

The Parish of Wellow

Luke 1:46-55 – ‘Mary: Prayer of Praise’ Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Talk Passage – Luke 1:46-55

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

2. Talk Notes

1. Introduction

- How often have we been involved in a project that starts well but then hits difficulties and we feel like giving up?
- How often have we started to pray to God for something, maybe for someone to get to know Jesus or for someone to be healed: things begin to happen but then everything goes quiet, it is like God has gone away.
- That is how the Israelites in Mary's day were feeling. That God had abandoned them to a rather unpleasant Roman occupation.

2. The story of Israel

- Things had started so well – God through Abraham, had chosen the people of Israel to demonstrate what living in relationship with God was like.
- God had been faithful to his side of the relationship but the Israelites had not. Time and again they had gone their own way and time and again God had forgiven them. God knew that he needed to deal with this recurring pattern once and for all.
- But for Mary and her fellow Israelites who were living under the Roman jackboot it felt like God had fallen asleep. 400 years had elapsed between the writing of the last book of the Bible and the first book of the New Testament. They had been 400 years of silence!

3. Mary's *Magnificat* prayer (Luke 1:46-55)

- How many of us have said or sung Mary's *Magnificat* prayer over the years? Have we really understood what it says?
- Mary's *Magnificat* prayer has echoes of Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and it has been sung and remembered down the centuries. So what is so special about this prayer? Why do we give the prayer of a 12 year old girl almost the same significance in our church services as we do the Lord's Prayer?
- Why does Mary praise and celebrate God in this *Magnificat* prayer if she and her people feel that God has abandoned them?

- Mary's words of celebration have been 'immortalised' because they encapsulate the gospel, they are words of good news, before the gospel. Her words are a 'shout of triumph' thirty weeks before Bethlehem and thirty years before Calvary and Easter.
- Inside her womb is God's answer to her people after 400 years of silence. And what an answer this was going to be!
- In Lord of the Rings there is a fantastic scene at Helm's Deep. The beleaguered forces of good are totally outnumbered and make a last stand at Helm's Deep. All appears to be lost. But then Gandalf at the head of a mighty army rides in at the last minute and routs the forces of evil to great celebration and thanksgiving.
- Mary's 'shout of triumph' in this *Magnificat* prayer is because she is aware that a turning point in history is about to happen. God himself is going to personally enter the human stage to rout the forces of evil once and for all.
- God often enters situations that look hopeless from a human perspective to demonstrate his strength. The apostle Paul discovered this again and again: *For when I am weak, then I am strong* – 2 Corinthians 12:10
- '*My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour*' verse 47 – Mary rejoices that God has finally come to the rescue of his people.
- There may be 400 years of silence but Mary celebrates in this special prayer that God has not abandoned his special chosen people (verses 54-55). Mary sings to her God who is faithful to his promises. God has seen and knows the predicament of his people.
- In 30 years time the baby in her womb will pay once and for all, the price not only of the Israelites rebellion to relationship, but also ours, by dying on a cross. Three days later God will raise Jesus from the dead and restore forever the relationship between 'man' and God.

4. So what about us?

- Do we feel abandoned by God? Do we feel that that our prayers are not being answered? Do we feel like God has gone on holiday? If we do then Mary's *Magnificat* prayer should be a boost and encouragement.
- Are we prepared to admit our weaknesses and call upon God's strength?
- Despite 400 years of silence Mary discovers that God:
 - e) Has not gone away
 - f) He is still totally committed to relationship with his people
 - g) He is in control of the big picture
 - h) He is faithful and trustworthy

3. Questions to consider at home

- 4) '*From now on all generations will call me blessed.*' Is Mary being arrogant?
- 5) '*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.*' What is Mary referring to here?
- 6) If Mary's *Magnificat* prayer is a 'shout of triumph' about a particular event at a particular time why should we remember or take note of it today?

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