

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 1:46-56

Verses 46-49

**My soul magnifies the Lord  
and my spirit exults in God my Saviour  
because he took notice of the lowly situation of his servant.  
Therefore, from now on, all generations will call me blessed  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me;  
and holy is his name.**

We are reminded of Hannah's song, which has the opening lines: My heart rejoices in the Lord (1Sam 2:1). Mary desires to praise the greatness of the Lord and seeks to express what is inside her, in her **soul** ψυχή. The second line, typical of Hebrew poetry, says something similar: **my spirit exults in God my Saviour**. Originally, **Spirit** πνευμά, was the breath of life from God that he gives to breathing things, but like soul, needn't be seen as parts of human make-up but simply as the inner person, the mind, looking out to God. Mary is moved by joy; her spirit, the life within her, is leaping with the greatest happiness that spills over in praise of her God as her **Saviour**. God's character is essentially that of being a **saviour**. It is a title framed in the words of Ps 35:9. God saved Israel, not only from Egypt, but from its many enemies during the time of the judges and kings. Mary applies this title to her personal life and calls him in faith, **my Saviour**. The pronoun makes all the difference.

It is **because** οτι of the **lowly situation** of Mary, his servant that Mary exalts her Lord. This has nothing to do with the later humiliation she would experience trying to explain to Joseph her pregnancy by the fact that she was a poor young woman. It was in this position of complete obscurity that the Lord visited her and gave the tremendous promise of the birth of a boy, to be called Jesus because he will be the Saviour and Lord of his people.

Mary continued her prophetic utterance in song by saying that all generations will call me blessed, lucky or happy. While she felt blessed and most fortunate, the emphasis is on the kindness of the Lord **for the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is his name. The Mighty One** δυνατός literally means powerful one. Psalm 111:9 is behind this verse and it speaks of redemption for his people, clearly fulfilled in the birth of the Saviour. The contrast between the might and power of God and the lowliness and insignificance of Mary is stark. What could have moved her to believe such promises and not think that she imagined them? Obviously, her trust was profound. However, the whole history of Israel has been one of trying to absorb, often with great resistance and rebellion, the nature of God as one who, though mighty and holy, has chosen Israel, the smallest of the nations and one despised as slaves. Already, Mary knew that the child to be conceived in her would also be great and would be the Son of the Most High (32). Jesus will have the same appellation of **Mighty One** given to his Father. He, too, would be the holy one (35).

Verses 50-55

**His mercy is on generation after generation of those who fear him.  
By his arm he has done a mighty deed; he has scattered the arrogant in the plans of their hearts.  
He has brought down rulers from [their] thrones and lifted up the lowly.  
The hungry he has filled with good things and sent away the rich empty.  
He has helped Israel, his child, to remember [his] mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.**

In Mary's prophetic song, she extols the Lord's **mercy**, the grace we have spoken about, implying that listener's should be encouraged to trust such a Lord. No other qualification is needed than faith, indicated by the expression, **those who fear him**. Fear means reverential trust. This verse echoes

Psalms 103:11,13), which reveals that God's love motivates his **mercy**, his consideration of Israel's plight and the great need of humanity. The constancy of this mercy extends to generation after generation (Ps 103:17). Mary could have meant that the covenant and the chosen status of Israel would determine the succession of God's mercy but she bases this mercy and gift of the Messiah on the trust and faith of each generation.

The next verses support this understanding for the chosen people could not simply rely on their birth to Jewish parents, Jewishness designated through their mothers. Trust in God's grace and gift of salvation was at the centre of a gentle polemic against the **arrogant, rulers and the rich**. **The arrogant and their plans** were a prophetic glimpse at those who would attempt to protect their power, wealth and position, such as the chief priests, the Roman governor, the Herods etc. All of them worked against the plans of God with their **own plans**. Simeon noted that the child would reveal the hearts of many and be the cause of the rising and falling of many (2:34,35). The coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ was a judgement and the cause of the end of human rule. Thus, he **has brought down rulers from [their] thrones**. The rich who shut out the hungry poor are **sent away empty** (6:24,25).

The sense of justice overcoming injustices is present in this song but we should not overlook the strongly salvific theme here. The reversal of fortune is based on faith and trust in the promised deliverance to be fulfilled in the birth of Mary's child. Arrogance, riches and power corrupt people and lead them to a self-justifying reliance on themselves and preservation of a false belief in their status, thinking that position makes them into a superior human being. Such attitudes are the antithesis of trusting oneself to the mercy, grace and saving help of the Lord. Those at the opposite end, **the lowly, the hungry** and the faithful (**those who fear him**) are fully reliant on the Lord's grace and promises to save so that their trust not in themselves but in the Lord is rewarded with all that they hope for in God.

Hence the revelation of God's plans to Mary and the promised gift of the baby boy who is great, holy and the very Son of the Most High, the advent of these promises will revive Israel's faith and remembrance of a coming salvation. **He has helped Israel, his child, to remember [his] mercy**

Verse 56

**Mary remained with her for three months then returned to her home.**