

Week 2 Song of Mary - Magnificat

The song of Mary can be found in Luke 1, 46 – 55, but useful background reading occurs earlier in the chapter in the preceding passage from verse 26. It is one of the better known songs, forming as it does, part of the service of Evensong.

Luke is our historian for this account. He is also a doctor and a man of intellect. He knows that there are many accounts circulating about the events in Jesus' life, and has set himself the task of fully investigating the evidence so that he can give a thorough account to 'most excellent Theophilus' (Luke 1, 3).

We do not know who Theophilus was, but one intriguing suggestion is that this was an honorary title and not an actual person. The word in Greek also means 'Friend of God' which could mean that both Luke and Acts were addressed to anyone who fits that description, and therefore we could include ourselves. Luke writes this so that we 'might know the certainty of the things you have been taught' (Luke 1, 4)

Mary's song is her natural reaction to a meeting between herself and her relative Elizabeth, who tells Mary that the child in her own womb has leapt for joy when he heard her speak. Elizabeth has also realised that the blessing that she has received is closely connected with that of Mary. They are both to be greatly used by God, and Elizabeth's reply confirms this insight.

'Why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'



This well-known song, called the *Magnificat* because of its first line in Latin, '*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*' is full of Old Testament imagery – close in form to 1 Samuel 2, 1 – 10, the prayer of Hannah as she gives her son, Samuel, into God's service as an offering for answered prayer. It talks of salvation, as did Zechariah's song (the *Benedictus*), and reflects the shared dream of Israel that one day all that the prophets had said would come to pass, God would do what he had promised and every nation on earth would be blessed through the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12, 1 – 3).

Some questions to think about

1 – Traditionally, Luke's Gospel has been assumed to have been written following a request by someone called Theophilus. If in fact it was written to help anyone who considers themselves a 'most excellent friend of God' does that alter our picture of Luke?

2 - Mary was probably in a difficult position with being pregnant and as yet unmarried. We do not know what the reaction of her parents was, but we do know that she spent quite some time with her relative Elizabeth. How vital to Mary might this relationship be?

3 - This is a song that is regularly sung as part of worship in some denominations. Is it one that we can relate to ourselves, as well as remembering it as the words of Mary?

4 - Mary acknowledges that future generation will talk of how blessed her life has been. Bearing in mind denominational differences, how should the worldwide Church best remember Mary as part of God's big picture of Salvation?

5 – The Jewish people had in their minds an image of the kind of Messiah that they were looking for, and how he would achieve his aim. How guilty are we of sometimes trying to tell God what to do, or conform to our image, rather than see his actions as Mary does?

6 - In verse 52 do you think Mary thinking militarily, or is this more to do with status?

7 – Similarly, in verse 53 in what way has Jesus fed the hungry and sent the rich away empty (can you relate this to any of Jesus' encounters in the Gospels)?

8 – It has been suggested that there is more than a hint of revolution in Mary's song. Is it right to think of Christianity in this way, and if so how should that be reflected in our lives?

9 – The Gospel writers each have their own way of handling the birth of Jesus. Luke's account is very people-centred, and he spends some time giving his readers an insight into the lives of Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary. Mark, by comparison goes straight in with John the Baptist in the desert and the baptism of Jesus. Does Luke's approach help you?