



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for December 7, 2008  
Released on Wednesday, December 3, 2008**

**“A Life of Total Commitment”**

**Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:46–55.**

**Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 2:1–10.**

**Background Scripture: Luke 1:26–38, 46–55.**

**Read: Luke 1:26–38, 46–55.**

**Place: hill country of Judea**

**Time: 7 or 6 B.C.**

**HOW TO SAY IT**

EN KAREM. In Kuh-*rim*.

HAMAN. *Hay-mun*.

MAGNIFICAT. Mag-*nif-ih-cot*.

**SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT:**

**Luke 1:46–55**

46And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

**LESSON AIMS**

**Facts:** to analyze Mary’s words and see that God chose her to bear His Son as a result of His grace.

**Principle:** to see how a faithful servant of God addresses Him.

**Application:** to develop a vocabulary that culminates in praising God.

**INTRODUCTION**

**SHORT- AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS**

Recently, I signed up for a new cell phone. I was told that if I made a two-year commitment, I would get a deep discount on the phone I wanted. This meant that I had to sign up for one of the phone company’s service plans. If I canceled this plan

and switched to another carrier before the end of the two years, I would have to repay the discount on my new phone. Therefore, I made a commitment that was not based on the wonderful service of the cell phone company, but primarily on my desire to save a few hundred dollars.

Since this was my fourth cell phone obtained under these kinds of circumstances, I had no problem in making the commitment. In my mind, 24 months was relatively short-term, not an odious condition for a substantial savings. The clock began ticking toward the end of this commitment the day I signed the agreement. Every month when I pay the bill, I will reduce the length of this commitment by one twenty-fourth. At the end of the two years, I expect that my phone will be a technological fossil, and I will shop for a new phone and a new plan; I will be willing to make a new commitment.

Many years ago, when my husband and I were married, the minister asked us if we were committed "for richer, for poorer" and "in sickness and in health." The commitment was for "so long as you both shall live." We have kept that commitment to each other. We understood it as a long-term commitment with no exact end date. We still intend to be married until we are parted by death.

When I was a teenager, I made a commitment to Jesus Christ. This was not an altogether easy commitment for me to make, because I knew this would determine the direction of my life. But on one particular day, I made a vow to serve Jesus and to trust Him as my Savior. I publicly promised this and was baptized into Christ on that same day. I really had no idea what all this commitment would require of me and where it would lead me. But it is a commitment with no end point. I intend to serve Jesus every day of my life and to live with Him for all eternity.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Today's lesson comes from Luke's account of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus the Messiah. The calendar system devised to begin with this birth is off by a few years, so we date today's text as having taken place about 5 or 6 BC. The two main characters in this part of Luke's story are Mary, a young woman from Nazareth, and Elisabeth, her older relative.

Nazareth was a Jewish village in the Galilee region, about 70 miles north of Jerusalem and 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee. We are not told the name of Elisabeth's city, just that it was in the Judean hill country (Luke 1:39, next week's lesson). Some think that Elisabeth and her husband, Zechariah, lived in the village of En Karem, located a few miles west of Jerusalem. Today, En Karem is the location of several churches and shrines associated with John the Baptist (the son of Elisabeth and Zechariah).

This week's lesson is about what happened when Mary visited Elisabeth. Mary's ability to make such a trip is a bit of a puzzle to us. Mary was yet to be married, so she was very young, perhaps 15 or 16 years old. For a young village girl to go from Nazareth to En Karem alone would have been unthinkable. Some students propose that Mary's family was relatively wealthy, and therefore she was safely accompanied by servants. Others suggest that Mary spent her early years in Jerusalem, with the journey from Jerusalem to En Karem being no more than a day's excursion. Mary thus could have made this trip many times. But these are just guesses.

Although the age gap between Mary and Elisabeth was 30 years or more, the two seem to have had a special bond that transcended generations. Both had become pregnant in miraculous ways, and Mary was eager to share with Elisabeth. Pregnant women, especially first-timers, often have a tie of fellowship that is difficult for others (especially some men) to appreciate. This special bond is an important factor in both this and next week's lessons.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **MARY'S REFLECTION ON WHAT GOD WAS DOING WITH HER—Luke 1:46—50**

#### **1. How is Mary's poetic expression in Luke 1:46—55 designated, and why is it called that(Luke 1:46, 47)?**

The text of this week's study is a poetic expression from Mary commonly known as the Magnificat. It is so designated because of the first word in the Latin translation, the Vulgate. It is actually a hymn of praise very similar to the one we read from Hannah (I Sam. 2:1—10). There are many quotes and allusions to the Old Testament, which tells us that Mary was very well acquainted with the Scriptures. This certainly reveals one reason God chose her to be the one to bear His Son.

Right away we should notice that the Song of Praise is filled with parallel lines (that is, two lines that express the same concept in different words). This is the primary characteristic of Hebrew poetry, often found in the Psalms and other places. Mary's use of this ancient technique shows both the excellence of her mind and the beauty of her *soul*.

#### **2. What was Mary experiencing when she said her spirit was rejoicing in God her Saviour?**

Mary's first words were about the Lord and how she rejoiced in Him. It is obvious that she loved the Lord deeply. Upon hearing Elisabeth's words, Mary experienced great joy, and it overflowed through words of gratitude to God for what He was doing. When she spoke of her soul magnifying Him, she was thinking of how great He appeared to be to her. After all, as we will soon see, He had bypassed the rich and famous and chosen her for this special privilege. Such thoughts stirred musings within her about the greatness of God.

When she spoke of rejoicing in God, she expressed a sudden surge of great happiness. The Greek word that has been translated "rejoiced" in Luke 1:47 means "to jump for joy," or "exult." It has been translated in other places of the Bible as "exceeding joy" and "greatly rejoice." Mary's heart was flooded with deep happiness beyond that of normal pleasure. God was so good and was blessing her in ways far beyond anything she could have comprehended as possible. It was probably the greatest sense of joy she had ever experienced.

#### **3. How do we miss out on the kind of joy Mary experienced?**

One of the things we believers often miss out on is experiencing this kind of joy as we watch God work in our lives. Perhaps it would be good to remind ourselves that every incident in life happens under God's control.

Here we see the strong character of this young woman, who, rather than being terrified by an unplanned pregnancy, is ecstatic in her praise to the Lord.

If we pay attention, we will find many reasons for being joyful. That extra provision coming from an unexpected source is reason for gratitude to God. That phone call from someone expressing love or appreciation came through God's promptings. For Christians, every blessing should bring joy.

#### **4. What was Mary realizing when she spoke of God regarding her lowly state (v. 48)?**

Mary recognized that in spite of her humble living conditions and low social status, God had sovereignly chosen to give her a great privilege beyond what anyone else had ever known. Before God, she considered herself to be nothing more than a handmaiden, that is, a female slave. She had no wealth or social status, she owned no property, she did not have others serving her, and there was no prospect for any of these things to become reality. The truth was, however, that there was a great God watching over her and determining the course of her life.

Because God was reaching into her life and granting her the privilege of bearing His Son, every future generation would call her blessed. Mary first understood God's call and submitted to it back in Luke 1:38. Yet, she makes no demands and sets no conditions for her submission. She has a heart of pure commitment that is marvelous for us to contemplate.

#### **Lord's Attributes Appreciated (vs.49, 50)**

Effective praise needs specifics. The great praise passages of the Bible are full of reasons to praise God. This can include both the divine attributes and the mighty deeds of the Lord. Mary now personalizes her praise for the ways God has worked in her life.

#### **5. What attributes of God did Mary recognize and express as she reflected on what He was doing (vs. 49, 50)?**

Mary's exaltation of God continued with her reference to Him as "he that is mighty." "Mighty" refers to something powerful, strong, and capable. Perhaps her thoughts came from Psalm 45:3, which says, "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty." Perhaps she knew Psalm 89:8, which describes God like this: "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? Or to thy faithfulness round about thee?"

She also recognized God's holiness in saying, "And holy is his name" (Luke 1:49). Psalm 111:0 says, "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name." Mary probably also knew the incident in Exodus when Israel had crossed the Red Sea and then sang a song about their deliverance (chap. 15).

The Old Testament speaks of God punishing iniquity across generations (see Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18). But Mary chooses to speak of the Lord's continuing *mercy* that *is on them that fear him* as she thinks across the generations. Modern people usually associate *fear* with evil things. We are terrified by deep depravity and criminality. The fear of the Lord has nothing to do with evil, however. To fear God is a matter of pure respect and reverence. It is to understand our position of weakness and neediness in relation to God.

This is the starting point for a life of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). To fear God is more than just a wise course, however. It is our duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

## **MARY'S REFLECTION ON GOD'S FAITHFULNESS—Luke 1:51—55**

The way of the world is that the rich and powerful often take advantage of the poor. This oppression is decried by the Old Testament prophets, who teach that God is Lord of both rich and poor. "Hear this word, ye ... which crush the needy.... The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks" (see Amos 4:1, 2).

In the eyes of God, a ruler must be just (2 Samuel 23:3) and must be a champion for the poor and needy (Psalm 72:4). The Lord's unwavering commitment to the weak and helpless is an expression of His faithfulness to men and women. In the final section of the Song of Praise, Mary worships God for His faithfulness.

### **6. How does Mary's song express the fact that God sometimes turns the values of the world upside down (vs. 51, 52)?**

"Mary's song shows that what is seen is not all that it seems. God takes the world's values and expectations and turns them upside down. God himself would come to earth and face rejection by the proud, the powerful, and the rich. He would lift the lowly and fill the hungry. And God continues to do that today" (Osborn, gen. ed., *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Tyndale). Mary might have been very young, but she obviously had a great deal of wisdom and insight.

"In Mary's song, as in Hannah's song, these holy women were filled with wonder to see that 'the proud, the mighty, the rich' were not chosen to usher in the greatest events, but the lowly. They sang of this as no capricious movement, but as a great principle of God by which he delights to put down the mighty from their seats and to exalt them of low degree" (*New Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Tyndale).

Modern people enjoy tales of triumph by underdogs. Ancient people likely are no different. We may think of Esther, the clever and faithful Jewish girl who resisted the intrigues of the powerful Haman with the result that Haman was destroyed. Also compelling are the stories of Daniel and his companions, who resisted the decrees of the mighty kings of Babylon.

Equally loved are the stories of ancestors who rose from humble beginnings to positions of great power. Joseph went from being a slave in prison to being the master of Egypt. David left the solitary life of a shepherd to become a great king. The irony of Jesus' life is that in His greatness He becomes the servant of all (see Mark 9:35). Paul tells us that Jesus left His secure place in Heaven and humbled himself to become a man. God has now exalted Jesus above all others (Philippians 2:6-9).

### **7. How does God satisfy the hungry (v. 53)?**

This role reversal of the *rich* and the poor is continued (compare 1 Samuel 2:5; Psalm 107:9). Later in Luke, Jesus teaches that the poor will be blessed and their hunger will be satisfied (Luke 6:20, 21). In contrast, Jesus says the rich will be turned away hungry (Luke 6:24, 25).

The coming of God's Messiah is to be a working out of His justice, bringing good news to the poor. When Jesus reads Scripture in the synagogue of His hometown Nazareth, He picks this passage: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

## **8. How has God helped the nation of Israel according to His mercy (v. 54)?**

*Holpen* is an older English form meaning "helped." The coming of the promised Messiah is to be understood as an act of great *mercy* to the nation of Israel in accordance with God's promises; God will indeed "perform the mercy promised to our fathers" (Luke 1:72). Israel has learned the lesson that it cannot survive without God's mercy, as shown in His consistent aid for the nation.

A strong theme in the Old Testament is the necessity of "waiting" for the Lord to show His mercy to the people. "And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18; compare Luke 2:25). Now this mercy has been shown in the womb of Mary. This part of the waiting is over!

## **9. How does Mary acknowledge God's trustworthiness (v. 55)?**

Mary ends her Song of Praise by recalling the most basic and central of Israel's heritage of promises from God. This is the promise *to Abraham* that his descendants (*his seed*) are to become a great nation. "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2; compare 17:7; 22:17).

Mary recognizes that God keeps His promises. This is the essence of trustworthiness. For this poor, pregnant teenager of "low estate," the trustworthiness of the Lord is the lifeline she needs to sustain her.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **MARY AS AN EXAMPLE FOR CHRISTIANS**

Are you committed to too many things? Do you find yourself running between church, school, family, job, hobbies, sports, social events, band concerts, shopping, fitness clubs, and many other commitments? Has anyone ever told you that you must learn to say *no* when asked to do more things? If this describes you, you may have a problem with over-involvement, but this is not necessarily a commitment problem.

True commitment is not a scheduling problem. It is not measured by the level of one's busyness. Commitment, rather, is a deep matter of the heart. It involves both a selfless willingness to serve and a clear sense of priorities. Ironically, commitment to God does not always mean "Let's get busy right now." Commitment to the Lord starts with slowing down and carefully discerning His will and His work.

Think about that: commitment begins with slowing down! If we take the opposite path, the path of "diving right in," we run the risk of missing what God may be trying to tell us through the subtle clues that He likes to give. We may become more and more inefficient as we become more and more frantic in our busyness.

This quarter's lessons will teach us much about commitment. They will do so by examining the lives of important Bible characters. Mary was one who slowed down and took time to praise God. She was faithful to Jesus throughout His life and did not abandon Him even at His execution. She is pictured after the resurrection as a person of deep faith and prayer (Acts 1:14). These are the reasons we still should call Mary "blessed."

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

We can never fully rejoice in God until we recognize our need for Him (Luke 1:46—47).

God's gracious gifts should make us humble, never boastful (vs. 48—49).

God's mercy is unlimited; it extends to all who humble themselves before Him (v. 50).

God's measureless power assures us that ultimately justice will be done (v. 51).

If we simply seek to humbly follow the Lord, He will exalt us in due time (vs. 52—53).

Christ's birth demonstrated God's faithfulness to all His promises (vs. 54—55).

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Make Mary's praise your own.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, when we see the praise that poured from Mary's heart, we cannot help but be moved. This young woman loved You very dearly. May our hearts become like hers, full of joy in serving You. May we never lose the wonder of being allowed to serve You. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Your Messiah. Amen.

### **ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

The next lesson reverts back to what happened when Mary first arrived at Elisabeth's house. We have an opportunity to study the words of praise offered by Elisabeth at what God was doing.

December 14<sup>th</sup>'s lesson is titled, "**Elisabeth's Commitment.**" The lesson text is Luke 1:39—45. Read Luke 1:5—24, 39—45 in preparation for this lesson. *Good studying!*

### **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

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