

luke 1. ⁴⁶⁻⁵⁵

a mother's intuition: intimations of jesus' radical reversal

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 elivated the sirvile
 ⁵³He hath filled the hungry with good things;
 and the rich he hath sent empty away.
 ⁵⁴He hath holpen his servant Israel,
 in remembrance of his mercy;
 ⁵⁵As he spake to our fathers,
 to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

Introduction to the series

This homily is the first in a series of homilies entitled, “The Topsy-turvy, Upside-down, Inside-out world of Jesus of Nazareth.” This series of homilies will explore the radical new world that Jesus envisioned, taught, and exemplified in his ministry. Jesus’ new world, created from new values, especially as they weigh the worth of individuals, or, in the language of the Doctrine and Covenants, “the worth of souls,”¹ was radically opposite to that of the world as it was and is.

Some might object to our calling the world Jesus envisioned, taught, and exemplified a “topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out” world. They may want to see the world as it is as the topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world, and Jesus’ world as the “right-side-up and right-side-inside” world. Others might object to our twice-repeated assertion that

¹ DC 18.¹⁰

Jesus' views were, and, by implication, Jesus himself was, radical.

As to the first objection, I appreciate the sentiment that it is this world as it is that is topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out. I agree with the premise that the world as it is, is not the world as it should be, indeed, opposite of what it ought to be. But the world has been the way it is for a very, very long time, from its very beginnings, really. The world as it is is the only world that this world acknowledges as existing. This world with 99.9% of its inhabitants thinks that what we have here is the norm. So, when someone like Jesus comes along re-imagining the world, trying to turn it into something very different from what it is, most everyone will agree that it is that someone who is topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside out. And radical.

Jesus surprised, shocked, confused, and offended with his criticisms of this world--especially in its valuation of individuals and their worth--and his proposed reordering of the world into something new and utterly different. Opposite. The world viewed, correctly, Jesus and his radically different, topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out world, as a threat to its established order. As Jesus himself bore witness, he was "not of this world." This sounds pretty dismissive of the world as it is. So, the world hated him.

"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."²

Hate turned to murder. The world killed him. Jesus was executed, murdered, not because God or some other cosmic force demanded it, but because of the radical threat that he and his re-imagined world represented to the only world that anyone seemed able to imagine or cherish.

The idea of a radical Jesus runs contrary to the modern domesticated and tamed Jesus that so many have created--a domesticated and tamed Jesus that has more in common with a comfy blanket or cuddly teddy bear than the man portrayed in the pages of the New Testament Gospels; a domesticated Jesus that ill prepares individuals to make discerning choices in an increasingly chaotic, disintegrating world. The domesticated

² John 7.⁷

Jesus gives no cause for offense and is rarely offended. It is impossible to imagine this domesticated Jesus being hated and violently killed--I mean, what's not to like about the tame little lamb. And yet, he was hated and he was violently killed. And this, precisely because he could not and would not be tamed, domesticated, un-radicalized.

Now, I, myself, love Jesus' self-description as found, for example, in Matthew 11.²⁹: "I am meek and lowly in heart." I am encouraged by his invitation to "come unto me."³ But we should remember that this self-description and invitation was aimed at all "that labour and are heavy laden."⁴ When, on the other hand, Jesus faces and faces off with a world of twisted logic and values--a world that makes so many labor under heavy loads--his tone is far from comfy and cozy. Rather, it is uncompromisingly challenging and critical.

Jesus, then, in his own life and in his ministry challenged the world's twisted logic and value systems, especially, again, as it weighed the value of individuals. But Jesus' reversals and turnabouts were intended to do more than surprise, shock, confuse, offend, and challenge a perverted world. Jesus intended to create a better and more enduring world. He was a world builder. Like Jeremiah before him, he did this by both tearing down the old and rebuilding anew.

"See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."⁵

Jesus presented and sought to build his new world through instruction. He also presented and sought to build a new world through the surprising company he kept, often including those that society belittled and devalued. He presented and sought to build a new world through those to whom he ministered, often those ignored and left behind by the religion of his day. Finally, he presented and sought to build a new world through the surprising individuals that he proposed as role models (and those he did not). Through their attitudes and actions, Jesus' role models become almost, heroic. Radically heroic.

³ Matthew 11.²⁸

⁴ Matthew 11.²⁸

⁵ Jeremiah 1.¹⁰

The instruction he offered, the company he kept, and the role models he proposed as he sought to turn the world upside down will be the central focus of the individual homilies in this series. While the themes explored in this series can be found elsewhere, including in the other New Testament Gospels, we will limit ourselves to an examination of Luke's Gospel, as Jesus' topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world seems to be one of Luke's purposeful themes.

Jesus was no one-trick pony. The Jesus of the Gospels is a complex and multi-faceted individual. Two thousand years after his life and ministry, and the composition of the Gospels that portray his life, we are still learning new things about Jesus and how his life and ministry can and should impact our lives-- individually and societally.

Jesus' challenge to and reversal of the world and its deceptive logic and twisted value system, and his proposal for a new, better, and polar opposite world--what he often calls the kingdom of God--belongs near the top of any list of the purposes and objectives of his life, his teaching, and his ministry as a whole. Indeed, even more recognized and appreciated aspects of Jesus' ministry—his healings, for example, and even his atoning sacrifice, death, and following resurrection, ascension, and heavenly enthronement—even these represent a challenge to and reversal of the world's values and prefigure a new world with a new logic and new values.

Jesus' challenges to the world with its twisted logic and values, and his vision of a new world with a new logic and divine values have implications that go far beyond this temporal world. We are dealing with something more than transitory ethics and values. Jesus' challenge of the old and his vision of the new have applications to the cosmos and how immortal beings exist and endure in the eternal realms. They point to the nature of "eternal life," the enduring life of individuals and societies. And, as always in Jesus' intentions, they teach us something of the character of God, Himself, and how He exists and endures in eternity.

Our journey through Luke, then, and Jesus' radically topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out world that Luke portrays will at times be a wild ride. Buckle in and hold on to your hat. Prepare for loopy-loops, for you about to enter Jesus' challenging and exciting topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world.

So, we will stick with our title. It's just a title, after all. And we will stick with our description of Jesus, his criticism of the world as it is, and his reordering of the world, especially in relation to the worth of souls, as radically topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out.

Introduction to this homily and Mary's Magnificat

The first Christian Bibles—a combination of the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament"—were written in Greek. The Christian Bible remained predominantly Greek in both the East and West until the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The Eastern Christian Church continued to copy and utilize the Bible in Greek after the collapse of the Western Empire. However, the Western Christian Church came to be dominated by Saint Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate—the vulgar, or common language Bible.

Due to depressed technologies that limited transportation and communication between the East and the West, the West all but forgot the Christian Bible's Greek origins. The West was mostly devoid of Greek texts of any kind—secular or religious—as well as individuals who could read and understand them. This state of forgetfulness and loss in the West lasted for some thousand years. Only as technologies and communications began to improve, and as refugees from felled Constantinople and the Eastern Roman Empire it governed streamed into the West with their Greek texts and knowledge did the West rediscover the classical Greek world and the Bible in its Greek original.

What, you might ask, does all of this have to do with Mary's Magnificat? The West's rediscovery of Greek was slow. The West's ability to print the Bible in Greek was halting. The first Greek Bibles published in the west were incomplete. One of the very first—perhaps the first—Greek Bibles printed in the West was printed at Milan in 1481.⁶ This printing brings us to Mary's Magnificat. This first Greek Bible published in the West included only the Old Testament Book of Psalms, Mary's Magnificat as recorded by Luke in 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁵, and the Benedictus found in Luke 1.⁶⁸⁻⁷⁹.

⁶ In the west, the first whole publication of the New Testament came in 1516 with that of Erasmus. The first western publication of the Old Testament in Hebrew came in 1488.

This speaks, certainly, to the importance and influence of the Psalms—something I have spoken and written about many, many, many times. It also speaks to the importance and influence of Mary and her Magnificat. What is it about the Magnificat that makes it so important and influential?

Well, first, we have its author. It is certainly valuable to see what men such as Peter or Paul or Alma or Moroni understand about God, about Jesus, and about Jesus' life mission as appointed by God. But what about Jesus' mother and her understanding of her son and his mission? Who, whether male or female, prophet or not, should we expect to better understand and communicate the character of God and His Son? Who should we expect to better understand and communicate the meaning of Jesus' life and mission than his mother? An inspired mother. A mother who thought of herself, first and foremost as a servant (handmaiden) of God. A mother who looked upon the face of an angel. A mother who was instructed by an angel. A mother to whom an angel revealed the character and greatness of her future son. A woman who became a mother through the power of God and an unknowable encounter with Him. A woman, it is said, who was the mother of God.

Second, we have the content of the Magnificat itself. Here, Mary reveals what is for her one of God's most fundamental works and intentions. Since Jesus is God's Son and agent sent to do the will of His Father, in revealing God's most fundamental intentions and works Mary also reveals one of her Son's most fundamental works and intentions. These she learned from her own experience and encounter with God, and by revelation. Through experience and revelation, Mary learned and declared that God, with Jesus as His agent, intended to reveal the twisted logic and values of this world--especially in its valuation of the individual and their worth--and to present a logic and value system diametrically opposite of and apposed to those of this world. In her Magnificat, Mary speaks plainly of a world turned topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out such as we discussed in our introduction to this series of homilies.

This homily, then, focuses on Mary, her Magnificat, and what we learn about God's intention to transform the world by turning it topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out through His Only Begotten Son and his matchless ministry.

the lead up to Mary's intuition as found in her magnificat

We begin this series of homilies with Mary, her Magnificat, and the intuition she reveals in it. But, before doing so, we should review how Luke has gotten us to Mary and her Magnificat.

Luke begins with a four verse greeting to one, Theophilus, to whom Luke addresses his letter.⁷ This letter later became one of the four Gospels. He begins his narrative in earnest with Luke 1.⁵. We can understand Luke 1.⁵-2.⁵² as a kind of introduction to his work. As I structure and understand it, this introduction is made up of seven narratives.⁸ Each narrative contains an oracle, or a divinely inspired utterance (in the case of the third narrative, there are two oracles). The oracles come from the mouth of angels, men, and women. Interestingly and tellingly, it is Jesus who utters the final and simplest oracle.

In his introduction, Luke does what authors do in introductions: he sets forth the themes and emphases that will inform and guide his work. We can identify several themes in Luke's introduction. But in this series of homilies, we focus on just one: Luke's report of the reversals of individuals' worth and their value as role models. These reversals are indicative of and point toward the new, topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world that Jesus, as God's agent, imagines and seeks to create.

We witness reversal of "worth" in our very first narrative. In this narrative, Luke introduces us to a couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth. They are, Luke informs us, barren. We need not go into detail concerning the humiliation and loss of social status that barren couples, and especially women, experienced in the ancient world. But in the first of many reversals found in the Book of Luke, an angel informs the couple that their barrenness will be reversed and that they will have a child. Furthermore, the child will not be just any child, but one who will be "great in the sight of the LORD," be "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb," become like the greatest of the prophets, Elijah, and be instrumental in preparing the people for the coming of Messiah.⁹

⁷ The New Testament Book of Acts is a follow up letter written by the same author to the same recipient.

⁸ These eight narratives with their oracles in parenthesis are: 1.⁵⁻²⁵ (1.¹³⁻¹⁷); 1.²⁶⁻³⁸ (1.^{28, 30-33, 35-37}); 1.³⁹⁻⁵⁶ (1.⁴²⁻⁴⁵ & 1.⁴⁶⁻⁵⁵); 1.⁵⁷⁻⁸⁰ (1.⁶⁷⁻⁷⁹); 2.¹⁻²⁰ (2.^{10-12, 14}); 2.²¹⁻³⁹ (2.^{29-32, 34-35}); 2.⁴⁰⁻⁵² (2.⁴⁹).

⁹ See Luke 1.¹³⁻¹⁷ (the first oracle)

The angel's words are fulfilled, and Elisabeth gives birth to a son, Johanan, "God is merciful."

In our second narrative, the same angel visits Mary. He greets her as one "highly favoured" and "blessed... among women." When she seems confused by this greeting, the angel reaffirms that she has "found favour with God." As we will learn in Mary's oracle, the woman's confusion over the angel's description and portrayal of her comes from the fact that the description and portrayal does not match her self-perception or her own sense of self-worth. And, again, this woman of low degree learns through angelic oracle that she is to have a most extraordinary son. Indeed, "the Son of the Highest."

In the third narrative, the two women introduced in the first two narratives meet: one, Elisabeth, lifted from her barrenness, the other, Mary, lifted from her "low estate." Here, Elisabeth utters her oracle, the third found in Luke's introduction. She is amazed that a woman such as herself should be honored to associate with a woman who is "the mother of my Lord." Having heard twice now, once from the angel and once from her cousin that she is "blessed... among women," Mary utters her oracle. It is Mary's oracle, the great Magnificat, that makes explicit what has been implied through the previous narratives: God, in Christ, is creating a new, topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-up world; a world of reversals in which the "first shall be last and the last shall be first."¹⁰

God's radical reversal of Mary's status

Mary's Magnificat can profitably be divided into two parts. In the first part, Mary focuses on her own personal experience with God and the joy and reversal that her experience has brought into her life.

"My entire being extols the Lord,
and the deepest parts of me leap for joy over God, my Deliverer,
because He has looked with compassion upon His servant's lowly status.
But, just imagine!
From now on every age will extol me as blessed
because the Mighty One has done great things for me.

¹⁰ See Matthew 19.³⁰

How incomparable is His power!”¹¹

Here, we witness the theme of personal reversal and the reversal of worth. Mary considered herself of “lowly status.” We noted this in her surprised response to the angel’s greeting and the honorifics he used in addressing her. Mary’s self-perception as being of lowly status should be seen as something more, something deeper and darker than our domesticated version of humility. Almost certainly, Mary’s self-perception was influenced by the world in which she was immersed, like a fish immersed in its watery world. Her self-perception was likely influenced by the world’s values, and by its estimations and valuations of the personal worth of souls. The world placed little value in Mary, and she had, like nearly everyone does, bought into its opinion and its authority. If one wishes to understand Mary’s lowliness as “humility,” then they should understand her it as being something closer to “humiliation” than to the domesticated “teachableness” to which we often, and wrongly, make it a simple synonym.

But God’s insertion of Himself into Mary’s life changed everything. It turned her world topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out. Rather than looking down on Mary for her “lowly status” as the world did, God had compassion on her. His compassion was not passive, but active. It brought reversal. God utterly reversed Mary’s status from one of being lowly to one of being extolled. And her extolled status was not temporary. She was to be extolled for ages to come.

This permanent reversal of status can justifiably be called radical. Nay, it demands to be called radical. The world and those captured by its propaganda and authority would and could never imagine such complete and irrevocable reversal, notwithstanding Mary’s testimony and admonition.

“But, just imagine!”

Those are Mary’s words. Her response to the wondrous reversal.

The world and its power brokers who imagine that they are the ultimate force would find

¹¹ Luke 1.^{46b-49} (author’s translation).

her conclusion about God, a conclusion based on her own personal experience, to not only be unimaginable, but deeply heretical and threatening: radical. Here, then, is the conclusion she drew about God.

“How *incomparable* is His power!”

But if the world might take umbrage at such a radically heretical and threatening declaration, one that challenged and questioned its power, how might it react to the broader conclusions she draws from her own personal experience! For, Mary’s Magnificat does not end there. Mary’s insights, her intuition goes beyond herself to take in the whole wide world. She intuited that she was but a small part of God’s much larger intentions for reversal, for his creation of a a topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside out world. Indeed, she served as a shadow of much more comprehensive, universal reversals.

Mary’s intuition concerning god’s radical world-wide reversal

After her encounter with God, perhaps *because* of her encounter with God, Mary would show herself to be exceptional in many ways. One of the ways she was exceptional was in her ability to get outside herself and see beyond her own little world. As Mary considered her own reversal, she intuited that she was a harbinger of God’s intention for a more expansive, world-wide reversal.

“Then too, His unwavering devotion extends for ages and ages.

He has exercised dominion with his power.

He has weakened the high and mighty with their inner self-perception.

He has brought rulers down from their thrones,

and has elevated the servile.

Those who go hungry He has satiated with delicacies,

and the rich He has sent away empty.”¹²

These reversals are shattering. Mind-numbing. Threatening. Radical. To speak them is dangerous. To actively embrace and work toward them is tantamount to treason, as Jesus would discover.

¹² Luke 1.⁵⁰⁻⁵³, author’s translation.

“Just imagine!”

“He has weakened the high and mighty with their inner self-perception.

He has brought rulers down from their thrones...”

Mary invites us to imagine this world’s rulers, kings, presidents, prime ministers, czars, senators, governors, mayors--potentates of all stripes--removed from their power.

Removed, not passively, but aggressively. Aggressively, not because God is aggressive, but because those potentates will not yield power without a fight, a fight that for them must be a fight to the death.

“Just imagine!”

“and elevated the servile.”

As if this weakening and lowering of the powerful and mighty were not threatening and radical enough, Mary invites us to witness the potentates displaced and replaced by those who had previously been vulnerable to the capricious, oppressive, and unjust attitudes, decisions, laws, policies, and actions of those displaced and replaced potentates.

“Just imagine!”

“Those who go hungry He has satiated with delicacies...”

Mary invites us to imagine the world’s poor, so long forced to scrounge for even the most basic necessities of life, suddenly eating like this world’s wealthy--its kings, its potentates, its merchants, its industrialists, its capitalists, its stock brokers, its share holders, its CEO s. Their stomachs full, their faces full and shining, their former skinniness replaced with well-fed, muscled bodies.

“Just imagine!”

“and the rich He has sent away empty.”

Mary invites us to imagine this world's wealthy--its kings, its potentates, its merchants, its industrialists, its capitalists, its stock brokers, its share holders, its CEO s--all who have lived in the lap of luxury and enjoyed the finest material benefits this world has to offer, suddenly hungry, their stomachs growling for want to food, their faces gaunt with malnutrition, their bones protruding through wrinkled flesh that once stretched over well-fed bodies.

“Just imagine!”

In these reversals, one finds echos of the past. No doubt, Mary had these in mind. Mary's personal experience of reversal and the world-wide reversal she intuits from it are, for example, consistent with Israel's very first experience with Yahweh.

“And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land and unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey...”¹³

In the end, Israel was exalted while Egypt was humiliated and defeated.

“But He lead His people out like sheep,
led them like a flock into the desert,
guided them safely and without fear,
while the sea buried their enemies.”¹⁴

Here, we have rulers brought down and the vulnerable elevated. In the process of leading Israel through the barren dessert toward their promised land, God.

“rained manna on them to eat,
and gave them heaven's food--

¹³ Exodus 3.⁷⁻⁸

¹⁴ Psalm 78.⁵²⁻⁵³, author's translation.

humans ate the food angels;
he sent them a plentiful supply.”¹⁵

Here we have the hungry being satisfied with the greatest of delicacies, just as Mary sees.

Mary’s Magnificat echoes the inspired witness of others who went before her. The Psalmist, for example bears witness to Yahweh’s work of reversal, manifesting itself in His assistance of the lowly and oppressed.¹⁶

“The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.
Who is like unto the LORD our God,
who dwelleth on high,
Who humbleth himself
to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill;
That he may set him with princes,
even with the princes of his people.”¹⁷

“Just imagine!”

Mary’s Magnificat is truly extraordinary. Visionary. It is a radical imagining of this world and its possibilities. But, we submit, in Luke’s hands, and perhaps even in Mary’s mind, Mary’s intuition did not encompass the past only. Her intuition encompassed the future as well.

Now, it is true that Mary’s verbs are in the past (aorist) tense, signifying something completed.

¹⁵ Psalm 78.²⁴⁻²⁵, author’s translation.

¹⁶ This testimony of God stands in stark contrast with that of so much of American “Christianity,” whose God exists only to justify and maintain a privileged white power structure—a power structure that looks for all the world too much like the ancient dynastic Egypt.

¹⁷ Psalm 113.⁴⁻⁸

“He *has exercised* dominion with his power.
He *has weakened* the high and mighty with their inner self-perception.
He *has brought* rulers down from their thrones,
and *has elevated* the servile.
Those who go hungry He *has satiated* with delicacies,
and the rich He *has sent away* empty.

However, in Hebrew, it is not uncommon to use the past (perfect) tense for future events that a writer considers to be a certainty. Sometimes called “the prophetic perfect” such past tense verbs predominantly describe acts of God performed in the future. At the same time, the Hebrew past (perfect) tense can indicate an action that is habitual or characteristic.

So, we should not read Mary’s descriptions of divine reversal as focused solely on the past. Mary is, we contend, certain that divine reversal of status and worth will continue in the future because “God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” He acted to reverse status and worth in the past. He acted to reverse status and worth in the present, Mary being proof of His present labors. He would act to reverse status and worth in the future. He would do that through Jesus, as Luke reports over and over again.

We can and should, then, understand Mary’s intuition about God’s reversals of status and worth as witnessed to in her Magnificat to include the future. And in this future, it would be Jesus, Mary’s son, God’s Son, and God’s agent, who would continue the divine labor of reversal. Let us consider more closely this idea of Jesus as God’s agent in the reversal of personal status and worth.

Jesus as God’s agent of reversal of status and worth

There can be no doubt that had Mary not given birth to Jesus, you and I would have never heard of the Jewish woman from northern Israel. Mary has not been extolled for two thousand years simply because she was *a* mother. She has been extolled for two thousand years because she was *the* mother *of Jesus*. Without Jesus, Mary would have been lost to history.

The same can be said of the couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, and their son, John. It is only because of the presence of Jesus in their stories that history remembers them. Indeed, this can be said of nearly everyone mentioned in the Gospels. If not for Jesus, a Caiaphas or a Pilate would likely be a blip, a footnote in history, if that. We most certainly would not have heard of Matthew or Peter. We would never have heard of a woman with female bleeding, a leper covered with leprosy, a man with a legion of demons, a widow who paid a mite in tithing, and a host of other individuals. They are all known and made famous through Jesus. Jesus' presence in their lives brought reversal, brought them out of obscurity and into the light. Jesus' presence in their lives lifted them in the eyes of everyone who has met them in the pages of the Gospels.

We can say, then, that the reversal of status and worth that came into Mary's life was the result of Jesus. It is through her son, Jesus, that God lifted her from her lowly status to her extolled status. Jesus was God's agent in bringing reversal of status and worth into Mary's life.

Mary, I submit, would have recognized this. But, in Luke's hands, her intuition goes beyond this private reality. Mary's private experience was a sign, a shadow, a harbinger of what was to come. Mary's son would be God's agent of reversal in the lives of countless others the world over. Luke's Gospel sets out to demonstrate this over and over again in the countless reversals that he reports Jesus bringing about.

In her Magnificat, Mary praises God for His transformative power; His power to reverse personal status and individual worth. But what God did in her life, and what he would do in the lives of countless others, would be accomplished in and through Jesus, God's perfect agent. The insights into God's power of reversal that are found in Mary's Magnificat, then, apply not only to God's work, but to her son's work. Father and Son would work in tandem, united in purpose, laboring to bring reversal of status and worth, laboring to create a new world, a topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world.

It is no stretch of the imagination to believe that Jesus was raised on his mother's story. It is no stretch to imagine Mary telling Jesus of the transformation God wrought in her life and status through him. It is no stretch of the imagination to believe that through his mother's story and intuition, Jesus came to possess a sense of purpose; an understanding

that just as his birth had transformed his mother's life, his life's work was to transform others. We could almost speak of the intuition revealed in Mary Magnificat as a kind of Divine mission call or mission statement issued to Jesus through his mother.

And, as we will see as we make our way through Luke, and, perhaps, as you know from your own experience, Jesus fulfilled and continues to fulfil this mission. Could Mary, or even Jesus, have imagined how many individuals Jesus would transform, how many reversals of worth he would bring about, and for how long his work would continue?

Conclusion

It is hard to overstate the significance of Mary's Magnificat, one of, if not the very first Greek texts printed in the West toward the end of the so-called "Dark Ages." In her Magnificat, Mary tells us explicitly what was implied in the first two narratives of Luke's Gospel.

In the first narrative, a barren couple's life was transformed and reversed. God reversed Zacharias' and Elisabeth's distressing and humiliating barrenness, giving them a child, John, that was to fulfill the incredible mission of preparing hearts and minds for Messiah. The Evangelist immediately followed this up with another story of transformation and reversal. God lifted a woman, Mary, from her lowly status to an exalted one by giving her a son--a son who was like no other, Son of the Highest, Son of God.

Mary intuited that her reversal of status and worth was both consistent with the character of God as revealed in his past historical dealings with Israel and a foreshadowing of what He would continue to do in the future. Just as Jesus had been God's agent in her own reversal of status and worth, he would be God's agent in a glorious world-wide transformation; a work of expansive reversal in status and worth in the lives of many, many others, including you and me to whom God graciously gives Jesus.

God's work of world-wide transformation and reversal through his agent and Son, Jesus, would take many forms. In her Magnificat, Mary envisions the divine intention of reversing, flipping on its head, the status and worth of the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, the full and the hungry. Jesus' work of reversing the status and

worth of individuals was absolutely central to his divinely appointed mission. It belongs near the top of any list concerning the purposes and objectives of his life, his teaching, and his ministry as a whole. Even more recognized and appreciated aspects of Jesus' ministry—his healings, for example, or his teachings, or even his atoning sacrifice, death, and following resurrection, ascension, and enthronement—even these represent a challenge to and reversal of the world's influences and values.

In engaging in the work of reversal, God's agent, Jesus, would not only reveal this world's twisted logic and values by which it so often denies human dignity, devalues individuals, and justifies the injustices that the powerful, influential, and wealthy perpetrate against those that the world wickedly deems as being of less worth. He would also bring into existence a new, transformed world in which his enduring logic and values guided individuals and society. Jesus, called this transformed world, The Kingdom of God.

Based, on Israel's past intimate experience of reversal with Yahweh, the scriptural witness of Yahweh's unchanging character, and her own experience of reversal, Mary entertained no doubts about her son's ultimate purpose of and success in bringing universal reversal. Hence, she could speak as if he had already accomplished his mission of reversal

“He *has exercised* dominion with his power.

He *has weakened* the high and mighty with their inner self-perception.

He *has brought* rulers down from their thrones,

and elevated the vulnerable.

Those who go hungry He *has satiated* with delicacies,

and the rich He *has sent* away empty.”

The “high and mighty” are not thrown down from their power out of anger or merely as retribution for the crimes that brought them to such power in the first place, or for the manner in which they maintained and exercised their power. The “rich” are not “sent empty away” merely as punishment for having purchased their wealth through the exploitation of the poor. They are brought down because they will not step down. Not for Jesus or anyone else. They will fight to the death to maintain their worldly status and

worth and suppress that of others.

The “high and mighty” also must be removed and brought down to fulfil the purposes of God in the lives of those who status and worth the world has always questioned and belittled; for God intends to reverse the status of the powerless, poor, and hungry.

If we hear echos from the past in Mary’s Magnificat, we also hear echo’s of her Magnificat in the distant future and in far off places. Nearly two thousand years after Mary, God inspired another individual of lowly status to imagine a new world of reversal. God intended that “a feast of fat things might be prepared for the poor; yea, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined.”¹⁸ All nations were to be invited, “first, the rich and the learned, the wise and the noble.” But then, after that “cometh the day of my power.” And what happens on “the day of [God’s] power”? What does God’s power intend to accomplish? “Then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the Marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come.”¹⁹

The reversal of personal status and worth is the ultimate manifestation of God’s character and a primary feature of “the day of His power.” It is irresistible. This world, with its twisted logic and valuation of the worth of souls should take heed. Mary’s Magnificat has been available to it for two thousand years. The warning has gone and continues today to go unheeded. How much longer can it be before “the day of His power” comes when He, with Jesus, puts an end to this world with its twisted logic and values and creates a new and enduring society established upon the logic and values of God, Himself?

This promised, inevitable, and irresistible reversal of status and worth--this topsy-turvy, upside-down, and inside-out world--may not be such good news for the high and mighty. It certainly wasn’t good news to those who first heard it. They found the good news to be bad news, radical news, threatening news. They killed the radical messenger of the radically good news, the best news ever.

¹⁸ DC 58.⁸⁻⁹

¹⁹ See DC 58.⁹⁻¹¹

But for the likes of Mary and the world's powerless, poor, and hungry, this is glad tidings of great joy, indeed. It was a manifestation of God's "mercy," His "unwavering devotion" that would extend for ages and ages. Little wonder that Mary exalted,

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Over two thousand years ago, Alma the Younger anticipated the coming of Jesus.

"And now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his coming; for the time cometh, we a know not how soon. Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice."²⁰

Alma, of course, had no say in when or even if the Jesus came. He could only anxiously anticipate it. The same is not true for the the coming of the Kingdom of God and the topsy-turvy, upside-down, inside-out world of radical reversals of status and worth. We do have something to say about when and if it happens. It will not happen magically. It will not simply happen by divine fiat. It will happen when the people of God demand it. It will happen when people like you and I reject this world's twisted logic and values, so convincingly presented, and adopt the logic and values of the kingdom of God, so powerfully exemplified in Jesus' ministry. It will happen when people like you and I finally say 'no' to this world's twisted logic and values and demand that the powerless, the poor, and the hungry be lifted up and valued with their true status: as valued children of the living God.

"Would to God that it might be in my day; but let it be sooner or later, in it I will rejoice."

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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²⁰ Alma 13.²⁵