

The Magnificat

Introduction

What is the greatest song of all time?

- Rolling Stone magazine declared Bob Dylan's song "Like a Rolling Stone" to be the greatest of all time.
- The Billboard Charts top achieving song of all time is Chubby Checker's "The Twist".
- The best-selling physical single of all time is "White Christmas" by Bing Crosby selling over 50 million copies sold whereas the best digital single in terms of sales is Wiz Khalifa's "See you again".

Are any of these the best song of all time?

Could the best song of all time be a song that was first heard in song 2000 years ago and has been regularly sung by billions of people since the 6th century? Could the best song be one that has been put to music by the likes of Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Vivaldi, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Sergei Rachmaninoff to name a few? Could the best song be one first performed by the mother of Jesus Christ? Could the best song of all time be a song about God's loyal love and faithful grace in the sending of his only Son in order to save his people?

If those criteria were sufficient to make a song the greatest of all time, then the song contained in the passage we consider today would win the title. The song in question has been called The Cantic of Mary and The Magnificat.

Luke 1:39-56 ESV

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

As promised by God, the Lord's coming results in unparalleled blessing, particularly directed to those who turn to him in humility and faith. Our response should be one of joy, faith, and thankfulness.

John Testifies

V 39-41a

John's testimony: The Lord has come.

John's response: joy.

- Mary and Elizabeth's meeting ties together the two births
- Mary visits her relative whom the angel told her about
- Mary moves quickly, traveling 80-100 miles demonstrating quick obedience and faith in God's words
- Mary's words and greeting bring a response from John (in the womb)
- John's response = he leapt

In **Psalm 114:4 ESV** we read "The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs."

- Skipped = Leapt, the mountains skip at the presence of the Lord
- John leaps at the presence of the Lord testifying that the Lord has come!

⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

- Leaping: 16 year old admitted to Harvard – Huffington Post: ***This 16-Year-Old Opening His Harvard Acceptance Letter Is Pure Black Joy - "There's literally nothing in the world like black joy. Proof is in the moments after Ayrton Little, 16, found out he had been accepted to Harvard University. The TM Landry College Prep senior, surrounded by his classmates and family, went online to check his decision. Once he saw he'd been admitted, the Opelousas, Louisiana, native jumped for joy and screamed. The entire room burst with purest form of excitement."***

Our Response: Do we not have infinitely more to be joyful about? Ayrton Little, in the article, was quoted as saying that this would change his life forever; but our response to the Lord's coming really does change our lives for ever!

Elizabeth Testifies

V 41b-45

Elizabeth's Testimony: The Lord's coming is a fulfilment of God's word to the great blessing of Mary

Elizabeth's Response: faith + joy ↘

⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry,

- A loud cry of excitement and exultation

⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

- = humility (John was humble too...he must increase, not worthy to tie his sandals)
- Elizabeth recognizes the significance of a visit from Mary who is carrying her superior
- It isn't just heat, but light: **Ryle: We should observe in this passage — the clear spiritual knowledge which appears in the language of Elizabeth. She uses an expression about Mary which shows that she herself was deeply taught of God. She calls her, "the mother of my Lord."**

Those words "my Lord" are so familiar to our ears, that we miss the fullness of their meaning. At the time they were spoken, they implied far more than we are apt to suppose. They were nothing less than a distinct declaration that the child who was to be born of Mary was the long promised Messiah — the "Lord" of whom David in spirit had prophesied — the Christ of God. Viewed in this light, the expression is a wonderful example of faith. It is a confession worthy to be placed by the side of that of Peter, when he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ — the Son of the living God!"

- **Bock: "[Elizabeth] expresses her own confidence that God will bring to pass everything he revealed."**
- Elizabeth testimony is one filled with faith!
- Faith comes out of having been filled with the Spirit!!!
- The filling of the Holy Spirit, common in the opening chapters of Luke, indicates that Elisabeth's exuberant greeting is an expressing of the mind of God

- The mind of God on this matter is seen in that Elisabeth knows that Mary has been graciously chosen to bear the Deliverer
- Fruitful womb = blessing of God related to obedience
 - Elisabeth recognizes God's faithfulness and the blessing of Mary

Elisabeth, demonstrating faith herself, highlights Mary's response of faith:

⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

- The blessing that Elisabeth declares is grounded in God fulfilling his promises, in God bringing about his plan, in God realizing the hope of Israel.
- Elisabeth testimony is that the coming of the Lord is a great blessing to Mary. To joy she adds faith. She recognizes Mary's faith and blesses her for that. She has a humble faith of her own.

Our response:

We should be people who respond with faith; people of faith respond with faith!

Two things in regards to this response:

1. Faith grew out of the Spirit's work
2. Faith grew on the promises of God

On Elisabeth's recognition of the blessing of faith, Ryle comments: *"Do we know anything of this precious faith? This, after all, is the question which concerns us. Do we know anything of the faith of God's elect — the faith which is the working of God? Let us never rest until we know it by experience. Once knowing it, let us never cease to pray that our faith may grow exceedingly. Better a thousand times be rich in faith — than rich in gold. Gold will be worthless in the eternal world to which we are all traveling. Faith will be owned in that world, before God the Father and the holy angels. When the great white throne is set, and the books are opened, when the dead are called from their graves, and receiving their final sentence — the value of saving faith will then be fully known! Men will learn then, if they never learned before, how true are the words, "Blessed are those who believed!"*

GOSPEL — *DUNBELIEVER — GIFT — CHRIST — lay hold of this gift by faith*

Mary Testifies

V 46-56

Mary's testimony: The Lord's coming is a blessing to the world

Mary's response: Joyful, faith-filled thankfulness

- Mary lifts up God as she praises him for his work; in commentator **Morris's** words, "*a humble contemplation of the mercies of God*"

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

- These affections come from deep within and the actions correspond – rejoicing in God and magnifying the Lord
- Lord, God, Savior = sovereign master and ruler, actual deliverer of Israel
- The verb tenses are interesting: the tense of magnifies is not the same as rejoices
- It gives the sense of Mary praising the Lord now, even as she begins to find joy in her salvation: this is particularly intriguing as Jesus's life on earth is just beginning but he will bring salvation

Mary reviews what God has done for her:

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

The "looking on" of God is his gracious, loving care

- Generations to come will note the favor of God on Mary, seen in her humility and faith and in carrying the Son of God

Next Mary focuses on God's attributes of power, holiness, and mercy – if she has drawn attention to herself, it is only to direct the attention back to God: In light of God's mighty sovereignty and transcendent holiness, his gracious to the lowly servant Mary is that much more astonishing

As Mary begins to praise God for his acts to all people, she transitions from a focus on God's might and holiness to his mercy:

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

- God's mercy is a faithful mercy: from generation to generation, particularly to those who humbly fear (acknowledge, respect his position and authority) – Mary sees this and praises God

Mary moved from God's power to his mercy, now she returns to his power:

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

- The anticipation is that God will continue to do these things going forward: this prophetically points to Christ who will scatter the proud, bring down the mighty, and send the rich away empty but who will also exalt the humble and fill the hungry

Mary narrows her focus to God's acts for His people Israel:

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

- Mary reflects on Israel's covenant Lord which would entail God's protection from enemies, vindication to opposition, and participation in the covenant
- This disposition and corresponding actions by God have as their foundation his loyal love and mercy which was originally promised in the covenants with the patriarchs and forefathers
- Mary clearly is looking for what most Jews would be looking for a political and social deliverer as well as a spiritual deliverer

- What Israel would fail to anticipate is that the spiritual deliverance would proceed the political one
- The suffering of the cross would precede the following glories, many of which we are still waiting for: **1 Peter 1:10-11 ESV** ¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

As Mary humbly contemplates the fulfilled promises of God in regards to herself, to Israel, and to all those who come to God in humility and faith, she sings the praises of God in a song saturated with joy, faith, and thankfulness. This is how we too should respond to the blessing of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Our Response:

How do (ought) joy, faith, and thankfulness play themselves out in our response this Christmas season?

I have lost my joy this season: how could I have navigated those experiences and people in order to respond with joy, faith, and thankfulness?

What is joy? **John Piper:** *Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.*

Note the work of the Spirit' pray for the filling of the Spirit to enable and empower you to be joyful

The Spirit accomplishes this work by causing us to "*see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world.*"

Isn't this what John, Elisabeth, and Mary experienced? In the details of their lives they saw Jesus in the fulfillment of God's promises, they saw the Messiah in the Word of God and in the world they lived in.

This is what I failed to do. I saw my conflicts; I saw my pressures; I saw my selfish desires; I saw my ^{struggles} suffering. I didn't see Jesus! And I had no joy. And no thankfulness. And I had no joy and no thankfulness because I had no faith in the promises of God that are mine in Jesus Christ who has come.

I should have told myself to stop looking at my conflicts, my pressures, my selfish desires, my suffering, and anything else that was burdening me. And I should have preached to my soul, and exhorted my spirit to look and see Christ and all God's beautiful promises that are "yes" in Him because he came.

Let us respond in joyful, thankful faith this Christmas by asking the spirit to help us see Jesus in the word of God and then in the world that God has placed us in.