

Rejoicing In God

Commentary on the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

The servants of Mary should pray the Magnificat often. It is filled with the most profound mysteries. – St. Louis de Montfort

IV. Mary's song of praise, upon this occasion. Elisabeth's prophecy was an echo to the Virgin Mary's salutation, and this song is yet a stronger *echo* to that prophecy, and shows her to be no less filled with the Holy Ghost than Elisabeth was. We may suppose the Blessed Virgin to come in, very much *fatigued* with her journey; yet she forgets that, and is inspired with new life, and vigour, and joy, upon the confirmation she here meets with of her faith; and since, by the sudden inspiration and transport, she finds that this was designed to be her errand hither, weary as she is, like Abraham's servant, she would *neither eat nor drink till she had told her errand*.

1. Here are the expressions of joy and praise, and God alone the object of the praise and centre of the joy. Some compare this song with that which her name-sake Miriam, the sister of Moses, sung, upon the triumphant departure of Israel out of Egypt, and their triumphant passage through the Red Sea; others think it better compared with the song of Hannah, upon the birth of Samuel, which, like this, passes from a family mercy to a public and general one. *This begins, like that, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, 1 Sa. 2:1.* Observe how Mary here speaks of God.

(1.) With great reverence of him, as *the Lord*: "*My soul doth magnify the Lord; I never saw him so great as now I find him so good.*" Note, Those, and those only, are *advanced* in mercy, who are thereby brought to think the more *highly* and *honourably* of God;

whereas there are those whose prosperity and preferment make them say, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?* The more honour God has any way put upon us, the more honour we must study to give to him; and *then* only are we accepted in magnifying the Lord, when our *souls* magnify him, and *all that is within us*. Praising work must be soul work.

(2.) With great complacency in him as *her Saviour*: *My spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour*. This seems to have reference to the Messiah, whom she was to be the mother of. She calls him *God her Saviour*; for the angel had told her that he should be the *Son of the Highest*, and that his name should be *Jesus, a Saviour*; this she fastened upon, with application to herself: *He is God my Saviour*. Even the mother of our Lord had need of an interest in him as her Saviour, and would have been undone without it: and she glories more in that happiness which she had in common with all believers than in being his mother, which was an honour peculiar to herself, and this agrees with the preference Christ have to obedient believers above his mother and brethren; see Mt. 12:50; Lu. 11:27, 28. Note, Those that have Christ for their God and Saviour have a great deal of reason to rejoice, to *rejoice in spirit*, that is rejoicing as Christ did (Lu. 10:21), with spiritual joy.

2. Here are just causes assigned for this joy and praise.

(1.) Upon *her own* account, v. 48, 49. [1.] *Her spirit rejoiced in the Lord*, because of the *kind* things he had done for her: his *condescension* and *compassion* to her. *He has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden*; that is, he has *looked upon her with pity*, for so the word is commonly used. "He has chosen me to this honour, notwithstanding my great meanness, poverty, and obscurity." Nay, the expression seems to intimate, not only (to allude to that of Gideon, Jdg. 6:15) that her *family* was poor in Judah, but that she was the *least in her father's house*, as if she were under some particular contempt and disgraced among her relations, was unjustly neglected, and the outcast of the family, and God put this honour upon her, to balance abundantly the contempt. I the rather suggest this,

for we find something toward such honour as this put upon others, on the like consideration. Because God saw that Leah *was hated*, he *opened her womb*, Gen. 29:31. Because Hannah was provoked, and made to fret, and insulted over, by Peninnah, therefore God gave her a son, 1 Sa. 1:19. Whom men wrongfully depress and despise God doth sometimes, in compassion to them, especially if they have borne it patiently, prefer and advance; see Jdg. 11:7. So in Mary's case. And, if God *regards her low estate*, he not only thereby gives a specimen of his favour to the whole race of mankind, whom he *remembers in their low estate*, as the psalmist speaks (Ps. 136:23), but secures a lasting honour to her (for such the honour is that God bestows, honour that fades not away): "*From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed*, shall think me a happy woman and highly advanced." All that embrace Christ and his gospel will say, *Blessed was the womb that bore him and the paps which he sucked*, Lu. 11:27. Elizabeth had once and again called her *blessed*: "But that is not all," saith she, "all generations of Gentiles as well as Jews shall call me so." [2.] Her *soul magnifies* the Lord, because of the *wonderful* things he had done for her (v. 49): *He that is mighty has done to me great things*. A *great* thing indeed, that a *Virgin* should *conceive*. A *great* thing indeed, that Messiah, who had been so long promised to the church, and so long expected by the church, should now at length be born. It is the *power of the Highest* that appears in this. She adds, *and holy is his name*; for so Hannah saith her song, *There is none holy as the Lord*, which she explains in the next words, *for there is none beside thee*, 1 Sa. 2:2. God is a Being *by himself*, and he manifests himself to be so, especially in the work of our redemption. He that is *mighty*, even he *whose name is holy*, has *done to me great things*. Glorious things may be expected from him that is both *mighty* and *holy*; who *can do every thing*, and *will do every thing well and for the best*.

(2.) Upon the account of *others*. The Virgin Mary, as the mother of the Messiah, is become a kind of public person, wears a public character, and is therefore immediately endued with another spirit, a more public spirit than before she had, and therefore *looks abroad*, *looks about her*, *looks before her*, and takes notice of God's various

dealings with the children of men (v. 50, etc.), as Hannah (1 Sa. 2:3, etc.). In this she has especially an eye to the coming of the Redeemer and God's manifesting himself therein.

[1.] It is a certain truth that God *has mercy in store*, mercy in reserve, *for all that have a reverence for his majesty*, and a due regard to his sovereignty and authority. But never did this appear so as in sending his Son into the world to save us (v. 50): *His mercy is on them that fear him*; it has always been so; he has ever looked upon *them* with an eye of *peculiar favour* who have looked up to him with an eye of *filial fear*. But he hath manifested this *mercy*, so as never before, in sending his Son to bring in an everlasting righteousness, and work out an everlasting salvation, for them that fear him, and this *from generation to generation*; for there are gospel privileges transmitted by entail, and intended for perpetuity. Those that *fear God*, as their Creator and Judge, are encouraged to hope for *mercy in him*, through their Mediator and Advocate; and in him *mercy* is settled upon all that *fear God*, pardoning mercy, healing mercy, accepting mercy, crowning mercy, *from generation to generation*, while the world stands. In Christ he *keepeth mercy for thousands*.

[2.] It has been a common observation that God in his providence puts *contempt* upon the *haughty* and *honour* upon the *humble*; and this he has done remarkably in the whole economy of the work of man's redemption. As God had, with his *mercy* to her, shown himself *mighty* also (v. 48, 49), so he had, with his *mercy on them that fear him*, shown *strength* likewise *with his arm*. *First*, In the course of his providence, it is his usual method to cross *the expectations of men*, and proceed quite otherwise than they promise themselves. *Proud men* expect to carry all before them, to have their way and their will; but he *scatters them in the imagination of their hearts*, breaks their measures, blasts their projects, nay, and brings them low, and brings them down, by those very counsels with which they thought to advance and establish themselves. The *mighty* think to secure themselves by *might in their seats*, but he *puts them down*, and overturns their seats; while, on the other hand, those of *low*

degree, who despaired of ever advancing themselves, and thought of no other than of being *ever low*, are wonderfully *exalted*. This observation concerning *honour* holds likewise concerning *riches*; many who were so poor that they had not bread for themselves and their families, by some surprising turn of Providence in favour of them, come to be *filled with good things*; while, on the other hand, those who were rich, and thought no other than that to-morrow should be as this day, that their mountain stood strong and should never be moved, are strangely impoverished, and *sent away empty*. Now this is the same observation that Hannah had made, and enlarged upon, in her song, with application to the case of herself and her adversary (1 Sa. 2:4-7), which very much illustrates this here. And compare also Ps. 107:33-41; 113:7-9; and Eccl. 9:11. God takes a pleasure in *disappointing* their expectations who promise themselves *great things* in the world, and in *out-doing* the expectations of those who promise themselves but *a little*; as a *righteous* God, it is his glory to *abase* those who *exalt* themselves, and strike terror on the secure; and, as a *good* God, it is his glory to exalt those who humble themselves, and to speak comfort to those who fear before him. *Secondly*, This doth especially appear in the methods of gospel grace.

1. In the *spiritual honours* it dispenses. When the proud Pharisees were rejected, and Publicans and sinners went *into the kingdom of heaven* before them,—when the Jews, who *followed after the law of righteousness*, did not attain it, and the Gentiles, who never thought of it, attained to righteousness (Rom. 9:30, 31),—when God chose not the *wise men after the flesh*, not the *mighty*, or the *noble*, to preach the gospel, and plant Christianity in the world, but the *foolish* and *weak* things of the world, and things that were despised (1 Co. 1:26, 27)—then he *scattered the proud*, and *put down the mighty*, but *exalted them of low degree*. When the tyranny of the chief priests and elders were brought down, who had long *lorded it over God's heritage*, and hoped *always* to do so, and Christ's disciples, a company of poor despised fishermen, by the power they were clothed with, were made to *sit on thrones*, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,—when the power of the four monarchies was broken, and

the kingdom of the Messiah, that *stone cut out of the mountain without hands*, is made to *fill the earth*,—then are the *proud scattered*, and those of low degree *exalted*.

2. In the *spiritual riches* it dispenses, v. 53. (1.) Those who see their need of Christ, and are importunately desirous of righteousness and life in him, he *fills with good things*, with the *best things*; he gives liberally to them, and they are *abundantly satisfied* with the blessings he gives. Those who are weary and heavy-laden shall find rest with Christ, and those who thirst are called to *come to him and drink*; for they only know how to value his gifts. *To the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*, manna is angels' food; and to the *thirsty* fair water is *honey out of the rock*. (2.) Those who are rich, who are not *hungry*, who, like Laodicea, think they have *need of nothing*, are full of themselves and their own righteousness, and think they have a sufficiency in themselves, those he *sends away* from his door, they are not welcome to him, he sends them *empty* away, they come *full of self*, and are sent away *empty of Christ*. He sends them to the *gods whom they served*, to their own righteousness and strength which they trusted to.

[3.] It was always expected that the Messiah should be, in a special manner, the strength and glory of his people Israel, and so he is in a peculiar manner (v. 54): *He hath helped his servant Israel, antelabato*. He hath taken them by the hand, and *helped them up* that were fallen and could not help themselves. Those that were sunk under the burdens of a broken covenant of innocency are *helped up* by the blessings of a renewed covenant of grace. The sending of the Messiah, on whom *help* was *laid* for poor sinners, was the greatest kindness that could be done, the greatest help that could be provided for his people Israel, and that which magnifies it is,

First, That it is *in remembrance of his mercy*, the mercifulness of his nature, the mercy he has in store for *his servant Israel*. While this blessing was deferred, his people, who waited for it, were often ready to ask, *Has God forgotten to be gracious?* But now he made it appear that he had not forgotten, but *remembered, his mercy*. He

remembered his former mercy, and repeated that to them in *spiritual* blessings which he had done formerly to them in *temporal* favours. *He remembered the days of old. Where is he that brought them up out of the sea, out of Egypt?* Isa. 63:11. He will do the like again, which that was a type of.

Secondly, That it is *in performance of his promise*. It is a mercy not only designed, but declared (v. 55); it was *what he spoke to our fathers*, that the Seed of the woman should break the head of the serpent; that God should dwell in the tents of Shem; and particularly to Abraham, that *in his seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed*, with the best of blessings, with the blessings that are *for ever*; and to the seed that shall be for ever; that is, his *spiritual* seed, for his carnal seed were *cut off* a little after this. Note, What God has spoken he will perform; what he hath spoken to the fathers will be performed to their seed; to their seed's seed, in blessings that shall last for ever.

Lastly, Mary's return to Nazareth (v. 56), after she had continued with Elisabeth about *three months*, so long as to be fully satisfied concerning herself that she was *with child*, and to be confirmed therein by her cousin Elisabeth. Some think, though her return is here mentioned before Elisabeth's being delivered, because the evangelist would finish this passage concerning Mary before he proceeded with the story of Elisabeth, yet that Mary staid till her cousin was (as we say) *down and up again*; that she might attend on her, and be with her in her lying-in, and have her own faith confirmed by the full accomplishment of the promise of God concerning Elisabeth. But most bind themselves to the order of the story as it lies, and think she returned again when Elisabeth was near her time; because she still affected retirement, and therefore would not be there when the birth of this child of promise would draw a great deal of company to the house. Those in whose hearts Christ is formed take more delight than they used to do in *sitting alone and keeping silence*.

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