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When Mary Sang

Text: Luke 1:46-56

In Luke’s infancy narratives, there are three songs. This song of Mary is called the Magnificat. In Luke 1:67-79, we see the second song, the Benedictus. In Luke 2:28-32, we have the third song, the Nunc Dimitis. The songs get their names from the first line of the songs in Latin. For instance, this song begins, *Magnificat anima mea.*

William Temple called this song of Mary, ‘a most revolutionary canticle’. [[1]](#footnote-2)

In structure, the canticle is similar to psalms of praise in the OT, in which God is praised in the opening lines. Then, the writer gives the reasons God is praised. This song of Mary also reminds us of Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2:1-10), in which Hannah rejoices that God overlooks the proud and mighty and blesses the humble poor. God sides with the poor, the humble, the peasant, the non-celebrity.

In this canticle of praise and celebration, Mary makes some bold statements.

1. I am a worshipper (v. 46-47). God is to be praised. Both my soul and my spirit are alive and engaged. One makes the Lord God larger (magnified) in my view and the other rejoices in God. (46-47)
2. God sees me (v.48).

God is aware that I am low caste (48a). I’m currently reading Isabel Wilkerson’s deep dive into the racial divides in the United States. In her book, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents, Wilkerson says there are three cultures in which we see the caste system fully displayed: India, Nazi-ruled Germany, and the USA.

Mary is fully aware of her place in the social order. Mary is not a bother or a nuisance to God. God values her.

**Illus**.

My mother was 21 years old when she gave birth to my sister and me. I have vivid memories of my mother as an attractive 30 and 35-year-old woman. She told me her friends would invite her for an evening out, after work, or on a vacation. She’d say, “I’ve got kids at home. I can’t go.” Later, I told her I was never made to feel that I’d interrupted or messed up her life. She saw her children and valued us! Mary felt the same way. God loved, valued, affirmed, and SAW Mary.

Mary is also full of faith and hope. She says,

In the future, people will talk about me and what God has done in and through me(48b,c).

3. God is at work (v. 49-55)

* Working in Mary’s life (v.49)
* Showing mercy to God-fearing people of every generation (v.50).
* Bringing down the mighty and sending the rich way AND exalting the lowly and filling hungry (v. 52-53).

Mary is one of the lowly (v. 48). She’s part of the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. She celebrates, in her song, God’s taking the side of the poor. God defends the poor: the people on whom the world often looks with disdain, apathy, and disgust. God sees them as valued, just as the rich are valued. God sees the poor as full of purpose and potential, just as the rich are full of purpose and potential. The poor are sent away by many. God draws them close to Himself.

Elihu, one of Job’s allegedly comforting friends, said of God,

*He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; For they are all the work of His hands.* (Job 34:19)

Psalm 69:33

...the Lord hears the poor and does not despise His prisoners.

Mary’s song encourages me. I want to see what Mary sees. I want to remember the truths about God, of which Mary sings.

1. God is to be praised.
2. God sees me in my low estate and in my circumstances.
3. God is at work, in the world and in me.

Amen

1. Jack Winslow, *The Eyelids of the Dawn* (Hodder & Stoughton,1954), p.109 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)