

## MARY ANNOUNCES THE REVOLUTIONARY KINGDOM OF HER SON

### Luke 1:46-56

(ESV) "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;<sup>49</sup> for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.<sup>50</sup> And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.<sup>54</sup> He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,<sup>55</sup> as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever.'<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home."

### INTRODUCTION

Would you agree that appearances are often deceiving about who, or what, is truly important? John Paul II served as Pope of the Catholic Church, 1978-2005. On his last day of a visit to Washington, D. C., so a story goes, his entourage had gone ahead to make the arrangements for his return trip to the Vatican. John Paul insisted on making a private visit to Arlington National Cemetery. Awed by what he saw, he offered long prayers of thanks for the lives and sacrifices of the honored dead. He was then running so late that he phoned for a limousine to rush him to Reagan National Airport. When the limousine arrived, the surprised driver, a devout Catholic, was joyful the Pope would be his fare. He proceeded to drive slowly and carefully. The Pope grew concerned about missing his flight and asked him to go faster. But the driver went slower; he wanted to prolong the thrill of having the Pope in his limousine. Finally, John Paul asked to drive the limo himself. He then sped off at 85 miles an hour. The policeman stopping him was shocked to discover the famous personality behind the wheel. He frantically phoned his police chief. "Chief, I have stopped a very important figure for speeding. I don't know what to do." "What do you mean? Give him a speeding ticket!" the chief said. "Sir, in all honesty, I can't." "Why can't you? The law is the law. Who is it anyway that you stopped? Is it the mayor?" "No, sir." "Is it a congressman?" "No, sir." "Is it the President?" "No, sir." "Well, then, who is it?!" demanded the police chief. "I don't know sir!" the officer replied. "All I know is that he must be extremely important. The Pope is driving him to the airport."

Mary's words are a song of praise to God traditionally called "the *Magnificat*," drawn from the opening verb for "magnify" in **vs. 46** of the Latin Vulgate translation that became the standard Bible of the early Church in A.D. 400. American Methodist missionary E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973) insists, "the *Magnificat* is the most revolutionary doctrine in the world." Jones was called "the Billy Graham of India." He gained such international stature for his success in reconciling opposition groups that he became a confidant of Mahatma Gandhi, Franklin Roosevelt, and other world leaders. He identified three revolutions God achieves when Christ is enthroned as King in our hearts, displacing the world's kingdom of values. In the words of **vss. 51-53**, (1) "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts"—a *moral revolution* in which the haughty who dismiss most others as inferior are themselves degraded; (2) "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate"—a *social revolution* exalting the worth of every person for whom Christ died, regardless of social status; (3) "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty"—an *economic revolution* promoting giving over getting. It is not the *proud*, nor the *mighty*, nor the *rich* who will have the last word. Mary prophesies her Son **Jesus**, the Christ (Messiah), is about to turn upside down the world's values about what is most important in life.

### CHRIST'S REVOLUTIONARY VALUES

Let's reread **vss. 46-50**: "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;<sup>49</sup> for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.<sup>50</sup> And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation."

For a teenager with little direct access to the Old Testament Scriptures beyond what she heard read during her weekly synagogue attendance or what her parents or friends passed down to her orally, Mary shows a remarkable awareness of the Bible. If the words of her song seem too eloquent to you to be spontaneous, you are right! During her journey from Nazareth to her "relative" Elizabeth's home (**Luke 1:36-45**), a distance of 60-80 miles requiring a journey of 3-4 days, Mary has had much time to reflect on the angel Gabriel's startling declaration she had been chosen by God to give birth to the Christ Child, who would be conceived by the "power" of the "Holy Spirit" (**Luke 1:26-37**). It is Mary's prayer-saturated reflection on God's word and God's promises that bursts forth in her song. One Bible commentator identifies citations to 13 different Old Testament passages, especially **I Samuel 2:1-10** (NASB), where Hannah's song exalts God's goodness over her marvelous child, Samuel, born by God's special intervention. Without access to our Bible, could we compose such a Scripture-filled letter or song to the Lord on short notice?

Six weeks from today is Christmas Eve. We often marvel over how the Son of God, the "Lord of lords and King of kings" (**Revelation 17:14**) comes to earth not as a conqueror or king, as human wisdom would have assumed, but as the most helpless human being imaginable, a newborn child. **Philippians 2:5-7** (NLT) describes the majesty of His humility: "[H]ave the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, . . . He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being." The mother God chose also defies human wisdom. Last week we pointed out Mary is but a teenager no older than 15, from a despised town, and of Israel's peasant class. Even her "relative" Elizabeth seems to be a much more likely candidate to handle the awesome responsibilities associated with being **Jesus'** mother during His infancy and youth. Elizabeth is a mature woman, both in spiritual and physical development. She's also of priestly descent and married to an honored priest. She is even an older "relative" of Mary and entitled to be in a position of leadership over her.

Nazareth, a farming community of but 400 residents 12 miles from the Sea of Galilee, also defies the world's thought as the place where the Messiah would be born. A mere four miles northwest of Nazareth is Sepphoris. In 4. B.C., after the death of Herod the Great, his son Herod Antipas chose this site as the capital of his government as ruler over Galilee. He quickly transformed Sepphoris into "the ornament of all Galilee," according to 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jewish historian, Josephus. Sepphoris became Galilee's largest city. It included a network of colonnaded paved streets, markets, residential houses, public buildings, bathhouses, theater, synagogues and churches. The richness of its mosaic floors, architecture, and other findings prove the city's wealth. Joseph, Mary's husband, most likely found much work as a carpenter in Sepphoris, with its vast building projects during **Jesus'** youth. If the adult **Jesus** could claim Sepphoris as His hometown, whose prominence would have been foreseen by the LORD God of Israel, **Jesus** would have commanded immediate respect by Israel's political and religious leaders. But spiritually He would have been tainted by the pagan, worldly values celebrated in Sepphoris, unlike God's faithful worship in simple Nazareth.

We can give worldly wisdom a nod by conceding that Elizabeth may have been a *good* choice to be the mother of **Jesus**. After all, she and Zechariah did a fine job in preparing John to be **Jesus'** forerunner. But Mary's unquestioning trust in the Lord and remarkably godly character in one so young prove she was the *best* choice God could have made. Mary praises God for the extraordinary blessings He's about to bestow upon Israel and the world through her Child and she expresses humble gratitude for the role she's privileged to play in the drama of the salvation of the human race! Her opening words of **vss. 46-47**, "My soul magnifies the Lord,<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior," acknowledge her own need of God's saving grace. Rather than being the *object* of faith some Church tradition has made of her, Mary is a *model* of faith in God's saving grace in her behalf that we all need to embrace. Her words through **vs. 51** underscore how God's choicest blessings come to those who are most aware of their need of God's grace and mercy, rather than those who believe they are entitled to God's blessings or who selfishly exalt themselves above others: "for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;<sup>49</sup> for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.<sup>50</sup> And His

mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts."

The Common English Bible translates the last part of **vs. 51** as, "He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations." The Voice translation is: "The proud in mind and heart, God has sent away in disarray." The word for "proud" combines the Greek words for "above" and "shine"; it describes those who seek to highlight their presumed superiority over others. The Greek word for "scattered" means "to disperse thoroughly." Therefore, we might best understand, "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts," as, "God throws into disarray the schemes of the proud to exalt themselves." There's a tale along the lines of an Aesop's fable of a turtle in Pennsylvania who wanted to spend a winter in Florida. He knew he could never walk that far, so he convinced a couple of geese to help him. Each took one end of a piece of rope, while he clamped his vise-like jaws on the middle of the rope. The flight went fine until someone on the ground looked up in admiration and asked, "Who in the world thought of that?" Unable to resist the chance to take the credit, the turtle pridefully opened his mouth to shout, "I did." Oops! Maybe this turtle should have had someone read to him from the **Book of Proverbs**. He would have heard, "Pride goes before destruction; a haughty spirit before a fall" (**Proverbs 16:18**, NKJV).

Here is a summary of what *The Voice of the World* tells us: "Appetite says, 'Be sensuous; enjoy yourself.' Education says, 'Be resourceful; expand yourself.' Materialism says, 'Be satisfied; please yourself.' Psychology says, 'Be confident; fulfill yourself.' Might says, 'Be strong; take for yourself.' Pride says, 'Be superior; promote yourself.' Humanism says, 'Be capable; believe in yourself.'" George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) took a swipe at prideful arrogance when he described a person in one of his plays as "a self-made man who worships his own creator!" It's easier to summarize *The Voice of God* in the Bible, "Be wise; humble yourself before your Creator."

## CONCLUSION

O. Henry (1862-1910) became one of America's greatest short story writers for his surprise endings that drive home valuable moral lessons. He published *The Assessor of Success* in 1907. The title challenges us to rethink our standards for considering ourselves successful. The main character is Hastings Beauchamp Morley of New York City. He credits his "success" to his ability to manufacture truthful sounding lies out of thin air, his taste for impressive looking clothes to hide his poverty, and an inborn ability to bluff most everyone—man, woman, or child—whom he labels "greenhorns" for how easily they allow themselves to be cheated out of money.

He's just picked the pocket of a man of \$140 (\$3500 today), while making a great show of his kindness by helping this man locate the son he came to New York City to find. Morley is quite pleased. He walks along a street congratulating himself for his successful career of living off the fools who work for a living. A neighborhood clock then strikes 9:00 p.m. He looks up and beholds a young woman who is rushing to the street corner to catch an approaching cable car. She acts as though she's just gotten off work and is hurrying to her home. She wears a simple white dress and radiates the beauty that comes only from a heart truly pure and innocent. Morley knew her. Eight years before he had sat on the same bench with her at school. Their fondness as friends had been based on their shared honesty and innocence. She mirrors to him the character of the person he once had been. Shame over the vile person he'd become cuts his heart. O. Henry closes this tale with the words, "He turned down the side street to a quiet spot and laid his suddenly burning face against the cool iron of a lamppost, and said dully: 'God! I wish I could die.'"

"His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."