

Luke: 1:39–56

From Catena Aurea:

39. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40. And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42. And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

AMBROSE. The Angel, when he announced the hidden mysteries to the Virgin, that he might build up her faith by an example, related to her the conception of a barren woman. When Mary heard it, it was not that she disbelieved the oracle, or was uncertain about the messenger, or doubtful of the example, but rejoicing in the fulfilment of her wish, and conscientious in the observance of her duty, she gladly went forth into the hill country. For what could Mary now, filled with God, (*plena Deo*) but ascend into the higher parts with haste!

ORIGEN. For Jesus who was in her womb hastened to sanctify John, still in the womb of his mother. Whence it follows, with haste.

AMBROSE. The grace of the Holy Spirit knows not of slow workings. Learn, ye virgins, not to loiter in the streets, nor mix in public talk.

THEOPHYLACT. She went into the mountains, because Zacharias dwelt there. As it follows, To a city of Juda, and entered into the house of Zacharias. Learn, O holy women, the attention which ye ought to

shew for your kinswomen with child. For Mary, who before dwelt alone in the secret of her chamber, neither virgin modesty caused to shrink from the public gaze, nor the rugged mountains from pursuing her purpose, nor the tediousness of the journey from performing her duty. Learn also, O virgins, the lowliness of Mary. She came a kinswoman to her next of kin, the younger to the elder, nor did she merely come to her, but was the first to give her salutations; as it follows, And she saluted Elisabeth. For the more chaste a virgin is, the more humble she should be, and ready to give way to her elders. Let her then be the mistress of humility, in whom is the profession of chastity. Mary is also a cause of piety, in that the higher went to the lower, that the lower might be assisted, Mary to Elisabeth, Christ to John.

CHRYSOSTOM. (Hom. iv. in Matt.) Or else the Virgin kept to herself all those things which have been said, not revealing them to any one, for she did not believe that any credit would be given to her wonderful story; nay, she rather thought she would suffer reproach if she told it, as if wishing to screen her own guilt.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) But to Elisabeth alone she has recourse, as she was wont to do from their relationship, and other close bonds of union.

AMBROSE. But soon the blessed fruits of Mary's coming and our Lord's presence are made evident. For it follows, And it came to pass, that when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb. Mark the distinction and propriety of each word. Elisabeth first heard the word, but John first experienced the grace. She heard by the order of nature, he leaped by reason of the mystery. She perceived the coming of Mary, he the coming of the Lord.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) For the Prophet sees and hears more acutely than his mother, and salutes the chief of Prophets; but as he could not do this in words, he leaps in the womb, which was the greatest token of his joy. Who ever heard of leaping at a time previous to birth? Grace introduced things to which nature was a stranger. Shut up in the womb, the soldier acknowledged his Lord and King soon to be born, the womb's covering being no obstacle to the mystical sight.

ORIGEN. (vid. etiam Tit. Bos.) He was not filled with the Spirit, until she stood near him who bore Christ in her womb. Then indeed he was both filled with the Spirit, and leaping imparted the grace to his mother; as it follows, And Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. But we cannot doubt that she who was then filled with the Holy Spirit, was filled because of her son.

AMBROSE. She who had hid herself because she conceived a son, began to glory that she carried in her womb a prophet, and she who had before blushed, now gives her blessing; as it follows, And she spake

out with a loud voice, Blessed art thou among women. With a loud voice she exclaimed when she perceived the Lord's coming, for she believed it to be a holy birth. But she says, Blessed art thou among women. For none was ever partaker of such grace or could be, since of the one Divine seed, there is one only parent.

THEOPHYLACT. But because there have been other holy women who yet have borne sons stained with sin, she adds, And blessed is the fruit of thy womb. Or another interpretation is, having said, Blessed art thou among women, she then, as if some one enquired the cause, answers, And blessed is the fruit of thy womb: as it is said, Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord. The Lord God, and he hath shewed us light; (Ps. 118:26, 27.) for the Holy Scriptures often use and, instead of because.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. Now she rightly calls the Lord the fruit of the virgin's womb, because He proceeded not from man, but from Mary alone. For they who are sown by their fathers are the fruits of their fathers.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) This fruit alone then is blessed, because it is produced without man, and without sin.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Severus.) From this place we derive the refutation of Eutyches, in that Christ is stated to be the fruit of the womb. For all fruit is of the same nature with the tree that bears it. It remains then that the virgin was also of the same nature with the second Adam, who takes away the sins of the world. But let those also who invent curious fictions concerning the flesh of Christ, blush when they hear of the real child-bearing of the mother of God. For the fruit itself proceeds from the very substance of the tree. Where too are those who say that Christ passed through the virgin as water through an aqueduct? Let these consider the words of Elisabeth who was filled with the Spirit, that Christ was the fruit of the womb. It follows, And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

AMBROSE. She says it not ignorantly, for she knew it was by the grace and operation of the Holy Spirit that the mother of the prophet should be saluted by the mother of his Lord, to the advancement and growth of her own pledge; but being aware that this was of no human deserving, but a gift of Divine grace, she therefore says, Whence is this to me, that is, By what right of mine, by what that I have done, for what good deeds?

ORIGEN. (non occ. vide Theoph. et. Tit. Bost.) Now in saying this, she coincides with her son. For John also felt that he was unworthy of our Lord's coming to him. But she gives the name of "the mother of our Lord" to one still a virgin, thus forestalling the event by the words of prophecy. Divine foreknowledge brought

Mary to Elisabeth, that the testimony of John might reach the Lord. For from that time Christ ordained John to be a prophet. Hence it follows, For, to, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded, &c.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. ad Dardanum 57.) But in order to say this, as the Evangelist has premised, she was filled with the Holy Spirit, by whose revelation undoubtedly she knew what that leaping of the child meant; namely, that the mother of Him had come unto her, whose forerunner and herald that child was to be. Such then might be the meaning of so great an event; to be known indeed by grown up persons, but not understood by a little child; for she said not, "The babe leaped in faith in my womb," but leaped for joy. Now we see not only children leaping for joy, but even the cattle; not surely from any faith or religious feeling, or any rational knowledge. But this joy was strange and unwonted, for it was in the womb; and at the coming of her who was to bring forth the Saviour of the world. This joy, therefore, and as it were reciprocal salutation to the mother of the Lord, was caused (as miracles are) by Divine influences in the child, not in any human way by him. For even supposing the exercise of reason and the will had been so far advanced in that child, as that he should be able in the bowels of his mother to know, believe, and assent; yet surely that must be placed among the miracles of Divine power, not referred to human examples.

THEOPHYLACT. The mother of our Lord had come to see Elisabeth, as also the miraculous conception, from which the Angel had told her should result the belief of a far greater conception, to happen to herself; and to this belief the words of Elisabeth refer, And blessed art thou who hast believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told thee from the Lord.

AMBROSE. You see that Mary doubted not but believed, and therefore the fruit of faith followed.

AMBROSE. But happy are ye also who have heard and believed, for whatever soul hath believed, both conceives and brings forth the word of God, and knows His works.

1:46

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

AMBROSE. As evil came into the world by a woman, so also is good introduced by women; and so it seems not without meaning, that both Elisabeth prophesies before John, and Mary before the birth of the Lord. But it follows, that as Mary was the greater person, so she uttered the fuller prophecy.

BASIL. (in Psalm 33) For the Virgin, with lofty thoughts and deep penetration, contemplates the boundless mystery, the further she advances, magnifying God; And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Athanasius.) As if she said, Marvellous things hath the Lord declared that He will accomplish in my body, but neither shall my soul be unfruitful before God. It becomes me to offer Him the fruit also of my will, for inasmuch as I am obedient to a mighty miracle, am I bound to glorify Him who performs His mighty works in me.

ORIGEN. Now if the Lord could neither receive increase or decrease, what is this that Mary speaks of, My soul doth magnify (magnificat) the Lord? But if I consider that the Lord our Saviour is the image of the invisible God, and that the soul is created according to His image, so as to be an image of an image, then I shall see plainly, that as after the manner of those who are accustomed to paint images, each one of us forming his soul after the image of Christ, makes it great or little, base or noble, after the likeness of the original; so when I have made my soul great in thought, word, and deed, the image of God is made great, and the Lord Himself, whose image it is, is magnified in my soul.

1:47

47. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

BASIL. (ubi sup.) The first-fruit of the Spirit is peace and joy. Because then the holy Virgin had drunk in all the graces of the Spirit, she rightly adds, And my spirit hath leaped for joy. (exultavit.) She means the same thing, soul and spirit. But the frequent mention of leaping for joy in the Scriptures implies a certain bright and cheerful state of mind in those who are worthy. Hence the Virgin exults in the Lord with an unspeakable springing (and bounding) of the heart for joy, and in the breaking forth into utterance of a noble affection. It follows, in God my Saviour.

AMBROSE. The soul of Mary therefore magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoiced in God, because with soul and spirit devoted to the Father and the Son, she worships with a pious affection the one God from whom are all things. But let every one have the spirit of Mary, so that he may rejoice in the Lord. If according to the flesh there is one mother of Christ, yet, according to faith, Christ is the fruit of all. For every soul receives the word of God if only he be unspotted and free from sin, and preserves it with unsullied purity.

THEOPHYLACT. But he magnifies God who worthily follows Christ, and now that he is called Christian, lessens not the glory of Christ by acting unworthily, but does great and heavenly things; and then the Spirit

(that is, the anointing of the Spirit) shall rejoice, (i. e. make him to prosper,) and shall not be withdrawn, so to say, and put to death.

BASIL. (ubi sup.) But if at any time light shall have crept into his heart, and loving God and despising bodily things he shall have gained the perfect standing of the just, without any difficulty shall he obtain joy in the Lord.

ORIGEN. But the soul first magnifies the Lord, that it may afterwards rejoice in God; for unless we have first believed, we can not rejoice.

1:48

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

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Isidore.) She gives the reason why it becomes her to magnify God and to rejoice in Him, saying, For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden; as if she said, "He Himself foresaw, therefore I did not look for Him." I was content with things lowly, but now am I chosen unto counsels unspeakable, and raised up from the earth unto the stars.

AUGUSTINE. (Pseudo-Aug. Serm. de Assumpt 208.) O true lowliness, which hath borne God to men, hath given life to mortals, made new heavens and a pure earth, opened the gates of Paradise, and set free the souls of men. The lowliness of Mary was made the heavenly ladder, by which God descended upon earth. For what does regarded mean but "approved?" For many seem in my sight to be lowly, but their lowliness is not regarded by the Lord. For if they were truly lowly, their spirit would rejoice not in the world, but in God.

ORIGEN. But why was she lowly and cast down, who carried in her womb the Son of God? Consider that lowliness, which in the Scriptures is particularly praised as one of the virtues, is called by the philosophers "modestia." And we also may paraphrase it, that state of mind in which a man instead of being puffed up, casts himself down.

ATHANASIUS. For if as the Prophet says, Blessed are they who have seed in Sion, and kinsfolk in Jerusalem, (Isa. 31:9. apud LXX.) how great should be the celebration of the divine and ever holy Virgin Mary, who was made according to the flesh, the Mother of the Word?

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Metaphrastes.) She does not call herself blessed from vain glory, for what room is there for pride in her who named herself the handmaid of the Lord? But, touched by the Holy Spirit, she foretold those things which were to come.

THEOPHYLACT. And therefore she says, all generations, not only Elisabeth, but also every nation that believed.

1:49

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

THEOPHYLACT. The Virgin shews that not for her own virtue is she to be pronounced blessed, but she assigns the cause, saying, For he that is mighty hath magnified me.

AUGUSTINE. (sup.) What great things hath He done unto thee? I believe that a creature thou gavest birth to the Creator, a servant thou broughtest forth the Lord, that through thee God redeemed the world, through thee He restored it to life.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. But where are the great things, if they be not that I still a virgin conceive (by the will of God) overcoming nature? I have been accounted worthy, without being joined to a husband, to be made a mother, not a mother of any one, but of the only-begotten Saviour.

TITUS BOSTRENSIS. But she says, that is mighty, that if men should disbelieve the work of her conception, namely, that while yet a virgin, she conceived, she might throw back the miracles upon the power of the Worker. Nor because the only-begotten Son has come to a woman is He thereby defiled, for holy is his name.

BASIL. (in Ps. 33.) But holy is the name of God called, not because in its letters it contains any significant power, but because in whatever way we look at God we distinguish his purity and holiness.

1:50

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

ORIGEN. For the mercy of God is not upon one generation, but extends to eternity from generation to generation.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Victor Pres.) According to the mercy which He hath upon generations of generations, I conceive, and He Himself is united to a living body, out of mercy alone undertaking our salvation. Nor is His mercy shewn indiscriminately, but upon those who are constrained by the fear of Him in every nation; as it is said, upon those who fear him, that is, upon those who being brought by repentance are turned to faith and renewal for the obstinate unbelievers have by their sin shut against themselves the gate of mercy.

THEOPHYLACT. Or by this she means that they who fear shall obtain mercy, both in that generation, (that is, the present world,) and the generation which is to come, (i. e. the life everlasting.) For now they receive a hundred-fold, but hereafter far more. (Matt. 19:29.)

1:51

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

ORIGEN. But to those that fear Him, He hath done mighty things with His arm; though thou comest weak to God, if thou hast feared Him thou shalt obtain the promised strength.

THEOPHYLACT. For in His arm, that is, His incarnate Son, He hath shewed strength, seeing that nature was vanquished, a virgin bringing forth, and God becoming man.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Photius.) Or she says, Hath shewed, for will shew strength, not as long ago by the hand of Moses against the Egyptians, nor as by the Angel, (when he slew many thousand of the rebel Assyrians,) nor by any other instrument save His own power, He openly triumphed, overcoming spiritual (intelligibles) enemies. Hence it follows, he hath scattered, &c. that is to say, every heart that was puffed up and not obedient to His coming He hath laid bare, and exposed the wickedness of their proud thoughts.

CYRIL OF JERUSALEM. But these words may be more appropriately taken to refer to the hostile ranks of the evil spirits. For they were raging on the earth, when our Lord's coming put them to flight, and restored those whom they had bound, to His obedience.

THEOPHYLACT. This might also be understood of the Jews whom He scattered into all lands as they are now scattered.

1:52

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

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The mighty in knowledge were the evil spirits, the Devil, the wise ones of the Gentiles, the Scribes and Pharisees; yet these He hath put down, and raised up those who humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6); giving them the power of treading upon serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy. (Luke 10:19.) The Jews were also at one time puffed up with power, but unbelief slew them, and the mean and lowly of the Gentiles have through faith climbed up to the highest summit.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Macarius ex Serm. 1.) For our understanding is acknowledged to be the judgment-seat of God, but after the transgression, the powers of evil took their seat in the heart of the first man as on their own throne. For this reason then the Lord came and cast out the evil spirits from the seat of our will, and raised up those who were vanquished by devils, purging their consciences, and making their hearts his own dwelling place.

1:53

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

GLOSS. (non occ.) Because human prosperity seems to consist chiefly in the honours of the mighty and the abundance of their riches, after speaking of the casting down of the mighty, and the exalting of the humble, he goes on to tell of the impoverishing of the rich and the filling of the poor, He hath filled the hungry, &c.

BASIL. (ubi sup.) These words regulate our conduct even with respect to sensible things, teaching the uncertainty of all worldly possessions, which are as shortlived as the wave which is dashed about to and fro by the violence of the wind. But spiritually all mankind suffered hunger except the Jews; for they possessed the treasures of legal tradition and the teachings of the holy prophets. But because they did not rest humbly on the Incarnate Word, they were sent away empty, carrying nothing with them, neither faith nor knowledge, and were bereft of the hope of good things, being shut out both of the earthly Jerusalem, and the life to come. But those of the Gentiles, who were brought low by hunger and thirst, because they clung to the Lord, were filled with spiritual goods.

GLOSS. (ordin.) They also who desire eternal life with their whole soul, as it were hungering after it, shall be filled when Christ shall appear in glory; but they who rejoice in earthly things, shall at the end be sent away emptied of all happiness.

1:54–55

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

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

GLOSS. (non occ.) After a general mention of the Divine mercy and holiness, the Virgin changes the subject to the strange and marvellous dispensation of the new incarnation, saying, He hath holpen his servant Israel, &c. as a physician relieves the sick, becoming visible among men, that He might make Israel (i. e. him who sees God) His servant.

BASIL. (non occ.) For by Israel she means not Israel after the flesh, whom their own title made noble, but the spiritual Israel, which retained the name of faith, straining their eyes to see God by faith.

THEOPHYLACT. (vide etiam Tit. Bost.) It might also be applied to Israel after the flesh, seeing that out of that body multitudes believed. But this He did remembering His mercy, for He hath fulfilled what He promised to Abraham, saying, For in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. (Gen. 12:3.) This promise then the mother of God called to mind, saying, As he spake to our father Abraham; (Gen. 17:12.) for it was said to Abraham, I will place my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, for an eternal covenant, that I shall be thy God, and the God of thy seed after thee.

GLOSS. (ordin.) For this promise of heritage shall not be narrowed by any limits, but to the very end of time there shall never lack believers, the glory of whose happiness shall be everlasting.

1:56

56. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

AMBROSE. Mary abode with Elisabeth until she had accomplished the time of her bringing forth; as it is said, And Mary abode, &c.

THEOPHYLACT. For in the sixth month of the conception of the forerunner, the Angel came to Mary, and she abode with Elisabeth three months, and so the nine months are completed.

AMBROSE. Now it was not only for the sake of friendship that she abode so long, but for the increase also of so great a prophet. For if at her first coming the child had so far advanced, that at the salutation of Mary he leaped in the womb, and his mother was filled with the Holy Spirit, how much must we suppose the presence of the Virgin Mary to have added during the experience of so long a time? Rightly then is she represented as having shewn kindness to Elisabeth, and preserved the mystical number.

THEOPHYLACT. But when Elisabeth was going to bring forth, the Virgin departed, as it follows, And she returned; or, probably because of the multitude, who were about to assemble at the birth. But it became not a virgin to be present on such an occasion.

GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Metaphrastes.) For it is the custom for virgins to go away when the pregnant woman brings forth. But when she reached her own home, she went to no other place, but abode there until she knew the time of her delivery was at hand. And Joseph doubting, is instructed by an Angel.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

1:39–40 Mary Journeys to Greet Elizabeth

Mary Visits Elizabeth So that Jesus Could Bless John.

Origen: Better men go to weaker men to give them some advantage by their visits. Thus the Savior came to John to sanctify John's baptism.... Jesus was in her womb, and he hastened to sanctify John, who was still in his own mother's womb. Before Mary came and greeted Elizabeth, the infant did not rejoice in her womb. But as soon as Mary spoke the word that the Son of God, in his mother's womb, had supplied, "the infant [John] leaped in joy." At that moment Jesus made his forerunner a prophet for the first time. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 7.1.

1:41 The Baby John Leaps in Elizabeth's Womb

John's Leap a Miraculous Sign of Faith.

Augustine: We see instances of leaping not only in children but even in animals, although certainly not for any faith or religion or rational recognition of someone coming. But this case stands out as utterly uncommon and new, because it took place in a womb, and at the coming of her who was to bring forth the Savior of humankind. Therefore this leaping, this greeting, so to speak, offered to the mother of the Lord is miraculous. It is to be reckoned among the great signs. It was not effected by human means by the infant, but by divine means in the infant, as miracles are usually wrought. Letter 187.23.

The Vivified Womb of Elizabeth.

Ephrem the Syrian: John jumped for joy to make an announcement concerning his future preaching. The infant of the barren woman exulted before the infant of the virgin. He sought out his mother's tongue and desired to pronounce a prophecy concerning the Lord. Therefore Elizabeth's conception was kept hidden from Mary for six months, until the infant would have limbs sufficiently formed to exult before the Lord with his jumping and become a witness to Mary through his exultation. Moreover, that he exulted in the womb of his mother was not of himself, nor because of his five months, but so that the divine gifts might show themselves in the barren womb that was now carrying him. It was also so that the other womb, that of the Virgin, would know the great gifts given to Elizabeth, and that the two soils might believe in the seeds they had received through the word of Gabriel, cultivator of both grounds. Since John could not cry out in his exultation and render witness to his Lord, his mother began to say, "You are blessed among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Our Lord prepared his herald in a dead womb, to show that he came after a dead Adam. He vivified Elizabeth's womb first, and then vivified the soil of Adam through his body. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 1.30.

1:42 Elizabeth's Liturgical Response

Elizabeth Heralds Christ as God.

Prudentius:

Believe what says the angel who was sent

From the Father's throne, or if your stolid ear

Catch not the voice from heaven, be wise and hear

The cry of aged woman, now with child.

O wondrous faith! The babe in senile womb

Greets through his mother's lips the Virgin's Son,

Our Lord; the child unborn makes known the cry

Of the Child bestowed on us, for speechless yet,

He caused that mouth to herald Christ as God.

The Divinity of Christ 585–93.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in John, Elizabeth and Mary.

Origen: Elizabeth, who was filled with the Holy Spirit at that moment, received the Spirit on account of her son. The mother did not inherit the Holy Spirit first. First John, still enclosed in her womb, received the Holy Spirit. Then she too, after her son was sanctified, was filled with the Holy Spirit. You will be able to believe this if you also learn something similar about the Savior. (In a certain number of manuscripts, we have discovered that blessed Mary is said to prophesy. We are not unaware of the fact that, according to other copies of the Gospel, Elizabeth speaks these words in prophecy.) Mary also was filled with the Holy Spirit when she began to carry the Savior in her womb. As soon as she received the Holy Spirit, who was the creator of the Lord's body, and the Son of God began to exist in her womb, she too was filled with the Holy Spirit. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 7.3.

1:43–45 Elizabeth's Wonder at Mary's Greeting

Christ the Fruit of the Faithful.

Ambrose: You see that Mary did not doubt but believed and therefore obtained the fruit of faith. "Blessed ... are you who have believed." But you also are blessed who have heard and believed. For a soul that has believed has both conceived and bears the Word of God and declares his works. Let the soul of Mary be in each of you, so that it magnifies the Lord. Let the spirit of Mary be in each of you, so that it rejoices in God. She is the one mother of Christ according to the flesh, yet Christ is the Fruit of all according to faith. Every soul receives the Word of God, provided that, undefiled and unstained by vices, it guards its purity with inviolate modesty. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 2.26.

1:46–49 Mary’s Hymn of Praise

Salvation Begins with Women.

Origen: Elizabeth prophesies before John. Before the birth of the Lord and Savior, Mary prophesies. Sin began from the woman and then spread to the man. In the same way, salvation had its first beginnings from women. Thus the rest of women can also lay aside the weakness of their sex and imitate as closely as possible the lives and conduct of these holy women whom the Gospel now describes. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 8.1.

Mary Preaches the New Kingdom.

Ephrem the Syrian: [Mary] revealed to Elizabeth what the angel spoke to her in secret, and that he called her blessed because she believed in the realization of the prophecy and the teaching that she heard. Then Mary gently brought forth the fruit of what she heard from the angel and Elizabeth: “My soul bless the Lord.” Elizabeth had said, “Blessed is she who has believed,” and Mary replied, “From henceforth all generations will call me blessed.” It was then that Mary began to preach the new kingdom. “She returned home after three months,” so that the Lord whom she was carrying would not begin service before his servant. She returned to her husband to clarify the matter, for if she had become pregnant through human fruit, it would have been appropriate for her to flee from her husband. Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron 1.28.

The Lord is Magnified in Our Image of Him.

Origen: Let us consider the Virgin’s prophecy. She says, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” Two subjects, “soul” and “spirit,” carry out a double praise. The soul praises the Lord, the Spirit praises God—not because the praise of the Lord differs from the praise of God but because he who is God is also Lord, and he who is Lord is also God.

We ask how a soul can magnify the Lord. The Lord can undergo neither increase nor loss. He is what he is. Thus, why does Mary now say, “My soul magnifies the Lord?” ... My soul is not directly an image of God. It was created as the image of an Image that already existed.... Each one of us shapes his soul into the image of Christ and makes either a larger or a smaller image of him. The image is either dingy and dirty, or it is clean and bright and corresponds to the form of the original. Therefore, when I make the image of

the Image—that is, my soul—large and magnify it by work, thought and speech, then the Lord himself is magnified in my soul, because it is an image of him. Just as the Lord is thus magnified in our image of him, so too, if we are sinners, he diminishes and decreases.

But surely the Lord is not diminished, nor does he decrease. Rather, we create other images in ourselves instead of the Savior's image. Instead of being the image of the Word, or of wisdom, justice and the rest of the virtues, we assume the form of the devil. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 8.1–3.

God Does Powerful Things for the Humble.

Origen: “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.” If I take “all generations” literally, I apply it to believers. But, if I search for something more profound, I will notice how valuable it is to join to it, “because he who is powerful has done great things for me.” For “everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.” God looked upon the blessed Mary's humility, and on account of it “he who is powerful did great things for her, and holy is his name.” Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 8.6.

1:50–53 God's Mighty Acts of Mercy

Mercy for All Believers Who Fear God.

Origen: “And his mercy extends to generations of generations.” God's mercy is not for one generation, nor for two, nor for three. It is not for five. It stretches “from generation to generation.” “To those who fear him he has shown strength in his arm.” You may approach the Lord as a weak man. If you fear him, you will be able to hear the promise the Lord makes to you on account of your fear of him....

So, if you fear the Lord, he gives you courage or authority. He gives you the kingdom, so that you might be placed under the “king of kings” and possess the kingdom of heaven in Christ Jesus, to whom is glory and power for ages of ages. Amen. Homilies on the Gospel of Luke 8.6–7.

Mary Foresees the Pride of the Scribes and Pharisees.

Cyril of Alexandria: The arm enigmatically signifies the Word that was born of her. By the proud, Mary means the wicked demons who with their prince fell through pride; the Greek sages, who refused to receive the folly, as it seemed, of what was preached; and the Jews who would not believe and were scattered for their unworthy imaginations about the Word of God. By the mighty she means the scribes

and Pharisees, who sought the chief seats. It is nearer the sense, however, to refer it to the wicked demons. When openly claiming mastery over the world, the Lord by his coming scattered them and transferred those whom they had made captive unto his own dominion. Commentary on Luke.

Rich and Hungry—Pharisee and Tax Collector.

Augustine: Who are the hungry? The humble, the needy. Who are the rich? Proud and self-important people. I will not send you far to find them. I will show you now, in one and the same temple, one of those rich who are sent away empty, and one of those poor who are filled with good things.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.” ... Observe the rich man burping his undigested food, breathing out the fumes of his intoxication—with pride, though, not with justice. “God,” he says, “I thank you because I am not like other men, robbers, unjust, adulterers, like this tax collector here.” ...

Come, poor men—come along, hungry tax collector. Rather, stand there, where you are standing. The tax collector, you see, “was standing a long way off,” but the Lord was drawing near to the humble. He did not dare to raise his eyes to heaven; yet where he did not raise his eyes, that is where he had his heart. Sermon 290.6.

1:54 Mercy and Aid for Israel

1:55–56 Abraham’s Eternal Seed

God Fulfills His Promise to Israel and Abraham.

Cyril of Alexandria: He has taken hold of Israel—not of the Israel according to the flesh, who prides himself on the bare name, but of him who is so after the Spirit, in accordance with the true meaning of the appellation. The latter comprises those who look to God, believe in him and obtain through the Son the adoption of sons, according to the Word that was spoken and the promise made to the prophets and patriarchs of old. It has, however, a true application also to the carnal Israel, for many thousands and ten thousands of them believed. But he has remembered his mercy as he promised to Abraham and has accomplished what he said to him: that in his seed shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed. This promise was not in the act of fulfillment by the impending birth of our common Savior Christ—who is the seed of

Abraham, in whom the Gentiles are blessed. For he took on him the seed of Abraham, according to the apostles' words, and fulfilled the promise made unto the fathers. Commentary on Luke.