



SESSION FIVE – MARY’S PRAYER

In this session we turn to one of the most recognizable women figures in all of Scripture—Mary, the mother of Jesus. Alongside Mary, we will learn about God’s plan for her as a pivotal figure in his plan for the redemption of humanity. We will watch her growing understanding of what he has called her to do, and witness a powerful song of praise and thanksgiving which ushers forth from her as she begins to comprehend how God’s radical work through her reflects his consistent character and the fulfillment of his promises.

CONTEXT

Mary’s prayer brings us into the New Testament. Approximately 400 years elapse between the time that the final prophet penned the last book of the Old Testament and the birth of Jesus Christ. Many, many generations after the women we have talked about thus far offered up their prayers, God is ready to bring the promises we’ve seen only hinted at previously to fruition at last. Mary was an ordinary woman living in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee, a place that in modern terminology we would likely call “podunk.” Neither who she was nor where she was from made her particularly remarkable, but God chose her to bear the greatest gift he would ever bestow upon humanity.

The time has come in God’s redemptive plan for him to take matters into his own hands and send his Son to save wayward humanity. Jesus will be the one through whom proper relationship between us and God is restored. But first, Jesus must be born, and for this he needs a mother.

Read Luke 1:1-45.

1. What do verses 1-4 indicate about the reliability of what Luke has recorded? Why is this important?

2. Provide a brief summary of what this passage recounts, using the general outline below as a guideline:
 - a. Verses 5-25

 - b. Verses 26-38

 - c. Verses 39-45

3. What familial situation does verses 5-7 introduce and how does it relate to similar situations we have seen throughout the study thus far? How has God responded in such circumstances in the past, and what does that suggest about what he is going to do here and why?

4. Provide a brief list of the things Gabriel foretold to Zechariah in this passage and those he told Mary. Compare the similarities and differences between the two, including the responses of Zechariah and Mary.

Zechariah (Luke 1:11-25)	Mary (Luke 1:26-38)
Similarities	Differences

5. What do verses 16-17 indicate about the role John the Baptist is going to play in what God about to do among his people? What do verses 31-33 indicate about Jesus' role?
6. Describe Mary's mental, emotional, and spiritual state, according to verses 26-38.

7. What adjectives would you use to describe the interaction between Mary and Elizabeth in this passage? How does the tone of their interaction reflect the significance of what both women are experiencing?

8. How does faith play a significant role in the response of both women to Mary's miraculous conception?

9. Turn your attention specifically to verse 45. Look the verse up in several translations, then rewrite it verbatim below from one of them.

10. In your own words, what is Elizabeth saying in verse 45? How is it informed by Mary's response to the angel in verse 38?

11. The Bible is the Word of God which tells one big story from beginning to end, and that story has Jesus Christ as its pinnacle. He is what it is all about, what the Old Testament has been pointing forward to and what the New Testament will celebrate and glorify. What themes, promises, and characteristics of God have you seen throughout this study that come into play in God's ultimate revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ?

THE PRAYER

One can only imagine how disorienting Mary's encounter with Gabriel must have been. Zechariah and Elizabeth's story harkens back to Old Testament descriptions of childless couples through whom God miraculously brought long-anticipated sons. Yet Mary's story is different. Elizabeth brings to mind Hannah and Sarah; there is no preexisting template for what is happening to Mary. Though there are echoes in this passage of how God has worked in the past, he is also now working in utterly new ways. The text is instructing us to sit up and pay attention. The point of all the work God has done throughout history is about to become crystal clear. All the promises are to be fulfilled. That to which all others have pointed forward is arriving. God himself is about to put on human flesh and enter history, as the baby who now is nestled in the most unexpected place—a virgin's womb. The story has familiarity to it at the same time that it is radically new. It is from recognition that the constant, faithful, promise-keeper God is now working something new and fully revolutionary that Mary is moved to pray.

Read Luke 1:46-56.

1. Mary's prayer has a twofold structure. Note the main points of each section below.
 - a. Verses 46-50

 - b. Verses 51-55

2. What does the twofold structure of this prayer indicate about how God's action in Mary's life has implications both for her personally and for the world at large?

3. Return again to verse 45. How does it set the stage for the prayer that follows?

4. What similarities and differences do you notice between Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55 and Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10? Feel free to include both the prayers themselves and the contexts from which the prayers arose in your comparison, looking back on your materials on Hannah from the second session of this study as needed.

Similarities	Differences

5. Read Psalm 35:9 and Habakkuk 3:18. Where do you see these Old Testament texts reflected in Mary's prayer? What does that indicate about the continuity between God's Old Testament promises and what he is now bringing about through Mary?
6. List the characteristics of God that Mary's prayer highlights.
7. Who is the subject of the verbs in verses 51-55? What does that indicate about who brings about salvation?

8. Look again at Mary's response to Gabriel in verse 38. What does this suggest about her character, and how does her character subsequently inform her prayer?

9. Mary's prayer has been called a psalm of thanksgiving. What specifically is she giving thanks for in this prayer?

10. What do the Scripture passages from this week suggest Mary believes about God? How do those beliefs shape how she approaches him in prayer?

PRACTICE

Mary has a unique and honored position in God's redemptive history. Though we have seen God select a variety of women to give birth to special sons, Mary alone is chosen to bear God's own Son. The text refers to her as blessed among women and remembered among generations to come, and her prayer makes clear that she understood this was due to God's sovereignty and grace, not her own might or importance.

1. In what ways do trust and dependence on God influence or play out for each of the people described in Luke 1:1-56?

2. How do trust and dependence on God factor in to your own faith journey?

Before beginning your prayer, read about the birth of the two babies Gabriel foretold (Luke 1:57-2:21).

1. Mary's prayer makes clear who the ultimate actor is in bringing about our salvation—it occurs through God and his mighty power. At the same time, we have in this opening section of Luke a portrait of four people who have important roles to fill as they cooperate in obedience to God's plan. For the following people, list the characteristics and credentials that contribute to their unique role in the story of Jesus entering the world:

a. Zechariah:

b. Elizabeth:

c. Mary:

d. John:

2. Based on Luke 1:16-17 and 57-80, write a "job description" for what John the Baptist was to be. How does his role in the life of Jesus share similarities with what we are called to do as witnesses to Christ (see Matthew 28:16-20)?

3. What characteristics and credentials do you possess that could can be used in cooperation with God to serve his plan of pointing the world to Jesus?

Using your answers to the above questions as a guide, start a conversation with God that begins with praise and thanksgiving for the provision of his Son as Savior. Share with God the ways in which you would like to grow in trust and dependence on him. Finally, ask God to show you how your unique character and credentials equip you well for specific work in his Kingdom and for strength to be obedient and faithful in that work. Conclude your prayer by exploring any insights or prompting you feel the Holy Spirit is bringing to you through your study of Mary's prayer.

Use the space provided below to write out your prayer, or to record your experience and insights gained as a result of your prayer.