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Intro. You’re probably familiar with the mid-19th century classic by Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, with its story about Ebenezer Scrooge. But when we hear the terms “Christmas” & “carol” together, we usually think about Christmas hymns. The Gospel of Luke incorporates 4 early hymns in the first two chapters, each revolving around an aspect of the coming of Christ. Over these next 4 messages, I’ll deal with each of these songs in the series “A Christmas Carol,” beginning in the middle of Luke 1 today with “A Song of Praise.” You know, when you think of praise, it’s been said that everyone needs recognition for his accomplishments, but few people make the need known quite as clearly as the little boy who said to his father: “Let’s play darts. I’ll throw and you say ‘Wonderful!’” (*Bits & Pieces*, December 9, 1993, p. 24). With praise toward God in mind, let’s read these 10 verses together.

Theme: Praising God

Background: Unlike the other Gospel writers, Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus. Instead, Luke interviewed others & did his own research to write an accurate account of Jesus’ life & ministry. One of Luke’s sources most likely was Mary & her family, because he mentions things specifically about Elizabeth, Mary & Jesus that were insights into their family.

- Much like Samuel’s mother, Hannah, offers a praise of thanksgiving to God for her pregnancy in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, this song by Mary catches a glimpse of her joy to the Lord for His favor toward her.
- “magnifies”—means to “make great, praise, extol” & is parallel to “rejoices,” grounded in God’s special work (Bock 1:148-149)
- This song presents us with two main reasons why we should **magnify the Lord & rejoice in God (1:46-47):**

1. Because He takes notice of the humble & needy (1:48, 52-53)

- The verb for He “has looked on” (1:48) refers to looking on His own in acts of love (cf. 1 Samuel 1:11; 9:16) & later in Luke as Jesus’ compassion for a man’s sick son (9:38)

Illus: If you have ever seen a homeless or needy person & showed compassion by giving them some food or clothing, you have demonstrated a bit of what God does all the time toward the humble & needy

- Moreover, both “humble” & “servant” occur two times each in this short song (1:48, 52, 54), stressing Mary’s view of herself & the view of Israel as God’s people, fully dependent on Him
- This focus on the humble is an important theme in Luke, occurring all throughout, beginning with Mary’s family & then the shepherds & the needy all throughout, including the repentant thief on the cross
- “from now on” (1:48)—a phrase in Luke to indicate a significant change in God’s plan (5:10—Jesus called Simon, James & John to catch men; 12:52—Jesus will bring divisions in families because He must be first; 22:18—Jesus would not drink the cup of the Lord’s Supper until God’s kingdom comes; 22:69—the Son of Man would be seated at the right hand of the power of God; Acts 18:6—Paul left the synagogue in Corinth to go to the Gentiles)

2. Because He takes action on behalf of the humble & needy (1:49-55)

- The words for “mighty” & strength (strong arm) are key here (1:49, 51-52)
- His actions include His salvation (v. 47), deliverance (v. 51), scattering the proud, defeating the earth’s mighty (v. 52), providing for the hungry (v. 53), humbling the rich & helping His servant Israel (v. 54)

a. His action displays His holiness (1:49)

- While “His name” refers to all of God’s character, so that His character is holy, the reference to holiness is to be “set apart,” & in this context, it means He is set apart in sovereignty over the rulers of the earth

b. His action displays His mercy toward His people (1:50-54)

- God’s “mercy” is His loyal, faithful, gracious love that God has in covenant for His people (Bock, 1:152)
- “strength with His arm” (1:51)—an anthropomorphism—God doesn’t literally have an arm (or eyes or hand), but biblical writers often use human description to explain God’s attributes—in this case, His strength & might

Illus: Much like you men might come to the rescue of your wife or children by scooping them up with your strong arm, so God’s might fights on behalf of His people

- While some scholars think Mary is talking about God’s actions in the past, it seems she is using the past tense in a prophetic way (much like Paul speaks of believers as having been “glorified” in Romans 8:30)—God’s strength will bring down the mighty & exult the humble
- He brings down the proud, the mighty (from the Greek *dunastās*—the root for our word “dynasty” & refers to rulers) & the rich, because those signify people who have learned to trust in themselves, their strength, their wealth & have little need for God (so they think)—the storyline of Luke-Acts shows the rulers to include Tiberias Caesar, Herod’s sons & grandson, the high priests Annas & Caiaphas & the Sadducees, who controlled the Sanhedrin—all of these rulers were brought down in one form or another, trusting in their pride, wealth or strength, but it failed them (see especially the death of King Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12:22-23)
- Rulers around the world throughout different ages have often oppressed Christians, seizing their land/homes & subjecting them to poverty—it occurred greatly in AD 303-305 by Emperor Diocletian & happens today in Communist & Islamic countries)
- Conversely, God exalts the humble, fills the hungry with good things (including the goodness of His Spirit) & helps His servant

c. His action displays His faithfulness (1:54-55)

- Like the prophetic past tense above, Mary probably refers to God’s faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to Abraham (a major OT figure in Luke-Acts, mentioned 22x) & his offspring by sending the promised Messiah to Israel
- “forever” is used by Luke to refer to the Messianic age of deliverance (Bock 1:160)
- This promise was not only for Israel, but it would result in a blessing for “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3) who became part of Abraham’s family through faith in God’s Messiah
- God’s faithfulness is motivated by His mercy, His loyal love shown to His people—He cares deeply for you as a child of God (cf. 1 John 3:2)!

Conc. The brilliant physician and writer Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., loved to collect compliments, and when he was older he indulged his pastime by saying to someone who had just praised his work, “I am a trifle deaf, you know. Do you mind repeating that a little louder?” Our Lord is not deaf, but we should regularly praise Him & say it loudly & proudly, because of His wonderful work & mercy shown to us through the work of Jesus Christ, in Whom you must trust for salvation.