Humble, but Blessed, Estate

Why does Mary magnify the Lord and rejoice in God her Savior? She explains in the next verse: “for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant” (Luke 1:48a). Mary has not suffered the *humiliation* that Elizabeth has because of the latter’s lifelong barrenness, so the phrase “*humble estate*” instead refers to Mary’s “unworthiness to be the mother of the Davidic Messiah and the Son of God.”²⁰ To some extent, this word may refer to the low social position of Mary, as a betrothed, teenage virgin from Nazareth (cf. Luke 1:52).²¹ Despite her utter unworthiness for such a role, God has blessed her in such a way that, Mary continues, “from now on all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name” (Luke 1:48b–49). The words “mighty” (*dynatos*) and “holy” echo Gabriel’s statement in Luke 1:35: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the *power* (*dynamis*) of the Most High will over shadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called *holy*—the Son of God.”²²

¹⁸ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 366.

¹⁹ “The seat of this emotion was her spirit—πνεῦμα, *spirit*. When the human spirit is referred to in Scripture, the word indicates the deepest part of our humanity, the point of contact between man and God. The soul is the actual centre of human life, the principle of individuality, and the seat of those impressions which are of an essentially personal character. This soul communicates, through the two organs with which it is endowed, the spirit and the body, with two worlds—the one above, the other below it—with the divine world and the world of nature. Thus, while the expression, ‘My soul doth magnify,’ refers to the personal emotions of Mary, to her feelings as a woman and a mother, all which find an outlet in adoration, these words, ‘My spirit hath rejoiced,’ appear to indicate the moment when, in the profoundest depths of her being, by the touch of the Divine Spirit, the promise of the angel was accomplished in her.” (Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, 63.)

²⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 367.

²¹ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 150.

²² Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 360.

These last two lines, however, accomplish more than only to celebrate Mary's private blessing as the exclusive mother of God. Beyond this, these lines set up the major theme of the second section of Mary's song: "God is beginning his eschatological exaltation of the lowly, for from now on the name of Mary will be known to all generations and they will speak of her rich blessing by God."²³ It is not merely *exciting* that God has elevated Mary from her humble estate. Much more, this event is *characteristic* of the way God intervenes in the world for the salvation of his people. This song is not only Mary's song, but the song of all God's people, for all of us have been blessed as God has lifted us up out of our humble estates, doing great and mighty things for us. Holy is his name!

Remember that God will Overturn the Kingdoms of this World (Luke 1:50–56)

Technically, Luke 1:50 belongs to the previous section, since it is a single sentence with Luke 1:49. In this transitional verse, however, Mary connects what God has done for *her* to the more general work that God is doing for *all* his people: "And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." (Luke 1:50; cf. Ps. 103:17).²⁴ God's mercy is not only for her, but for all those who fear God, from generation to generation. The word for *mercy* is the typical word used in the Septuagint to "translate the Hebrew term **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*), which refers to the loyal, gracious, faithful love that God has in covenant for his people (Ps. 103:2–6, 8–11, 13...)." ²⁵ Generation after generation has already experienced God's *hesed* before Mary, and many more generations after Mary. While Mary alone is the mother of God, that unique privilege is a manifestation of the general privileges that all believers share: "God's dealings with Mary are in keeping with his general attitude to his people."²⁶

The Reversal of Human Power

Mary continues, expanding our vision for the significance of her pregnancy beyond God's special favor toward her alone:

- [51] He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
- [52] he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
- [53] he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty. (Luke 1:51–53)

In each of these phrases, Mary speaks of God's complete reversal of human power.²⁷ By the strength of God's arm (arm is an anthropomorphism that describes God's strength), God has scattered the proud away from the thoughts of their hearts. God has brought down the mighty from their thrones,

²³ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 82.

²⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 368.

²⁵ Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 152.

²⁶ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 84.

²⁷ Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, 64–65.

while exalting those of humble estate (cf. Luke 1:48). Finally, God has filled the hungry with good things, but sent away the rich empty. Notice that all of these describe *completed actions*, not ongoing or incomplete events. Mary seems to be speaking prophetically, seeing ahead to the final fulfillment of what God will do through her son Jesus.²⁸ Jesus' final victory is so certain that Mary can speak of it as though it were already accomplished.²⁹

To Abraham and Abraham's Offspring Forever

The advent of Jesus will accomplish more than just the dethroning and rejection of the rich and powerful. Much more, Jesus' reign will accomplish the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to his people:

[54] He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
[55] as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever." (Luke 1:54–55)

As we noted earlier, Mary patterns her song after Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2. So, Hannah rejoices over what God has done (1 Sam. 1:1), she praises God for his holiness and strength (1 Sam. 1:2–3), and she speaks to the way that God will reverse human power (1 Sam. 1:4–8). Finally, Hannah closes her prayer by acknowledging that God is doing all this for the good of his people (1 Sam. 1:9–10).³⁰ Hannah spoke of the strength that God will give to his "king," his "anointed" (1 Sam. 1:10), anticipating the way that her son, Samuel, will anoint God's chosen king, David.

Here, Mary speaks more generally of God's help for Israel in remembrance of his mercy as the fulfillment of all God spoke to Israel's fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever (Luke 1:54–55). When the Scriptures speak of how God *remembers*, they do not suggest that God previously forgot something, and only now remembers what slipped his mind. Rather, the idea of God's *remembering* means, at a more basic level, to *consider* something, or to *call something to mind*. Practically speaking, when God says that he *remembers* something, he means that God will now *act* on what he has promised (e.g., Gen. 9:15, 16). God also calls us to *remember* his faithfulness toward us (Deut. 8:2; 32:7; Ps. 77:11; 143:5; Isa. 46:9). By *remembering* God's mercy toward all his people in the past, we can confidently *remember* (that is, *consider/call to mind*) God's promises toward us in the future—even for the promises that God has not yet fulfilled. As the rest of the Gospel of Luke and the

²⁸ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 84.

²⁹ "These consequences result from his past conception (1:49). These events are seen as so certain that, even though they are future events, they can be portrayed as past realities. Paul has this force with the verb *glorified* in Rom. 8:30. Such an approach unifies the context and ties together nicely with the idea of the realization of the covenant promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). In this sense, the hymn parallels the expression of Zechariah in Luke 1:72–74. The total salvation of those who fear God is so certain that it can be viewed as having taken place. What God will do (view 4) is like what God always does (view 2), but Mary is interested in what Jesus' coming will mean. In a real way, God is setting up a new world order. Those who are on his side can look for a reversal of current fortune." (Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, 155.)

³⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, 369.

New Testament in general will make clear, Abraham's offspring are not limited to those only who are the biological descendants of Abraham in the nation of Israel, since Abraham's offspring includes all those who look to Jesus in faith (Gal. 3:29).³¹

Mary's Return Home

This scene closes abruptly: "And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home" (Luke 1:56). Most likely, Mary stayed with Elizabeth all the way until the birth of John.³² For one thing, Mary probably helped with her relative's delivery. More than that, waiting until John was born would have given Mary an opportunity to see the complete fulfillment of the prophecy of the angel. Luke, however, does not explicitly confirm that Mary remained that long. Instead, Luke "wants to clear the stage" to allow John the Baptist to stand in the spotlight for a moment before being overshadowed by Jesus.³³ Jesus *will* overshadow John, but because John is the greatest man among all other men born of women (Luke 1:28), we must see this greatness in order to fully appreciate the even *greater* greatness of Jesus himself. Therefore, Mary returns to her own home—that is, not yet to the home of Joseph—as she awaits the birth of her own son.³⁴

Discussion Questions

- 1) The Father sends Gabriel to announce the coming of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit fills John, Elizabeth, and Mary to declare the glory of the Son in Mary's womb. How do all three persons of the Trinity operate inseparably in bringing Jesus into this world? How do their inseparable operations reveal God's great blessing, joy, faithfulness, and power in the person of Jesus?
- 2) Even after the conception of Jesus, Mary continues in her "humble estate" (Luke 1:48). Furthermore, her situation becomes more difficult as even Joseph resolves to divorce her because of her pregnancy (Matt. 1:19). On what basis does Mary magnify the Lord and rejoice in God (Luke 1:46–49)? How is she blessed? What great things has the Mighty One done for her?
- 3) Mary claims that God has shown his mercy to those who fear him from generation to generation (Luke 1:50). What evidence do we have to verify her claim? Why has our Enemy sought to deceive us about God's goodness toward us, even from the first temptation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1)? How do you fight to keep God's mercy clear in your mind and heart?
- 4) Mary's statements about reversing human power in Luke 1:51–53 describe events that have not yet taken place. How does *God* remember his mercy (Luke 1:54)? What does it mean for us to *remember* promises of God's mercy that have not yet been fulfilled? What strategies do you have for remembering God's *forthcoming* mercy toward his people? Why must we not forget?

³¹ Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, 62. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31.ix.x.html>>

³² Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 85.

³³ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, 362.

³⁴ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 85.