

Luke 1v46-55 Sermon 2019

46 'My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
48 for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
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 powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Introduction

Imagine the scene; a greek island at dusk, the sun setting beyond the sea and sitting there is a wise old Jewish woman with smiling eyes and the grace and peace that comes from a lifetime of prayer. And next to her is Luke, travel weary but wide eyed. And he says to her "So Mary, is it true?" And Mary, visited by angels when little more than a child, by shepherds and kings in a stable in Bethlehem, who fled to Egypt to save her infant son's life, who watched him grow up and had to share him with the world, and who stood at the foot of the cross; Mary says yes, it's true. All of it.

We don't know for sure that Luke met Mary, but it would fit that in his careful investigation Luke went to Patmos where Mary lived out her last days. And certainly Luke has insights that other gospels doesn't. What a conversation that would have been, but in the midst of it she shares this poem, this prophesy, this song. Only Luke has record of this deeply personal song of Mary, and what a delight it is.

It has been sung in monasteries for millennia, proclaimed in cathedrals, intoned in palaces, and to this day prayed every evening by millions of christians at evensong, and it has been set to music by none less than JS Bach.

It is called the Magnificat from the opening word in Latin - "Magnificat anima mea" *My soul magnifies*.

Last week The Archbishop of Canterbury was speaking to the Spectator and he was challenged on a something he said about God sending the rich away empty, and he replied, "*it is not my words, it is part of the Song of Mary and, as such, an essential part of the Christian message. The Magnificat is not just a background part of the Bible. It's not just a minor bit. It is one of the most fundamental statements.*"

And it shows Mary's vision of what Christ comes to accomplish. A vision deeply rooted in Scripture and experience and a healthy counterpoint to many contemporary expressions of Christianity.

In structure, this song doesn't come from nothing it is rooted in the Psalms, the OT and the worship of 1st Century Judaism. It specifically echoes Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2.

Mary speaks of her own experience - *v48 God has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant*. This young poor girl - in a patriarchal and oppressive culture, yet she is at the heart of the christian faith, a person of great honour with a prophetic and distinct voice. But she speaks from that to all of us.

Mary says God is good - The world seems to be a dark place. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer, the powerful do what they want, the rest of us just stand by and watch. It is one of the great themes of the Old Testament. "*How long shall the godless flourish, the wicked prosper*" says the Psalmist. And Mary says - not for much longer. Something has started here and the world will never be the same.

Her life has been given meaning and dignity. And the gospel has continued to do that for the poor - just as it first spread like wildfire amongst the underclasses of the roman empire, so it does today through the slums of the third world. Christianity has always (and often despite the best efforts of men) been a religion that grants dignity and meaning to the poor. God is good say Mary, in spite of the world

Mary says you need to be willing to humble yourself.

The greatest barrier to faith is not doubt, but pride. The reason why faith is so hard amongst the rich and the powerful is this. God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. It is sometimes a hard process, of having to let go of expectations, of facing the disappointments of what is, for the joy of what will be.

Mary says don't be discouraged.

God keeps his promises. Sometimes that takes longer than you thought.

v50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has not forgotten you. Just like the generations of Israel, those who prayed and hoped yet never saw the salvation promised. So we need to hold on hope and

Faith is specifically patient hope in the face of despair. Faith that is seen is not faith, it is in the darkness that we hold on to the light.

v52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

This is the old story - God raises up the least of people. Jacob, it is David it is the unlikely and the outsider, Israel itself. God raises the humble to shame the proud And he continues to do that.

And Mary says remember the big picture Sometimes when we can't imagine how the kingdom could come we reduce salvation to simply saving our souls. But that is not what Mary is saying here. She says His kingdom is coming, his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is a very literal picture of God's overturning the order of things - scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful from their thrones, filling the hungry with good things. It is the world put right. And it has begun.

Conclusion

Mary song has been sung by believers for two millennia. And little by little by the slow gentle process of the holy spirit whispering in our hearts stirring up hope, it helps us to set our hearts on what is to come. Mary gives us this song and invites us to make it our own. So sing the magnificat, let it seep into your soul and shape your dreams of what God is doing in the world and you place in the coming kingdom.