

Upside-down kingdom

a. Mary and Elizabeth (1:39-56)

1:39-45 What considerations should cause caution in reading too much into Elizabeth's greeting?

[1] [v.39] [anastasa, arose] A very favourite word with Lk., who has it about 60 times against about 22 times in the rest of the N.T. **Alfred Plummer**, Luke p.27

[2] [v.39] But now go back in imagination to that Nazareth home, that Nazareth society, those Nazareth surroundings; questionings, whisperings, suspicions. Explanation was absolutely impossible. Never forget that when you are thinking of the story. She could not explain. She could tell the story, but would anybody believe it? Now, be quite honest. Would you have believed it? I am quite convinced that part of the sword that pierced the soul of Mary in those earliest days, and I think all through life, was suspicion that rested upon her. **G. Campbell Morgan**, Luke p.25

1:46-50 What understanding must we draw regarding Mary's 'blessedness'? (2:22-24; Lev.12; Romans 3:9-12,23)

[3] Let us mark, secondly, in this hymn of praise, *the Virgin Mary's deep humility*. She who was chosen of God to the high honour of being Messiah's mother, speaks of her own "low estate," and acknowledges her need of a "Saviour." She does not let fall a word to show that she regarded herself as a sinless, "immaculate" person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Saviour for her own soul. We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to

reprove the honour paid by the Romish Church to the Virgin Mary, than the Virgin Mary herself. **J.C. Ryle**, Luke p.35

1:51-56 What is the great theme of 'The Magnificat'? (Psalm 106:1,40-48; Psalm 136)

[4] [v.51-53] As is often the case in the Old Testament, the future acts of God are viewed as already accomplished. The promise of God has the efficacy of the act itself (cf. Gen. 17:5). His word is the word of power. God will reverse the status of men in the coming age. In sovereign purpose he 'puts down' and 'exalts'. Thereby he manifests both his justice and his great mercy. **E. Earle Ellis**, Luke p. 76



Alexander Maclaren

Who is Jesus Christ? –

"the most revolutionary force in history"

[5] [v.53] The broad truth which she foretold remains one of the salient historical results of Christ's coming, and is the universal condition of partaking of His gifts. He has been, and is, the most revolutionary force in history; for without Him society is constituted on principles the reverse of the true, and as the world, apart from Jesus, is down-side up, the mission of His gospel is to turn it upside-down, and so bring the right side uppermost. The condition of receiving anything from Him is the humble recognition of emptiness and need. **Alexander Maclaren** *Expositions*: Luke p.23

[6] Mary is saying that God's action in the Messiah is not so much completely new as a continuation of His mercy to Abraham. **Leon Morris** p.77

[7] The Magnificat (46-55) takes its name from the Latin Vulgate, the 'Authorized Version' of the medieval Church. A lyrical poem modelled upon Old Testament (and Qumran?) psalms, it has a special affinity to the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10; cf. Lk. 1:38 ...) It expresses Mary's joyous gratitude for her personal

Communion with other believers - 'an eminent means of grace'

[10] [v.45] We should observe in this passage, the benefit of fellowship and communion between believers. We read of a visit paid by the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elisabeth. We are told in a striking manner how the hearts of both these holy women were cheered, and their minds lifted up by this interview. Without this visit, Elisabeth might never have been so filled with the Holy Ghost, as we are here told she was; and Mary might never have uttered that song of praise which is now known all over the Church of Christ. The words of an old divine are deep and true: "Happiness communicated doubles itself. Grief grows greater by concealing: joy by expression." We should always regard communion with other believers as an eminent means of grace. It is a refreshing break in our journey along the narrow way to ex-

change experience with our fellow travellers. It helps us insensibly and it helps them, and so is a mutual gain. It is the nearest approach that we can make on earth to the joy of heaven. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend." We need reminding of this. The subject does not receive sufficient attention, and the souls of believers suffer in consequence. There are many who fear the Lord and think upon His name, and yet forget to speak often one to another. (Malachi 3:16.) First let us seek the face of God. Then let us seek the face of God's friends. If we did this more, and were more careful about the company we keep, we should oftener know what it is to feel "filled with the Holy Ghost." **J.C. Ryle** Luke Vol.1 p. 30

blessing (46-48), God's graciousness to all who reverence him (49-50), his special love for the lowly (51-53) and for Israel (54f). The last half of the poem describes God's victory in terms of a national deliverance from human oppressors. This is a recurrent note in pre-Christian messianism. The New Testament writers do not deny it, but they redefine it and transfer it to Messiah's *parousia*. **E. Earle Ellis, Luke p. 75**

[8] [v.55] No shadows are yet cast across the morning of which her song is the herald. She knew not the dark clouds of thunder and destruction that were to sweep over the sky. But the end has not yet come, and we have to believe still that the evening will fulfill the promise of the morning, and 'all Israel shall be saved,' and that the mercy which was promised from of old to Abraham and the fathers, shall be fulfilled at last and abide with their seed for ever. **Alexander Maclaren Expositions: Luke p.24**

[9] Let us learn from this holy woman's example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. ... It is clear that the souls of Old Testament believers fed much on God's promises. They were obliged to walk by faith far more than we are. They knew nothing of the great facts which we know about Christ's life, and death, and resurrection. They looked forward to redemption as a thing hoped for, but not yet seen, and their only warrant for their hope was God's covenanted word. Their faith may well put us to shame. So far from disparaging Old Testament believers, as some are disposed to do, we ought to marvel that they were what they were. **J.C. Ryle Expository thoughts on Luke pp.38,45**

b. The Prophecy of Zacharias (1:57-80)

1:57-64 Why is it that Zacharias's tongue is finally loosed?

[11] [v.64] Be assured that when you do not really obey, then you are *mute* and have *nothing* to say. But at the moment when unbelief is taken away, then the mouth of man is opened again, then Zechariah can talk again. "He spoke, blessing God." His mouth has not been opened for some unnecessary talk, but for the praise of God. **Karl Barth, The Great Promise p.62**

"He has been, and is, the most revolutionary force in history; for without Him society is constituted on principles the reverse of the true, and as the world, apart from Jesus, is down-side up, the mission of His gospel is to turn it upside-down ... '
— Alexander Maclaren

1:65,66 What is Luke at pains to stress about these supernatural events? (Acts 4:16; 26:26)

[12] [v.65] The twofold reaction is very human: they were awed and they gossiped. The 'things', i.e. events, became 'common talk'. Probably they played their part in the acceptance which the Baptist later received as a prophet of God (7:26; 20:6). **E. Earle Ellis, Luke p. 78**

1:67-79 Isolate the key thoughts of Zacharias's inspired praise (Gen.12:3; 22:16-18; Lev.26:42)

[13] [v.69] It reveals incidentally that Mary probably had Davidic connections, for at this time Zechariah could not have known whether Joseph would marry her or not. **Leon Morris Luke p.80**

[14] [v.74] The Magnificat describes a reversal of political and economic status in the coming age (1:52f.). The 'Benedictus' speaks of the ethical transformation to be effected by the messianic redemption. **E. Earle Ellis, Luke p. 79**

1:74-79 Reflect on the significance of these inspired utterances for the likelihood of peace and security for Israel – or for that matter any other nation in the world today (Isaiah 32:1,15-18)

[15] [v.77] Messiah's work is defined as a deliverance from 'fear' and from 'sins'. This goes beyond a political redemption to picture the messianic salvation in religious priestly terms quite appropriate to the priest Zechariah. For while the mass of Jews viewed Messiah as a political deliverer, his priestly role is not absent from Judaism. **E. Earle Ellis, Luke p. 77**

[16] What could the Assyrians, Babylonians, Philistines and Egyptians do against Israel if Israel were true to God? ... We may serve him without fear while fearing only him, therefore without any other fear ... **Karl Barth, The Great Promise pp.68,69**

[17] John was no preacher of revolt, as the turbulent and impure patriots of the day would have liked him to be, but of repentance. His work was to awake the consciousness of sin, and so kindle desires for a salvation which was deliverance from sin, the only yoke which really enslaves. Zacharias the 'blameless' saw what

'Jesus came into the world ... music was reborn'

[20] Luke is the only one who has recorded for us the outburst of poetry and music in connection with the Incarnation. Matthew does not tell us anything about songs; Mark does not tell us anything about songs; John does not tell us anything about songs; but Luke, the Greek, the artist, himself a poet as well as a scientific man, when he was investigating and getting these stories, obtained copies of these songs. That is another instance of how the overruling of the Spirit of God allows nothing to be lost. Luke is the instrument, and the right instrument, to give us

those early poems and songs. From him we have gained the Beatitude of Elisabeth, the Magnificat of Mary, the Benedictus of Zacharias, and the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon; the Evangel sung by the angel of the Lord over the plains, and the Gloria of the angelic host. Those who love the modes of music will surely linger over these chapters. Luke, the artist, has gathered and collected, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the stories which reveal the fact that when Jesus came into the world, poetry expressed itself, and music was reborn. **G. Campbell Morgan, Luke p.27**

the true bondage of the nation was, and what the work both of the Deliverer and of His herald must be. We need to be perpetually reminded of the truth that the only salvation and deliverance which can do us any good consist in getting rid, by pardon and by holiness, of the cords of our sins. **Alexander Maclaren** *Expositions: Luke* p.28

1:80 Notice the dominant role of the Spirit in this section -- that is, the Holy Spirit acting upon the human (vv.41,47,67,80)

[18] [v.80] He lived a solitary life. ... This fact answers the question whether John was influenced by the Essenes, communities of whom lived in the wilderness of Judea. We have no reason to believe that he came in contact with them. Excepting the ascetic life, and a yearning for something better than obsolete Judaism, there was little resemblance between their principles and his. He preached the Kingdom of God; they preached isolation. They abandoned society; he strove to reform it. **Alfred Plummer**, *Luke* p.44

[19] The Holy Spirit is the vicegerent of Christ on earth, not the Pope of Rome. The Holy Spirit is the power of Christ on earth for all men who will let him use them. ... We have Luke's Gospel with its wondrous picture of Christ to take with us. We have the Acts with the marvellous story of the power of the Holy Spirit to cheer us. Jesus is king. Let us crown him. That is what Luke means by his Gospel and Acts. **A.T. Robertson**, *Luke the Historian in Light of Research* p.165