

ABSTRACT

A Hermeneutical Harmonic:
The Four Canticles of Luke's Gospel as a Symphony of OT and NT Theological Themes

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The four canticles in Luke's Gospel (Mary's *Magnificat*, Luke 1:46-55; Zachariah's *Benedictus*, 1:67-79; the angels' *Gloria*, 2:14; and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, 2:29-32) hold a unique place both in the canon of Christian Scripture and in the life of the Christian Church. They are set at the heart of the Scriptures because of their literary proximity and unique poetic response to the event to which all of the Scriptures point – the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In the Church, the canticles have been used from the early centuries of Christianity in liturgies, as Christians adopt the words of Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon as their own. This thesis project reflects upon the four canticles both textually and musically. In a written analysis, I argue that the canticles achieve for Luke's narrative a hermeneutical “harmonic,” in that they provide a synthesis of ancient Jewish and early Christian theological themes. They thus both recapitulate many theological themes from Hebrew poetry in the Old Testament, and serve as an exposition for theological themes that Luke develops in the rest of his Gospel and Acts. In a musical composition for violin, alto, and bass, I aim to draw upon the ideas developed in the written analysis by putting several of the reflected upon Hebrew and Greek texts into the artistic form of the canticles themselves: a song to praise the Lord.

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INTRODUCTION

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)¹

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations. (Psalm 100)

The verses quoted above from Psalm 27 and Psalm 100 serve as an appropriate introductory contemplation of the subject at hand. Psalm 27:4 characterizes the attitude portrayed by the three primary authors of the texts to be considered: Mary in the *Magnificat*, Zachariah in the *Benedictus*, and Simeon in the *Nunc dimittis*. These poems, traditionally called canticles from the Latin *canticum* meaning “song,” are found in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, along with the angelic hymn, *Gloria*. Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon all display the attitude spoken of in Psalm 27 in that they approach with absolute awe and humility their divine subject, Jesus. The words spoken by them are stunning in their beauty particularly because they are inspired by this most beautiful of subjects, Jesus himself, indeed *Beauty* itself. The authors of the canticles are eyewitnesses, or ἀπόπται (cf. Luke 1:2) to the event of the divine beauty becoming flesh, and thus they may be thought of as those who have indeed beheld “the beauty of the Lord” that the psalmist speaks of.

¹ All Scriptural quotations will come from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

Psalm 100 allows us to contemplate not only the *attitude* of the canticles' authors, but also their *response* to the miraculous event taking place. As the narrative of Jesus' birth progresses, Luke calls forward these three witnesses to testify to the things they see, and the words that flow forth from their mouths are pure music – as befit words that describe the incarnation of the long awaited Priest and King of Israel. Mary, Zachariah and Simeon do indeed “enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.” The response of singing and of praise at the advent of the Lord as the *correct response* to this event is one of the major lessons that the Lukan canticles have to offer the church. Indeed, the paired themes of *beholding* the beauty of the Lord, and *proclaiming* that beauty through song, will be two major foci of the study at hand.

The four canticles in Luke's gospel serve a unique purpose both in the canon of Scripture and in the life of the Church. In Scripture, they are set at the very heart of the whole canon, for in essence, all of a points to, and is dependent upon, the fulfillment of the promise of God in Jesus Christ. All of the Old Testament awaits the event of Christ's incarnation, his life, death, and resurrection. The four gospels proclaim (εὐαγγελίζουσιν) that event, and the rest of the New Testament interprets it. The four poetic texts in the first two chapters of Luke's gospel (the only gospel canticles, and therefore sometimes termed the “evangelical canticles”) are special in that they give us the immediate responses of men and angels, in poetry, to the turning point of all Scripture.

The four Lukan poems also serve a unique purpose in the life of the church. It has already been stated that the church has traditionally called these texts *canticles*; it is also the case that the names given to these canticles are from the first word of each Latin

Vulgate translation. Therefore, *Magnificat* comes from *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (“My soul doth magnify the Lord...”), and *Benedictus* from *Benedictus Dominus, Deus Israel* (“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel...”). Likewise, the *Gloria* comes from *Gloria in altissimis Deo* (“Glory to God in the highest...”) and the *Nunc dimittis* from *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine* (“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart...”). Because of their poetic aspect, the canticles have been used from the early centuries of the church in liturgies, as Christians adopt the words of Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon as their own. Following the Roman Rite, the *Magnificat* has traditionally been spoken at Vespers, the *Benedictus* at Lauds, and the *Nunc Dimittis* at Compline. Christians from all ages and in all places are able, through the canticles, to “behold” the beauty of the Lord and to respond to His incarnation in the very language of Scripture even though they were not physically present at that event.

Three Exegetical Assumptions

A few words should be stated as to three important exegetical assumptions I will take in this work. These three assumptions concern first the *formal cause* of the canticles as musical and not merely poetic texts; secondly, the matter of authorship (*efficient cause*) of Biblical texts, particularly in the Lukan canticles; and lastly, the *final cause* of Biblical interpretation.

First, this study will treat the canticles not only as poetic texts, but particularly as musical texts. The question here arises from the fact that the Greek text has *Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ* (“And Mary said” - Luke 1:46), *Καὶ Ζαχαρίας...ἐπροφήτευσεν λέγων* (“And Zachariah prophesied, saying” - Luke 1:67), etc., but does not specify that the canticles

were, in fact, sung. However, there is considerable evidence for the argument that the texts were indeed intended as songs, not least of which is the interpretive memory of the Church. Among scholars, Alfred Sendrey points out that “the earliest poems of ancient peoples have all been sung,” and asserts for his own subject that “poetry was sung, prose recited,” although he also considers that “there was not too conspicuous a distinction between emotional speech and singing.”² Stephen Farris, in his work on the canticles, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives* (1985), does not deal with this question specifically; however he implies the texts' musical aspect by calling them “hymns” in his book's title and throughout the work. He also notes the fact that the texts are received by Psalms scholars as “old friends” because of their similarity in vocabulary and form with texts in the Psalter, texts which certainly have musical references and are certain to have been sung.³ John Arthur Smith also points to later evidence that utterances over the births of children, such as the Lukan canticles are, “were delivered as song” (Anna's song over her daughter Mary in the *Protoevangelium of James*).⁴ Considering these sources, the assumption that these texts were intended as songs, though perhaps not a definite one, is at least not an unlikely one.

Secondly, this study will look at the issue of authorship in three ways: in light of the speakers of the canticles as the texts' primary authors (which has already been briefly alluded to), in light of Luke's task as historian, and in light of the divine authorship which must be taken for granted when treating any part of Scripture as the inspired Word of

God. The first two aspects are evidenced in Luke's own introduction to his gospel:

2 Alfred Sendrey, *Music In Ancient Israel* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1969), 159-164.

3 Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 67ff.

4 John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2011), 148-149.

*Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also...*⁵

Luke explicitly calls his genre of writing a δῆγησις (*diegesis*, Greek for “declaration” in the verses above), which was a Hellenistic form of historical chronological narrative based on the reports of eyewitnesses. Luke as historian wrote down the delivered declaration of witnesses as evidence for the truth of the gospel message. In light of Luke's own disclosure as to his genre and method in the introduction of his gospel, there seems to remain only one option for the reader intent on a faithful rendering of the text: he must trust that if Luke wrote “Mary said” and “Zechariah prophesied,” etc., the words that followed were the words of these witnesses as they were delivered to him. This act of trust may, however, be backed up by some evidence, as Bock points out in his excellent commentary.⁶

This study will also take for granted the third, yet not by any means least, aspect of authorship: the divine one. The thirteenth century medieval exegete, Saint Bonaventure, noted this aspect in his commentary on Luke as well, and his treatment can help us in understanding how the efficient cause of Scripture can be both divine and human. In the thorough manner characteristic of his exegesis, Bonaventure uses Isaiah 61:1 (“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek”) to delineate what he sees as a threefold cause present in Luke:

[The efficient cause] is *supreme* when it is expressed as *The Spirit of the*

5 Luke 1:1-3a.

6 Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 144-145; 174-175.

Lord...[it] is most humble in this which says: *Upon me*, that is upon Blessed Luke...Reference is made to the *intermediate efficient* cause when it is said: *Because the Lord has anointed me*. For anointing by grace disposes the soul to receive the teachings of truth from the Supreme Teacher...For the Holy Spirit taught the Evangelist through grace, and, having been instructed, he taught the Church by writing the evangelical doctrine. - And thus in this work the cause is threefold: *supreme*, which is indeed the person of the Holy Spirit; *most humble* is the Evangelist himself; *intermediate* is the grace of the Holy Spirit. And all three causes are to be presupposed when we refer to Blessed Luke as the author.⁷

Bonaventure's way of explaining Luke's authorship, as through the work of the Holy Spirit, is entirely biblical. Prophets in the Old Testament, going back even to Moses, looked to the Lord for the words they were to speak and to write (e.g. Exodus 4:10-12, Isaiah 6:5-9, etc.). In the New Testament, followers of Christ are instructed in the same way (e.g. Matthew 10:20, Luke 21:15, etc.). This way of looking at the efficient cause of Scripture as an "anointing" of the author with the grace of the Holy Spirit takes on an even more complex meaning when we look at the canticles of Luke, since here there is a double anointing taking place. Not only is Luke given the words of the Holy Spirit in relating his *διήγησις*, but Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon have been filled with them as well. This is most explicitly seen in the case of Zachariah ("And his father Zachariah was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied," Luke 1:67), but it is implicit in those of the other speakers as well when we take all three aspects of authorship into consideration.

The third main exegetical assumption I make in the present study regards the final cause, or purpose, of Biblical interpretation. We may turn to Luke's introduction for a helpful beginning to this matter as well. Resuming from where the last quotation of this introduction left off:

⁷ Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Robert J. Karris (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2001), 6-8.

*...It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*⁸

There is a connection here between the theological virtues of love (charity), faith, and hope. The name Theophilus, of course, means “lover of God,” and this inscription has been interpreted traditionally to mean that Luke writes to all those who love God.

Indeed, St. Augustine will later write that “the plenitude and the end of the Law and of all the sacred Scriptures is the love of a Being which is to be enjoyed...That we might know this and have the means to implement it, the whole temporal dispensation was made by divine Providence for our salvation.”⁹ According to St. Augustine, Luke and other authors of sacred Scripture (the primary authors of the canticles included) are used by God to direct us toward a greater love of Him.

Luke also sets out to increase his readers' faith and their hope in the “certainty,” (or ἀσφάλειαν, meaning “full truth”) of Christian teaching (κατήχησις). Augustine will later connect love with faith and hope in his definition of the purpose of Christian teaching:

Indeed, if faith staggers, charity itself languishes. And if anyone should fall from faith, it follows that he falls also from charity, for a man cannot love that which he does not believe to exist. On the other hand, a man who both believes and loves, by doing well and by obeying the rules of good customs, may bring it about that he may hope to arrive at that which he loves. Thus there are these three things for which all knowledge and prophecy struggle: faith, hope, and charity.¹⁰

Augustine helps us to understand what is happening in Luke's gospel, namely that the

⁸ Luke 1:3-4.

⁹ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), 30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

story of Jesus' incarnation and salvation of mankind is related in δὴγγησις, and that readers might partake of that salvation through love of God, faith in His word, and hope in the completion of His promises eschatologically. The canticles themselves are good examples of faith, hope, and charity at work in human beings: they aim to teach the reader how to *behold* the incarnation which requires faith, how to *respond* to it, which requires love, and how to hope for eschatological fulfillment based on the knowledge that the promises of Christ's first coming have already been fulfilled. The present study will approach the canticles other biblical texts in the way that Augustine suggests Scripture to be read, and in the way that Luke intended for them to be read by his own admission (indeed even in the way, it may be argued, that the cantors themselves intended) – namely as texts through which the charity, faith, and hope of the reader may be strengthened.

The Thesis and Structure of this Study

Those three exegetical assumptions (the formal, efficient, and final causes of the canticles) aside, I will now comment briefly upon the thesis and overall structure of the study at hand. The four songs in Luke are made up of many theological themes which have a larger significance in the context of the whole of Scripture. These motifs, which are introduced within the Old Testament tradition, come together in a great “symphony” at the actual event of Jesus' incarnation in Luke's Gospel, and are further developed in the remaining narrative of the Gospel and its sequel, the Acts of the Apostles. In this thesis, I will argue that the four canticles achieve for Luke's narrative a hermeneutical “harmonic,” in that they provide a synthesis of these ancient Jewish and early Christian theological themes. Two chapters will provide the argument for this synthesis. The first

chapter will show that these songs *recapitulate* themes from ancient Hebrew poetry (particularly found in the Psalms and prophecy of Isaiah in the Old Testament). The second chapter will show that they provide a kind of *exposition* for several themes that Luke will continue to develop in the rest of his work.

As mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, two major focal points of this study will be the paired themes of *beholding* the beauty of the Lord, and *proclaiming* that beauty through song, as illustrated by the psalm quotations above and by the canticles themselves. In a certain overall structure of this work, the the two chapters of close textual study are a kind of “beholding.” These chapters will investigate, they will consider, they will contemplate. The immediate subjects of focus will be the four Lukan canticles, but even more basically, before those subjects is the *supreme* subject to which they themselves look: the beauty of Jesus Christ. The second part of this work will be a “proclaiming” of that beauty, in the very manner of the cantors themselves, through song. The two chapters of analytical study will have as their companion a musical composition, which will take the theological themes of the canticles and translate them into melodic motifs. It will take the characters of Mary, Zachariah, Simeon, and the angels, and translate them into musical themes. But most importantly, it will proclaim the glory of the Lord which these people beheld and in which the whole people of God may partake through His sacrifice.

CHAPTER ONE

The Lukan Canticles as a Recapitulation of Jewish Theology

As stated in the introduction, the goal of the present work is to show that the canticles of Luke's Gospel, in light of their unique place in the canon of Scripture as responses to the advent of the long-awaited Savior, are both a *recapitulation* of the theological themes of ancient Israel looking for the Messiah, as well as an *exposition* of the theological themes Luke uses in developing his portrait of Jesus and Jesus' message in the rest of his Gospel. In this chapter, I will develop the first part of that argument. The songs in Luke will be shown to recapitulate both the general purpose and tone of Israelite music, as well as specific theological themes from musical and poetic texts in the OT.

Hebrew Music and the Presence of God

In order to understand the use and purpose of music in the Hebrew Bible, one must first consider that the Israelites' music is defined by its relationship with their God. Who, then, is the God of the Israelites, and how does He manifest Himself to His people? Moses implicitly asks these very questions of the Lord in his desire to give an account of the Holy One who had appeared to him:

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me to you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of

Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.¹¹

Moses' inquiry as to the Lord's name was implicitly an inquiry into the Lord's identity. Indeed, since a Hebrew name often revealed something characteristic about the person to whom it belonged, we might even say that Moses' question was an inquiry into the Lord's personality or characteristics (insofar as we may think of the Lord as sharing a sense of “personhood” with us). It is thus revealing that the Lord chose to give His name in ontological terms: I AM THAT I AM.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God does not appear visibly to the Israelites. Even Moses has to shield his face from God's own face when the glory of God passes before him, for “no man shall see Me, and live” (Exodus 33:20, NKJV). Instead of a physical revelation, in the Old Testament God manifests Himself to the Israelites as a spiritual presence (Exodus 33:14). God's name, I AM, foretells this presence, this ontological *being*. God's promise was that His presence, His being, would go with the Israelites as long as they continued to obey Him. Such was His covenant with them.

The question we must ask in considering the music of the Hebrew Bible follows from this understanding of God's revelation of Himself to His people: what is the relationship of the Israelite's music to the covenantal presence of God? That question may be answered through contemplation of the following passage from 2 Samuel 6:

And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house

¹¹ Exodus 3:13-15.

of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals...And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.¹²

The removal of the ark of God from the house of Abinadab to the Tabernacle in Jerusalem occurred soon after the anointing of David as the new king of Israel. Two important elements emerge from the narrative: the ark of God as representative of God's spiritual and covenantal presence, and the music of David and the house of Israel as representative of the response of Israel toward that presence.

The ark of the covenant, also called “the ark of God” and “the Testimony” in Scripture (all names used to signify the fact that it contained the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments), was the most important of all the objects commanded to be built for the Tabernacle in Exodus 25-40, namely because it housed the presence of God, “appear[ing] in the cloud upon the mercy seat” (Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89):

The ark cover, or “mercy seat,” (KJV; Heb. *kapporet*), was a slab of gold which sat atop the ark (Exod. 25:17). That the root of the Hebrew word *kapporet* means “atone” or “propitiate” as well as “cover” points to the ritual function of the mercy seat (see Lev. 16:2, 14), and this also explains why the *kapporet* is referred to as “the propitiatory” rather than “the mercy seat” in English Bibles before the KJV. Facing each other at opposite ends of the mercy seat were two winged cherubim. The mercy seat, or more specifically its surface between the cherubim, was the place of the manifestation of the Divine Presence and Divine Will (Exod. 25:22; 30:6; Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89).¹³

¹² 2 Samuel 6:2-5, 14-15

¹³ David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 54.

Because God's presence dwelled on the ark, and his Word dwelled inside it, God's saving power against enemies both physical and spiritual went wherever the ark went. Therefore the ark was carried before the Israelites in their journeying (e.g. Num. 10:33), its miraculous presence allowed them to pass into Jericho on dry ground (Josh. 3:17), and it went before them in their battles (c.f. Num. 10:35-36; 1 Sam. 4; 1 Sam. 14:18; 2 Sam. 11:11). However, the ark did not always remain in the camp of the Hebrews; it was captured by the Philistines during one battle (1 Sam. 4) and carried to Ashdod where they placed it in the house of Dagon, the Philistine god. After the Philistine people suffered death and plague because of the holy presence of the ark of God in their pagan land (even the image of Dagon literally fell on its face before the ark; 1 Sam. 5:3-4), they decided to give it back to the Hebrews. The ark ended up in the home of Abinadab in Gibeah, and that is where we find it in the beginning of the story in 2 Samuel 6. When David became king, it was fitting that the ark be carried from Abinadab's house into the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem. The saving presence of the Lord would enter the heart of Israel once more.

The second element in this story is the response that King David and “all the house of Israel” gave to the ark as it journeyed from Gibeah to Jerusalem and upon its arrival to the city: glorious music and dancing befitting the glorious presence of God. Scripture scholar Tim Gray identifies this musical response to the advent of the ark as an expression of a Jewish peace offering called the *todah* (תודה, Heb., “thanksgiving”):

A todah sacrifice would be offered by someone whose life had been delivered from great peril, such as disease or the sword. The redeemed person would show his gratitude to God by gathering his closest friends and family for a *todah* sacrificial meal. The lamb would be sacrificed in

the Temple and the bread for the meal would be consecrated the moment the lamb was sacrificed. The bread and meat, along with wine, would constitute the elements of the sacred *todah* meal, which would be accompanied by prayers and songs of thanksgiving, such as Psalm 116.¹⁴

Gray claims that “the best example of *todah* sacrifice and song is found in the life of King David.” He writes of this passage (found in 1 Chronicles 16 as well as 2 Samuel 6),

The bringing of the ark to Jerusalem was the occasion of a great national *todah* festival. The sacrifices were “peace offerings,” and the *todah* was the most important and common peace offering. All the elements of the *todah* were present. For example, David offered bread and wine along with the meat of the sacrifices (1 Chron. 16:3). Most importantly, David had the Levites lead the people in *todah* hymns, that is, psalms of thanksgiving (1 Chron. 16:8-36).¹⁵

The Hebrew noun תודה is derived from the verb root ידה (*yadah*), which in its basic rendering of its Arabic origin means “to throw” or “to cast,” and in the hifil stem means “to give thanks,” “confess,” “laud,” or “praise.” The תודה sacrifice, by its very name an act of thanksgiving and praise, was therefore extremely closely linked to musical praise. Such musical sacrifice was the idea behind Psalm 107:22 (“And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.”), a verse alluded to later in Hebrews 13:15: “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

The theology of תודה characterizes much of the music in the Old Testament. Other prominent examples of this type of praise are the Israelites' Song of the Sea, following deliverance from Egypt (“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea,” Exod. 15:1); Jonah's

14 Tim Gray, “From Jewish Passover to Christian Eucharist: The Story of the *Todah*,” *Lay Witness* (Nov./Dec. 2002).

15 Ibid.

prayer to God in the belly of the great fish (“I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving,” Jonah 2:9); Hannah's song, praising God for the birth of her son (“My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord...I rejoice in thy salvation,” 1 Samuel 2:1); and many of the psalms of David.

The Gospel Canticles and the Presence of God

We have seen from the 2 Samuel passage and several other examples that music in the Hebrew Bible most often takes the tone of thanksgiving, of תודה, in response to the covenantal and saving presence of God in the lives of His people. In looking forward to the canticles in Luke's Gospel, we must ask how these songs recapitulate the theology of תודה. How do the canticles of Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon respond to the covenantal presence of God? In the New Testament, the presence of God is revealed in the incarnation of God's Son, Jesus Christ. We began the last section with a discussion of God's self-acknowledged name, I AM, which communicates His ontological presence with His people; let us begin this section with a discussion of the name of God's Son, ישועה (*Yeshuah*), which communicates His salvation.

ישועה is the noun form that comes from the verb root ישע (*yashah*, “to save,” “to deliver”), as σωτηρία (“salvation”) is derived likewise from σώζω (“I save”). However, σώζω is the Greek rendering not only of the Hebrew form ישע, but also of three other verbs: פלח, מלט (both similar in meaning: “to slip away,” “escape;” in the passive sense they mean “to be delivered” as in “to have been let to escape”), and נצל (in the piel stem meaning to “to plunder,” in the nifal “to deliver oneself” or “to be delivered,” in the hifil

“to snatch away” or “to deliver”). Considering these differences, **שׁע** takes on a more defined meaning as distinguished from an “escape” or a “delivering of oneself.” Instead of these things, **שׁע** communicates a definitive action of deliverance, usually, in religious texts, done by God for the benefit of His people. According to the TDNT, “Deliverance is imparted to the weak or oppressed in virtue of a relation of protection or dependence in which he stands to someone stronger or mightier who saves him out of his affliction. The thought is neither that of self-help nor of co-operation with the oppressed. The help is such that the the oppressed would be lost without it.”¹⁶

In the Luke nativity narrative, the Hebrew noun **ישׁועה** (“salvation”) takes on even greater meaning when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that “behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus” (Grk. Hebraism Ἰησοῦς for Heb. **ישׁועה**; Luke 1:31), for, as Matthew adds, “he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). This announcement is a definitive moment in the Scriptures because it brings together two ideas connected in the 2 Samuel 6 passage: the *presence* of God and the *salvation* of God. Jesus is God in the flesh, with his people, *Immanuel* (Heb., “God with us,”). Now God's presence on earth is given a human name: Jesus. Ἰησοῦς. **ישׁועה**. *Salvation*. It is this **ישׁועה** for whom the canticles give thanks in their תודה.

Indeed, of the larger theological themes presented in the Lukan canticles, σωτηρία (Greek equivalent of **ישׁועה**) is the most prevalent. This word, or one of its cognates, is

¹⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 973.

mentioned five times throughout the four songs: once in the *Magnificat*, three times in the *Benedictus*, and once in the *Nunc dimittis*. Although Luke's Gospel was written in Greek, it is important to note that every use of the word σωτηρία in the canticles is illuminated by its Hebrew equivalent, ישועה. This is the case for more of the canticles' texts as well. Much scholarship has been done to demonstrate that the canticles in Luke's Gospel were most likely originally composed in Hebrew because of the very clear Hebraisms in their Greek texts (Stephen Farris dedicates a chapter of his book to the scholarship of this debate and casts his vote in favor of it¹⁷). This quite plausible theory leads one to the likely possibility that Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon were indeed the original authors of their songs.

The discussion of the name of Jesus, ישועה, leads to another point regarding Hebrew music that has not yet been touched upon here. In addition to expressing thanksgiving and praise for God's presence, ancient Israelite music and poetry also expressed a longing for future salvation, often referring to the Savior who was to come. Indeed, in the Hebrew Bible, the word ישועה is first uttered in poetry. The name of God's Son is spoken first by the man who wrestled with God, who saw the face of God and yet lived, who bore the name of Israel (Genesis 32: 22-32). In Genesis 49, nearing death, Jacob/Israel prays in three words, לישועתך קויתי יהוה (my translation: *For your salvation have I waited, O Lord* – Genesis 49:18). Israel's prayer is echoed in the psalms and in Isaiah (e.g. Ps. 25:5; Is. 25:9; 33:2). Hebrew poetry expresses longing and waiting as well as joy and declarative praise – both are responses to the present or future salvation

17 Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 31-66.

of God.

The canticles of Luke's Gospel proclaim not only thanksgiving and praise for the presence of God, but also the fulfillment of what the Hebrew people awaited for so many years – the Messiah, the Savior. It seems hardly coincidental that the *first* use of the word *ישועה* in Scripture (Gen. 49:18) is paralleled by the *last* canticle in Luke's gospel because of the example of Simeon, the man “waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). Simeon held in his arms the fulfillment of everything Israel waited for. “Now my eyes have seen your salvation...”

We see all of this coming together when we compare the response of the canticles with the response of King David in 2 Samuel 6. There are great connections between the 2 Samuel passage and the story of the Incarnation; this is so because the ark, in exegetical tradition, represents Christ. As the Venerable Bede comments in his commentary on the tabernacle, “It is appropriate that the ark, which is the first of all the things ordered to be made in the tabernacle, designates the incarnation of our Lord and Saviour, *in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col. 3:2).”¹⁸ Just as the ark signified the presence of God in the camp of the Israelites, Christ in His Incarnation became the presence of God to all men on earth. As noted before, He came as *Immanuel* (Heb., “God with us”), both physically and spiritually.

Luke's nativity narrative is especially linked with the story of 2 Samuel 6, as we may see from the verses left out of the quote above, the middle part of the story:

And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger

¹⁸ Bede, *On the Tabernacle*, trans. Arthur G. Holder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 11. For a more full description of Christ as the ark of testimony, see pp. 11-16.

of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obbedom the Gittite. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obbedom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obbedom, and all his household. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obbedom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obbedom into the city of David with gladness.¹⁹

Exegetes through the centuries have noticed that Luke's nativity narrative parallels this section of the story in several ways. David's question, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" is echoed by Elizabeth's question upon Mary's arrival at her home, "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me" (Luke 1:43)? The ark remaining in the home of Obbedom for three months parallels Mary's stay with her cousin for three months (Luke 1:56); the blessing of Obbedom's family "because of the ark of God," is similar to the blessing Elizabeth pronounces, through the Holy Spirit on Mary and "the fruit of thy womb," as well as the joy that Elizabeth and her baby receive upon being in close proximity with that "fruit" (Luke 1:41-44). Even the journey to the "city of David," in this case Jerusalem, foreshadows another journey, namely that of Mary and Joseph to another "city of David," Bethlehem (Luke 2:4). The parallels between these two texts result from an ancient understanding of Mary as θεοτοκος ("God-bearer"). As the ark bore God's presence before Israel, so Mary carried God's presence in the flesh.²⁰

¹⁹ 2 Samuel 6: 6-12

²⁰ Scott Hahn, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 63-65.

In addition to the connections between the two passages listed above, the *canticles* in Luke's gospel in response to the advent of Christ correspond to the music of the king and the “house of Israel” in response to the advent of the ark of God in Jerusalem. Both are responses to God's covenantal, saving presence. Like the response of David and the house of Israel, the four Lukan canticles together are a liturgy of תודה – a sacrifice of praise expressing thanksgiving for the salvation, the ישועה, of God. The canticles of Luke's Gospel thus recapitulate the תודה aspect of Hebrew music, and bring the long awaiting of the Hebrew people to completion by giving thanksgiving to the Savior Himself.

The Magnificat and the Musical-Theological Themes of Ancient Israel

It has so far been shown that the Lukan canticles recapitulate the primary purpose (responding to God's presence) and tone (thanksgiving, תודה) of ancient Jewish music as recorded in the Old Testament. In the second half of this chapter, we will look at the specific theological themes that the canticles take from ancient Jewish musical literature, such as the psalms, the prophet Isaiah, and other OT musical texts. While the next chapter will look at the canticles closely and individually in light of their theological and literary place within Luke's two-volume work, in this chapter we will focus solely on their relationship to the Old Testament. It has been noted already that the canticles were most likely originally written in Hebrew, and that assumption will be key as we examine their theology as philologically related to OT hymnic passages.

Commentator Darrell L. Bock presents a short but important word as to the structure of Mary's *Magnificat*, the first canticle in Luke's Gospel: "The hymn proper has three parts: 1:46-49 focuses on God's actions for Mary the humble woman; 1:50-53 generalizes God's acts to include God-fearers, proud, humble, hungry, and rich; 1:54-55 repeats the covenant context and highlights God's faithfulness to his promises to Israel"²¹ This explanation of the structure of the poem may be seen in outline form:

- I. Praise for God's work for Mary (1:46-49)
- II. Praise for God's acts to all (1:50-53)
- III. Praise for God's acts for his people Israel (1:54-55)²²

In short, Mary's hymn moves from a concentration on the individual, to those who are blessed by God in general (as contrasted with those who are not blessed), and finally to the nation of Israel itself. The character of Mary works literarily as a synecdoche for the rest of the poem: she represents the God-fearing and lowly, and she represents the nation of Israel in its unity with God; her Savior also works in her life with the same grace with which He works in the lives of His blessed ones and with Israel. This literary structure is evidence of the psalter's influence: "such transitions from the individual (first-person singular) to the community (third-person plural) are common in the Psalms (Ps. 9, 30, 66, 68, 72, 117, 137; Nolland 1989: 71)."²³ The following analysis is divided into the sections that Bock outlines.

Praise for God's Work for Mary (Luke 1:46-49)

- 46 Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ, Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον,
- 47 καὶ ἠγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρι μου,

²¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 146.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 153.

- 48 ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ. Ἴδου γὰρ ἀπὸ
τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,
49 ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός. Καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

(My translation: *And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoiced in God my Savior, because he looked down upon the humble state of his maidservant. For behold, from now all the generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me. And holy is his name.*)

The first four verses of Mary's hymn inherit much from the music of ancient Israel, only some of which will be discussed here. At the outset, we may note the influence of Hebrew poetry in the *Magnificat's* use of parallelism. Verses 46 and 47 are clearly parallel with with three word pairings: (1) μεγαλύνει and ηγαλλίασεν; (2) ψυχή and πνεῦμά, which is a standard parallelization in Hebrew poetry - Job 12:10; Ps. 77:3-4 [76:3-4 LXX]; Isa. 26:9; Wis. 15:11)²⁴; (3) κύριον and the expression θεῶ τῷ σωτήρι μου. These verses are followed by two parallel ὅτι clauses (verses 48 and 49), describing reasons for Mary's praise.

Verses 46-47 are closely theologically related to several psalm and other poetic texts (Ps. 25:5; 34:3 [34:4 MT]; 35:9; 40:16 [40:17 MT]; 69:30 [69:31 MT]; 70:4 [70:5 MT]; Is. 12:2; Hab. 3:18). I will examine closely just two of those texts here: Psalm 34:3 and 69:30. First, see the following chart for important Greek-Hebrew equivalencies in these two verses:

μεγαλύνω ↔ גדל
ψυχή ↔ שׁפּנ
κύριος ↔ יהוה
ἀγαλιάω ↔ שׁושׁ/שׁישׁ, also גיל
πνεῦμά ↔ רוּחַ
θεῶ τῷ σωτήρι μου ↔ אלהי ישׁעי

²⁴ Ibid., 149.

Psalm 34:3 (34:4 MT) is the first psalm text I will look at: “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.” (גדלו ליהוה אתי / ונרוממה שמו יחדו). The first four verses of Mary's song use the two ideas present in this psalmic line (“magnify the Lord” and “exalt his name”) as a literary frame. Verse 46 begins with the two Greek equivalents to גדל (“magnify”) and יהוה (“Lord”), μεγαλύνω and κύριος, and verse 49 ends with an “exaltation” of the Lord's holy name (ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ). With the allusion to Psalm 34:3, Mary not only declares her own magnification and exaltation of the Lord, but implicitly incites others to do the same: “O magnify the Lord with me!”

Mary also alludes to Psalm 69:30 (69:31 MT) in the first verse of her psalm: “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.” (ואגדלנו בתודה / אהללה שמ אלהים בשיר). This psalm verse contains the two themes of the last verse we looked at (praising the name of God, and magnifying him), this time in the reverse order. Additionally, this verse connects Mary's song to two elements of ancient Jewish music with the words שיר (“song”) and תודה (“thanksgiving”).

The Hebrew word “song” (*shir*, שִׁיר) would associate Mary's poem through allusion with a particular type of Hebrew religious music. In the OT, the most common words describing the action of making music (in the verb form) or the actual music (in the noun form) are those that are built on the roots שִׁיר and זָמַר (*zamar*). As John Arthur Smith notes, these two words were often used in parallel fashion and thus possess distinctive meanings individually:

The use of SYR- and ZMR- words in literary parallelism is also an indication of distinction in their meaning. This is illustrated particularly

clearly in verse 9 of the pre-exilic Psalm 144, where *sir* 'song' and *asira* 'I will sing' in the first clause are paralleled by *benebel* 'with the *nebel*' and *azammera* 'I will play, I will make music' in the second. The second clause also contains an example of the association of a word built on the root ZMR with a variety of plucked-string instrument, the *nebel*...The nuances of meaning of SYR- and musical ZMR- words in contexts concerned with religious observance may be understood by saying that both SYR- and ZMR- words imply cultic music, the former emphasizing its vocal aspect, the latter its instrumental, but neither excluding the aspect emphasized by the other.²⁵

In alluding to Psalm 69:30, which calls its praise a שִׁיר , Mary's song is thus associated with the vocal music present in ancient Jewish worship. Although the root זמר is not used in this particular psalmic verse, it is present in another verse with which Luke 1:47 may be identified: Isaiah 12:2 (“Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.”). The Hebrew for the last part of this verse (כי עזי וזמרת יה יהוה ויהי לי) (לישועה) is almost a direct quote of Exodus 15:2, עזי וזמרת יה ויהי לי לישועה (“The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation”), from the Israelites' Song of the Sea following their deliverance from Egypt. Verse 47 of Mary's *Magnificat* (“my spirit rejoiced in God my savior”) echoes the identification of God with salvation, and therefore implicitly with song (this time of the זמר variety). Perhaps it is not too far off to imagine that Mary's song was not only sung, but also put to instrumental music by the early Christians, inheritors of the ancient שִׁיר / זמר dichotomy.

Secondly, an allusion to Psalm 69:30 relates Mary's song to the genre of תודה songs, already discussed in this chapter. Mary not only praises God with a song (שִׁיר),

²⁵ John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Surrey: Ashley Publishing Limited, 2011), 42-43.

but also with a sacrifice of thanksgiving (תודה). Mary is “lifting up her heart” in the liturgical sense of that phrase, offering it as a sacrifice to God her Savior. This is a sacrifice of love, as her magnifying the Lord is a result of her love of His salvation (see Psalm 40:16 [40:17 MT]). It is a sacrifice of her whole being: body (Luke 1:38), soul (1:46), and spirit (1:47).

Moving from the parallel verses 46-47, we now turn to look at the relation of the parallel ὅτι clauses (verses 48 and 49) to musical texts of the OT. Stephen Farris perceptively points out that verse 48 (ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ. Ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί) contains two meaningful allusions: “By alluding to the words of two OT mothers, Hannah (v. 48a) and Leah (v. 48b), the hymn makes clear that the speaker praises God for the gift of a son.”²⁶ In this comment, Farris refers to Hannah's words in 1 Samuel 1:11, when she prays to God that He will “look on the affliction of thine handmaid” (תראה בעני אמתך), and to Leah's words in Genesis 30:13 (“Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed”). The Lord's “looking” (ἐπέβλεψεν/ראה) on a woman's “affliction” or “lowliness” (ταπείνωσιν/עני), and his subsequent “blessing” of her are the common Hebrew verbs related to a woman's conception and giving birth to children. However, these verbs may also be used in a spiritual sense, as when God looks on the humility of His servant and blesses her obedience. David Jeffrey notes in this regard, “the Hebraic verbal echoes are deep and resonate already in the greeting of Gabriel and Elizabeth: “Blessed is the man...[whose] delight is in the law of the Lord” (Ps. 1); blessed is the man, and so also blessed is the

26 Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 118.

woman who is found in the way of complete openness to the word of God.”²⁷ This concept may also be applied collectively to a whole people. As noted before, Mary works as a synecdoche for her poem as a whole, and her ταπείνωσις is reflected by the ταπείνωσις of Israel as a nation (she thus repeats this idea in verse 52). As Bock notes, “ταπείνωσις as a social-status terminology also has OT parallels to describe *both Israel and individuals* (Gen. 29:32; Deut. 26:7; 1 Sam. 9:16; 2 Sam. 16:12; 2 Kings 14:26; Ps. 9:13 [9:14 LXX]; 25:18 [24:18 LXX]; 31:7 [30:8 LXX], emphasis added).”²⁸ When we come to verse 52 of Mary's song, I will discuss this loaded term, ταπείνωσις, in more detail.

The second ὅτι clause in verse 49 (ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός. Καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) reflects two OT themes: praise for the great deeds of the Mighty One, and praise for His holy name. According to Bock, “The title Mighty One often alludes in the OT and in Judaism to the warrior God who fights on behalf of his people and delivers them (Ps. 44:4-8 [44:5-9 MT]; 89:9-10 [89:10-11 MT]; 112:2, 9; Zeph. 3:17; 2 Macc. 3:24; 3 Macc. 5:51).”²⁹ We have already noted two psalmic references to praise for God's name (Psalm 34:3 and 69:30). In Luke's gospel, the words ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα occur together only one other time. This time Jesus is the speaker: “And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομα σου).

27 David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 33.

28 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 150.

29 *Ibid.*, 151.

Praise for God's Acts to All (Luke 1:50-53)

- 50 καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.
51 Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους
 διανοία καρδίας αὐτῶν.
52 Καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινοὺς,
53 πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν
 κενοῦς.

(My translation: *and his mercy is upon generation and generation to the ones fearing him. He showed strength with his arm, he scattered proud ones in the intention of their heart. He took down rulers from thrones and lifted up the lowly, he filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty.*)

Verses 50-53 contain multiple OT poetic allusions (1 Sam. 2:7-8; Ps. 9:11-12, 17-20; 10:1-4, 17-18; 12:1-5; 18:25-29; 25:12; 34:6-7, 9, 18; 35:10; 44:4-8; 71:19; 72:2; 85:9; 89:9-10; 103:2-6, 8-11, 13, 17; 107:9; 111:9; 112:2, 9; 126:2-3; 138:6; 146:7; Isaiah 55:3, 6; 57:15). The theme that characterizes the acts of God in all of these verses, including Mary's own in Luke's Gospel, is his ἔλεος (“mercy”), “used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew term *חסד* (*hesed*), which refers to the loyal, gracious, faithful love that God has in covenant for his people.”³⁰ This *חסד* is upon those who fear God, i.e. those who keep his covenant. Conversely, God's *חסד* is *not* upon the proud, i.e., those who *do not* keep his covenant. This dichotomy is an ancient one, going all the way back to the cursing and blessing of Deuteronomy 30.

Because there are so many OT references in Luke 1:50-53, there is much that one could say about Mary's recapitulation of OT theology in these four verses. In my analysis, I will concentrate on verses 52-53 (Καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὕψωσεν

³⁰ Ibid., 152.

ταπεινούς, πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν κενούς), which, as Farris points out,

form one unit of thought. They make use of the common classical and OT motif of the reversal of fortunes. Their unity is indicated by a clear chiasmic structure. If a work which God does against the wicked can be designated as A and a work for his people by B, the structure of the quatrain is AB BA. The quatrain as a whole is paralleled by 1 Samuel 2.7-8 (Hannah's Song).”³¹

Again, these two verses echo the ancient dichotomy between the righteous and the wicked, and the blessing or cursing that results from their actions. Farris correctly cites a parallel between Luke 1:52-53 and Hannah's words in 1 Samuel 2:7-8 (“The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them.”). Hannah's song actually gives us more background into the Biblical idea of the “poor,” which Mary briefly alludes to, both in reference to herself and to a collective group of people. Hannah notes the great cosmological and even eschatological power of the Lord who raises the poor out of the dust (implicitly recalling Adam's creation out of dust, עֶפֶר, in Genesis 2:7), and makes them to sit upon thrones: “for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and he hath set the world upon them.” As noted before, the word ταπεινούς is a loaded term in the Old Testament. Farris gives the best description of the term and the *Magnificat's* use of it:

Behind the Greek word ταπεινούς may well lie the Hebrew עֲנִיִּים or עֲנִיִּים, familiar to the reader of the Psalms. The complex of ideas associated with the 'poor' in the *Magnificat* finds its antecedent in the

31 Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 121.

Psalter...According to the Psalter God delivers a 'poor' or 'humble' people but humbles the arrogant (Ps. 18.27). He saves the poor man (here πτωχός) and his angel encamps around those who fear him (Ps. 34.6-7). (For that reason, according to this psalm, one may 'magnify' the Lord [Ps. 34.3].) The nation Israel can be called the 'poor' (Ps. 72.2; 149.4). Above all, the poor are those whom God saves (Ps. 34.18; Ps. 35.10 [πτωχόν]; cf. Prov. 3.34).

There seem to be three closely related elements in the use of language about the 'poor': attitude, situation and national identity. The poor are not only the destitute; they are those who depend utterly on Yahweh. They are, however, also very often those who live in real affliction and so cry to Yahweh because of their need. They are also the recipients of salvation; God sees their weakness and delivers them from it. Finally, the word can be a self-designation for Israel.

None of these aspects of the word are irrelevant to the *Magnificat*. The word ταπείνωσις derives its strength and power there from the many layers of meaning given it by its ancient Biblical use. Those of low estate certainly share the ultimate dependence on Yahweh characteristic of the OT poor. Their situation has been one of need and perhaps is so still. But here we have a significant development. That rescue of the poor which is characteristic of God has been definitively achieved. Those who sing the hymn may be the poor and afflicted but they are already the saved poor. They are also Israel, but they are the Israel whom God has helped.³²

Thus Mary not only *recapitulates* OT poetic language, but *develops* its theology by referring to God's salvation as a completed event. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the idea that the canticles of Luke's Gospel express both the thanksgiving of OT psalms, as well as the fulfillment of that to which OT psalms look: the manifestation of God's salvation in His Son, Jesus. Here, in Mary's song, we see an example of that idea: present is both the similarity between her praise and the praise of ancient Israel, and yet also a “significant difference.”

Praise for God's Acts for His People Israel (Luke 1:54-55)

54 ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,
55 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ τῷ

³² Ibid., 122.

σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

(My translation: *He helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.*)

The last two verses of Mary's song are not difficult to relate to the theology of the OT, since they refer by name to the nation of Israel and to its father, Abraham. These lines reference in the prophet Isaiah, who refers to Israel as God's "servant" (Isaiah 41:8-10; 42:1; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3). Mary also refers to the important OT action of remembering (μνησθῆναι), which "is not merely cognitive, but refers to God's bringing his promise into operation."³³ Finally, she ends her song in typical psalmic fashion:

The psalm ends with the phrase εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 'forever'. Such a formula very frequently ends a psalm and it should not be attached too closely to any preceding part of speech. The formula has two functions: it states that the present salvation is not ephemeral but will last for all time and it marks the end of the psalm.³⁴

From beginning to end, Mary's *Magnificat* reflects the theology of Hebrew musical texts. In summary of what we have discovered about this most beautiful poem, David Jeffrey gives a final word:

Echoes of Torah, of the rejoicing of Hannah, but most of all of the psalms of David are woven together into an exuberant poem. And it seems fitting that one who is to bring into the world the "word from the beginning," the long-awaited "David's royal son," should be among women a poet and human author of a seminal scripture herself. As with the song of her namesake predecessor Miriam (Exod. 15) and the psalms of her ancestor David, so Mary's song is poetry attuned for joyous praise; in it God is found to be greater than all our frail imaginings of him.³⁵

33 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 184.

34 Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 126.

35 Jeffrey, *Luke*, 33.

The Benedictus and the Musical-Theological Themes of Ancient Israel

The second canticle in Luke's Gospel is Zachariah's *Benedictus*. Like Mary's *Magnificat*, Zachariah's song is full of references to OT hymn material and theology. This fact should be expected, since Zachariah himself was a priest (Luke 1:5) and most definitely was well-versed in the Torah, Writings, and Prophets. Zachariah's hymn, perhaps of all four canticles, is the most distinctively Jewish. One reason for this is the fact that within the song itself Zachariah refers to the agency of all three major Jewish vocational roles in the announcement and worship of the Messiah: prophet, priest, and king. Zachariah himself is both a priest and a prophet (which the setting of the hymn makes clear - "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied"), and he highlights these roles in verses 70 (prophet), 74-5 (priest), and 76 (prophet) of his song. He also refers to the role of the Messianic kingship in verses 68-69 and 78-79. Again, Darrell L. Bock gives us a helpful outline of this song:

- a. Setting (1:67)
- b. Praise for messianic deliverance (1:68-75)
 - I. Redemption for Israel through David's house (1:68-69)
 - II. In accordance with the prophets (1:70)
 - III. Salvation from enemies (1:71)
 - IV. Mercy and covenant remembrance (1:72)
 - V. In accordance with Abrahamic promise (1:73)
 - VI. Goal: to serve God in holiness after rescue (1:74-75)
- c. Prophecy about Jesus and John (1:76-79)
 - I. John: prophet of the Most High to prepare the way (1:76)
 - II. John: to give knowledge of forgiveness of sins (1:77)
 - III. Jesus: Dayspring Visitor by the mercy of God (1:78)
 - IV. Jesus: to bring light and to guide into the way of peace (1:79)³⁶

Bock divides the body of the hymn into two main sections, which I will deal with each in turn.

³⁶ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 175.

Praise for Messianic Deliverance (1:68-75)

- 68 Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ,
ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ,
69 καὶ ἤγειρεν κέρασ σωτηρίας ἡμῖν ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυὶδ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
70 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ' αἰῶνος προφητῶν
αὐτοῦ,
71 σωτηρίαν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς πάντων τῶνμισούντων
ἡμᾶς.
72 ποιῆσαι ἔλεος μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης
ἁγίας αὐτοῦ,
73 ὄρκον ὃν ὤμοσεν πρὸς Ἀβραάμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν, τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν
74 ἀφόβως ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας λατρεῦειν αὐτῷ
75 ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις
ἡμῶν.

(My translation: *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he visited and worked redemption for his people, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, just as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all the ones hating us, to accomplish mercy among our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham to give to us, having been delivered from the hand of our enemies to serve him fearlessly in holiness and righteousness in the presence of him all our days.*)

As with the *Magnificat*, I will work through an analysis of OT musical-theological allusions verse by verse. First, verse 68 opens the song with a “Berakah [Heb., “blessing”]...a familiar OT formula. On several occasions similar formulae are linked with David or David's son (1 Sam. 25.32; 1 Kings 1.48; 8.15; cf. 2 Chr. 2.12).”³⁷ In 1 Kings 1:48, David blesses the Lord for allowing his son to sit on the throne of Judah as king: “And also thus said the king, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which hath given one to sit on my throne this day, mine eyes even seeing it.” Two interesting factors related to fatherhood and sonship come to light as a result of Zachariah's allusion to this verse: first, Zachariah himself is a father who is prophesying the future service of his son

³⁷ Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 134.

to God, and second (and even more pertinently), Zachariah proclaims the fact that God has given his own Son to sit as a king upon *his* throne. For this, most of all, Zachariah blesses the Lord God of Israel. A second *berakah* allusion reveals this fact as well. In 1 Kings 8, King Solomon blesses the Lord (v. 15) when God's presence comes to dwell in the new Jerusalem temple in the ark of the covenant. In the same way, Zachariah blesses the Lord when the presence of his Son comes to dwell on earth.

The Berakah in verse 68 is the context with which the rest of the sentence (verses 69-75) may be read: Zachariah blesses the Lord God of Israel for the things he has done for Israel. Verse 69 thus reveals that God raised up (ἤγειρεν) a horn of salvation in the house of David. As Bock notes, “the idea of God's raising up (ἤγειρεν, *egeiren*) someone is the way the OT expresses God's sending a significant figure to his people: a prophet (Deut. 18:15, 18), judge (Judg. 3:9, 15), priest (1 Sam. 2:35), or king (2 Sam. 23:1).³⁸ The object of this verb, κέρασ σωτηρίας (“horn of salvation”), identifies the figure in Zachariah's hymn to be a king:

The reference to the “horn of salvation” is drawn from the OT, where it pictures an ox with horns that is able to defeat enemies with the powerful thrust of its protected head (Deut. 33:17). The image was transferred to the warrior who had a horned helmet to symbolize the presence of power (Ps. 75:4-5, 10 [75:5-6, 11 MT]; 148:14 [in reference to the nation of Israel]; 1QH 9.28-29). The figure is also used to describe God himself (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:2 [18:3 MT]). In particular, the term was often used for a powerful regal figure. In some of these references the horn is specifically tied to the Davidic house, which is portrayed as delivering the nation (1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 132:17; Ezek. 29:21).³⁹

In verse 70, we see that God promised the κέρασ σωτηρίας through the prophets. The promises referred to “are the two alluded to in this hymn: the Abrahamic oath of Gen. 12

³⁸ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 180.

³⁹ Ibid.

(Luke 1:73) and the Davidic covenant of 2 Sam. 7 (Luke 1:69).⁴⁰ Furthermore, in verse 71 “lies an allusion to Psalm 106.10 which recalls God's deliverance of his people at the Red Sea. The present salvation is described in relation to the great saving event of the past, the deliverance from Egypt. It could almost be described as a new Exodus.”⁴¹

Verses 72-73 give two reasons why God raises up a κέρασ σωτηρίας: to accomplish mercy (ποιῆσαι ἔλεος) and to remember his holy covenant (μνησθῆναι διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ) which he made with Abraham. We have already seen from Mary's *Magnificat* that mercy, remembrance, and covenant are key OT themes. Summing up verses 68-73 of Zachariah's *Benedictus*, Farris writes,

The psalm has thus completed a rapid review of OT history. The saving act is not new; its roots reach back through David (v. 69), Moses and the Exodus (v. 71), to Abraham, the father of the people. 'The law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms' are here made to speak of Christ.⁴²

Zachariah's *berakah* in the first verse of his canticle thus provides the framework for his weaving of several layers of Jewish history and poetry into verses 68-73.

In verses 74-75, Zachariah brings this history to bear on himself and on his people as the present faithful servants of God. He relates that Israel has been delivered by God for a purpose: ἀφόβως...λατρεύειν αὐτῷ ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἡμῶν (“to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness in his presence forever”). It is impossible to read these verses and not to think of the Jewish priesthood. The verb that Zachariah uses, λατρεύειν, and its cognate noun λατρεία (“service,” “rites,” or “duties”), are Greek words typically used to describe the works that

40 Ibid., 181-182.

41 Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 136-137.

42 Ibid., 138.

priests would accomplish at the altar of God (e.g. Heb. 9:6). The priestly connotation of this verb is augmented by the descriptive words “in holiness and righteousness.”

Holiness indicates complete openness to the work of God in one's life, and righteousness conveys obedience to God's “right” covenant. Zachariah thus asserts the notion of Exodus 19:6, that God's people are “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.”

Furthermore, Zachariah prophesies that they will serve in the presence of God forever.

Like Mary's *Magnificat*, Zachariah's *Benedictus* is an act of הַלְלָה (a sacrifice of praise), and it urges God's whole people to serve Him (λατρεύειν) in this way as well.

Prophecy about Jesus and John (Luke 1:76-79)

In the second section of the *Benedictus*, Zachariah moves from a הַלְלָה praising God for his redemptive acts, to a prophecy of the roles of both his son, John, and God's Son, Jesus:

- 76 Καὶ σὺ δέ, παιδίον, προφήτης ὑψίστου κληθήσῃ προπορεύσει γὰρ
ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ,
77 τοῦ δοῦναι γινῶσιν σωτηρίας τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν
αὐτῶν,
78 διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν, ἐν οἷς ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολή
ἐξ ὕψους,
79 ἐπιφάναι τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένοις, τοῦ
κατευθῆναι τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης.

(My translation: *And even you, child, will be called a prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation for his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercies of our God, in which the dayspring from on high will visit us, to give light to the ones sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*)

As Bock notes in the outline above, verses 76-77 focus on John, while verses 78-79 focus on Jesus. Farris introduces this section of the poem with the following words:

This subordination of John to Jesus, a feature of all the gospels, explains the presence of the prophecy at this point in the hymn. The hymn has already described the present saving act of God by reference to the history of Israel from David to Abraham. It has expressed the purpose of God's activity (v. 75). At this point it is ready to recapitulate its contents by presenting again the Davidic Messiah under the image of the ἀνατολή. John, as forerunner, appeared before the Messiah. His role is therefore described here, immediately before the culminating description of the Messiah himself.⁴³

What is John's role? Zachariah says that his son would be called “prophet of the highest” for two reasons: he would prepare the Lord's ways (v. 76) and would give knowledge of salvation for the Lord's people in the forgiveness of their sins (v. 77). Because the phrase “knowledge of salvation” is not found in the Old Testament, and “forgiveness of sins” is a decidedly Lukan expression,⁴⁴ I will discuss verse 77 in the next chapter and will instead concentrate here on the clear OT allusions behind verse 76. Two OT prophets, Isaiah and Malachi, spoke of the prophet who was to come, namely Zachariah's son John: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3), and “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in : behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:1). Isaiah describes the forerunner as a voice (קול, *qol*), and Malachi describes him as a messenger (מלאך, *malach*, the Hebrew root of Malachi's own name). These allusions reinforce Zachariah's own term for his son's vocation: he will be a προφήτης.

43 Ibid., 140.

44 Ibid., 139.

Verses 78-79 return to OT imagery for the Jewish Messiah. “In v. 69 [the Messiah] appeared under the image of the horn; here he reappears under the image of the ἀνατολή, the rising light from on high.”⁴⁵ In calling Christ the ἀνατολή, Zachariah possibly alludes to two different Messianic references at once:

The reference to ἀνατολή is important. The Greek term, which literally means “that which springs up,” has a rich and varied OT background. On the one hand, it referred to the Branch or Sprout in dependence on the Hebrew term **הַצֶּמֶח** (Jer. 23:5; 33:15 [not present in the LXX]; Zech. 3:8; 6:12; Isa. 11:1-40). It also referred to the rising sun or star when the verbal form ἀνατέλλω (anatello, to rise up) was used (Num. 24:17; Mal. 4:2 [3:20 MT/LXX]). At Qumran and in contemporary Judaism, the former sense of Branch was predominant and was understood messianically...Many think that the first-century association of the term with the messianic Branch was so strong that double entendre is present, that is, Luke intends to evoke both associations, though the rising sun association is the dominant idea (Bock 1987: 73, so also Bovon 1989: 109).⁴⁶

Both images of the branch and the light may be found in the writings of Isaiah: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (11:10), and “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (9:2).

As we have seen, Zachariah's *Benedictus* is especially rich in Hebrew allusion and imagery. In his poem he brings together prophets, priests, and kings to worship the one Divine King whose righteous, saving, light-giving, and peace-giving reign he also acclaims. Zachariah gives thanks in **תודה** to God, who did not forget His people but remembered them (**זכר**, *zakar*, the root of Zachariah's own name) through His tender mercies.

45 Ibid., 140.

46 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 192.

Musical-Theological Themes of Ancient Israel: the Gloria and the Nunc Dimittis

We have examined the ancient Hebrew musical and theological aspects of the two longest of the four canticles: Mary's *Magnificat* and Zachariah's *Benedictus*. We now move to the shorter canticles, the *Gloria* of the angels at Christ's birth, and the elderly Simeon's joyful *Nunc Dimittis*, inspired from holding the Savior in his arms. I will examine the themes of both of these shorter hymns in this last section of chapter one.

The *Gloria* is found in Luke 2:14: Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας (my translation: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of his good will*). Bock comments on the OT context behind this one-line hymn:

The word pairs glory-peace, heaven-earth, and God-men relate literarily to one another. Δόξα (doxa, glory) can have one of two meanings. It may refer to an attribute of God, describing his majesty (Marshall 1978:112), or it may be used to ascribe praise to God. The latter sense of praise is more likely here, since this concept appears in 2:13...While heaven offers praise, humans are to have peace. Εἰρήνη (*eirene*) connotes the harmonious relationship that can exist between God and humans, the biblical “shalom” of the OT (Ps. 29:11; Isa. 26:3; Jer. 16:5; Ezek. 34:25-31). God's peace extends to ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας (*anthropois eudokias*, men of his good pleasure), which is almost a technical phrase in first-century Judaism for God's elect, those on whom God has poured out his favor. In this context, God's elect would be the God-fearers mentioned in the *Magnificat* (1:50-53), those who will respond to Jesus' coming.⁴⁷

In giving glory (δόξα, Greek equivalent of Hebrew כבוד, *khavod*) to God and proclaiming peace (εἰρήνη / מלח, *shalom*) to men, the angels offer their own hymn of תודה at Christ's birth. They both give thanks for the work God has done (δόξα), and proclaim the fulfillment that will happen through Christ, namely the εἰρήνη that he brings. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, the תודה was an ancient Jewish peace

⁴⁷ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 220.

offering – offered in covenant between men and God. In singing their ἠνθ, the angels announce that God has fulfilled his part in that covenant, making peace with men through the Prince of Peace.

Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* is found in Luke 2:29-32:

29 Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλον σου, δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ,
30 ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου,
31 ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν,
32 φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ.

(My translation: *Now you are releasing your servant in peace, Lord, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared before the face of all the people, a light for the revelation of Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.*)

Most commentators recognize three parts to this hymn. Farris gives an outline, explaining that “this is the typical structure of the kernel of the declarative psalm of praise”:

29 Word of Praise
30 Motive Clause
31-32 Statements Expanding the Motive Clause⁴⁸

Simeon begins his song with a Hebraic reference in his use of the Greek word νῦν (“now”): “The hymn begins with an emphatic 'now'. Throughout the infancy narratives there is a sense that the present moment is the time of salvation: 'For behold, from *now* on...' (1:48); 'Unto you is born *this day*...' (2.11).”⁴⁹ This sense of “now” and “today” is a Hebrew idiom that is reflected in the psalms (“*This is the day* which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it,” Psalm 118:24), and emphasized when a covenant is made with Israel (“See, I have set before thee *this day* life and good, and death and evil,”

48 Farris, *The Hymn's of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 145.

49 Ibid., 146.

Deut. 30:15). Simeon draws from the same Hebrew poetic language to reflect his own joy in the day of salvation, and to emphasize the covenantal presence of יהוה. As with the other canticles, Simeon's song expresses both תורה and fulfillment of the long-awaited Savior. A second Hebrew reference in verse 29 is the verb ἀπολύεις, “let depart.” In the OT, “ἀπολύω is used to express death in various texts (Gen. 15:2 [Abraham]; Num. 20:29 [Aaron]; Tob. 3:6 [Tobit]; 2 Macc. 7:9 [a martyr]).”⁵⁰ Like these faithful Jews, Simeon submits to the Lord's will in his own death, as is evidenced by his juxtaposition of the words δούλος (“servant”) and δεσποτα (“lord”).

Verse 30 (“For my eyes have seen thy salvation,” ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου) is the heart of the whole song, as it gives the reason for Simeon's praise in verse 29 and serves as the antecedent to the clauses in verses 31-32. Simeon's use of σωτήριόν here is no doubt a reference to the child's name, יהוה, especially given the context of the child's presentation in the temple, following his naming and circumcision (2:21). It is an echo of Isaiah 40:5, Isaiah 52:10, and other such OT verses that prophesied a time when “all flesh will see the salvation of God.” Simeon's simple sentence then, is a victory cry for all of God's faithful people who had longed, hoped, and waited for the consolation of Israel. That consolation, that Messiah, that יהוה, had come at last.

Verses 31-32 are descriptive clauses, modifying the σωτήριόν that Simeon saw. God had prepared his salvation “before the face of all the people” (31), and יהוה was both a light to Gentiles and the glory of Israel (32). The important concept here is the

⁵⁰ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 241.

fact that Simeon prophesies the Messiah's salvation as extending to both the Gentiles and to Israel. Although Mary had referred generally to “those who fear God” and the angels had spoken of peace to “men of good will,” Simeon's is the first reference in the canticles to any other specific group besides the Jewish nation. The OT texts behind these verses come from the prophet Isaiah, who also prophesied of future hope for Gentiles (42:6-7; 46:13; 49:6; 51:5 (LXX); 52:10; 55:5; 60:1-3, 5, 19; 61:9). In summary of the song, Bock writes:

The hymn as a whole repeats basic themes of all the hymns in the infancy narrative. God is acting for his people Israel. He is saving them according to his plan and promise. That salvation is found in Jesus. But the *Nunc Dimittis* also adds to these themes. Jesus is now directly associated for the first time with the “Servant” hope of Isa. 40-66. However, it is not the suffering elements of this figure that are brought to the fore, as in other NT uses of this theme; rather it is the note of victory, vindication, and hope. In addition, the hymn adds the universal scope of Jesus' work. The regal, Davidic, messianic Savior-Servant has come to redeem more than the nation of Israel; he has come for the world.⁵¹

Bock's words underline the theological harmonic of the *Nunc Dimittis*, a song that recalls the longing of Israel for the Messiah, and celebrates the consolation of Israel in the person of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that the four canticles in Luke's Gospel recapitulate the theology of Israelite music in the Hebrew Bible. In sections one and two of this chapter, we saw that the songs in Luke reflect the general purpose and tone of Hebrew music in that they are all תודה hymns which give thanks for the saving presence of God. In the subsequent sections, we found that each of the four Lukan

⁵¹ Ibid., 245.

canticles allude to specific theological themes from musical and poetic texts in the OT.

This chapter has shown the first half of the theological “harmonic” that comes together in these four texts; in the second chapter, we will examine the second half of that harmonic: that the canticles provide an exposition of the theological themes Luke will use to portray Jesus and Jesus' message in the rest of his two-volume work.

CHAPTER TWO

The Lukan Canticles as an Exposition of Gospel Themes

In the first chapter, I argued that the Lukan canticles are a harmonic of ancient Jewish and early Christian theological themes by looking at the evidence for their recapitulation of Jewish musical theology. This chapter will investigate the second half of that thesis by arguing that the canticles literarily serve as a kind of musical “exposition” for the Christian themes that Luke develops in the rest of the work. With each song, I will first examine the canticle's (and cantor's) literary place within the text, and then isolate several themes (revealed in key words and phrases) that are carried through the rest of Luke-Acts. Several of these themes overlap among the canticles (e.g. the theme of “peace” is present in both the *Benedictus* and the *Nunc Dimittis*), and several themes that are found in the canticles will be omitted for the sake of concentration on a select few. Omission of these themes in the present analysis in no way reflects their level of significance in the Scriptures as a whole; rather, the themes that I have chosen to present in this chapter are those that I believe are most significant for the message that *Luke in particular* is trying to communicate. Below is an outline of the thirteen themes that I will examine and their references in the canticles:

Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

1. Magnifying God (1:46)
2. Joyfulness (1:47)
3. Salvation (1:47; also *Benedictus*, 1:69, 71, 77 and *Nunc Dimittis*, 2:30)
4. Servanthood (1:48; also *Nunc Dimittis*, 2:29)
5. God-fearers (1:50)

6. Rulers/Rich vs. the Poor/Hungry (1:52-53)
- Benedictus* (Luke 2:67-79)
7. Holy Spirit (2:67)
8. Benediction (2:68)
9. Forgiveness of Sins (1:77)
- Gloria* (Luke 2:14)
10. Glory (also *Nunc Dimittis*, 2:32)
11. Peace (also *Benedictus*, 1:79 and *Nunc Dimittis*, 2:29)
- Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32)
12. Sight, Light & Revelation
13. Jews & Gentiles

The Canticles and the Christian Eucharist

In the beginning of chapter one, we identified the canticles as inheritors of the ancient Jewish practice of the *todah* (תודה) sacrifice. In the beginning of this chapter, I would like to carry this idea further in order to put it in the context of Luke's Gospel and early Christianity, and to highlight an overall theme that will thread through much of what we discuss in this chapter.

The equivalent to the ancient Jewish practice of תודה is the Christian celebration of the Eucharist instituted by Christ (Luke 22:14-23; cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Scholars have traced the origins of the Christian Eucharist and celebration of the Mass to the תודה sacrifice, as Scott Hahn does in his book, *The Lamb's Supper*:

Perhaps the most striking liturgical “ancestor” of the Mass is the *todah* of ancient Israel. The Hebrew word *todah*, like the Greek Eucharist, means “thank offering” or “thanksgiving.” The word denotes a sacrificial meal shared with friends in order to celebrate one's gratitude to God. A *todah* begins by recalling some mortal threat and then celebrates man's divine deliverance from that threat. It is a powerful expression of confidence in God's sovereignty and mercy.⁵²

⁵² Scott Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 32.

Hahn notes the philological connection between the Hebrew תודה and the Greek εὐχαριστία: the latter is the best translation of the former, both meaning “thanksgiving.” Indeed, the verb form of εὐχαριστία appears in Luke 22:19-20, when Jesus offers the bread and wine to his disciples as his body and blood: καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου... (my translation: *and taking the bread, having given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, “This is my body...”*). However, Hahn also points out that the connection between תודה and εὐχαριστία is not merely a philological one:

The similarities between *todah* and Eucharist go beyond their common meaning of thanksgiving. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has written: “Structurally speaking, the whole of Christology is present in the *todah* spirituality of the Old Testament.” Both the *todah* and the Eucharist present their worship through word and meal. Moreover, the *todah*, like the Mass, includes an unbloody offering of unleavened bread and wine. The ancient rabbis made a significant prediction regarding the *todah*. “In the coming [Messianic] age, all sacrifices will cease except the *todah* sacrifice. This will never cease in all eternity” (*Pesiqta*, I, p. 159).⁵³

The liturgy of Christian Mass still reflects the two key elements of the *todah*: word and meal. As the ancient rabbis predicted, the *todah* sacrifice has not ceased because the sacrifice of the Eucharist in Christian Mass has continued to this very day.

As a liturgy of תודה, the canticles are thus also eucharistic in expression, in the sense that they celebrate the divine mystery coming near to men – so near that they may see and touch Him. Simeon's words, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people,” are echoed in John the Baptist's declaration at the approach of Jesus Christ, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the

⁵³ Ibid., 33. Citing Joseph Ratzinger, *Feast of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 57.

world” (John 1:29) - the same words that are spoken by a Christian priest in the presentation of Christ's body in the Mass. Furthermore, just as the $\eta\eta\eta$ sacrifice was closely associated with musical praise, so the Eucharist: in both Matthew's and Mark's accounts of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, Jesus and his disciples sang hymns in addition to taking part in the meal (cf. Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

Finally, the canticles reveal Jesus as also the sacrament of Eucharist reveals Jesus – a theme that is uniquely important to Luke. In Luke's Gospel alone we are presented with the story of Jesus' walk with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus following His death and resurrection, His instruction of them through the scriptures while they were unaware of his true identity, and His revelation to them in the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-32). The relationship between seeing Christ and recognizing Him is present throughout Luke's Gospel: “As Augustine says of Jesus on the way, “He was at one and the same time seen and concealed....He was walking with them along the road like a companion, and was himself the leader. He was seen, and not recognized” (Sermon 235.2-3). It would be hard to find a theme that more clearly resonates through Luke's narrative than this.”⁵⁴ The theme of Jesus' revelation, then, is extremely important to Luke, and one that he draws to a triumphant conclusion in this passage near the end of his gospel. David Jeffrey shows that this passage is not only important to Luke, but that it has been of decided importance to the Church through the ages as well:

The church has seen in this moment one of the most cherishable evidences of the way Christ's presence comes among his faithful followers. When we invite him to break for us the bread of life, he does. He has been there all along in the exposition of the scriptures, a living presence in his word, but they have only sensed rather than recognized that in its fullness. Now,

⁵⁴ David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), 286.

“their eyes were opened” - and just at the moment they *see*, he vanishes “from their sight” (24:31). Augustine draws the point: they know Christ in the breaking of the bread: “It isn't every loaf of bread, you see, but the one that receives Christ's blessing that becomes the body of Christ” (Sermon 234.2). This passage in Luke becomes a powerful nexus for the church's understanding of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament. In the stunning painting of the scene at Emmaus by Caravaggio, at the very moment the disciples recognize the Lord they leap up, but their eyes are fixed upon his hands and the now consecrated bread. Augustine concludes that “everything in the scriptures speaks of Christ, but only to him who has ears. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and so we should pray that he will open our own” (Homily 2 on 1 John). The *Glossa Ordinaria* (Patrologia latina 114), seeing the progress from scriptural exegesis to Eucharist as prefiguring the liturgy of the church, treats the entire episode also as an exemplum of the promise of Jesus that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20; cf. Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels* 11.9). *The Meditations on the Life of Christ* emphasizes the “hidden communion” of Christ's lovers with their beloved in meditation on his word and the *consolatum* of the Eucharist (Pseudo-Bonaventure 1961: 367-68). For all of these reasons this passage is of enormous importance to Christian life, and it is found only in Luke.

I highlight the Luke 24:13-32 passage and the theme of Jesus' revelation because I believe both are important to consider for an understanding of how Luke uses the texts of the canticles to underline the same theme. From the beginning (Christ's incarnate birth) to the end (Christ's death and resurrection) of the Gospel, Luke wants his readers to see and to know Christ. While Jesus was and is still revealed to his disciples in the breaking of eucharistic bread, the canticles also reveal Him in a “eucharistic” sense for those who have ears to hear them.

Themes from the Magnificat

The theme of the revelation of Christ in the canticles will be an overall theme that we will return to throughout this chapter. For now, however, we turn to a discussion of

our first cantor, Mary, and the ways in which Luke uses her character literarily and theologically in his work. Following this we will explore six specific themes that Luke draws from Mary's song, the *Magnificat*.

The character of Mary holds a special place in Luke's Gospel. Out of all four gospel writers, Luke gives us the most information about this extraordinary woman, most likely because he talked with Mary personally and was able to record her stories in δῆγησις (historical chronological narrative based on eyewitness reports⁵⁵). Unique to Luke's account are the following key scenes in the life of Mary: the annunciation, the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, Mary's song, Mary's "pondering in her heart" the birth of her son and the worship of angels and shepherds, the presentation of Jesus in the temple by Mary & Joseph, and the child Jesus' independent visit to the temple and Mary's reaction.

What does Luke say in these scenes about Mary, the girl upon whom and in whom God deigned to descend? In Luke 1, the angel Gabriel addresses her as κεχαριτωμένη ("full of grace"), a singular descriptive epitaph found no where else in the New Testament. In her own words at the annunciation, Mary is the "handmaid of the Lord," giving the blessed fiat with which she submitted her body and life to the Lord's will (Luke 1:38). In the visitation scene, Elizabeth calls her "blessed among women" (Luke 1:42) and praises "she who believed" (Luke 1:45). Mary is characterized as a poet and possibly even a musician, as we know from her *Magnificat*. She is a woman given to contemplation, as we see in Luke 2:19 ("But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."), and she is faithful to Jewish law (Luke 2:22-24). Finally Simeon, in

⁵⁵ See the introduction to this study.

his address to her, prophesies that “a sword will piece through your own soul also” (2:35), foreshadowing Christ's crucifixion and Mary's sorrow. All of these titles, pieces of information, and prophecies about Mary are unique to Luke's Gospel.

The fact that Luke spends so much time portraying Mary's character on the surface of the text points to his unique emphasis on her extraordinary spiritual and figurative role in God's plan. As we have already seen in chapter one of this study, there are very strong parallels between Luke 1 and 2 Samuel 6, identifying Mary with the ark of the covenant and therefore identifying her as θεοτοκος (“God-bearer”). This observation alone places Mary in a spiritual context that goes back to the earliest Jews. Luke also makes the connection that Mary, as the mother of God, is the spiritual mother of the Church as an extension of Christ's own body. This theological idea is highlighted by a literary parallel: the birth of Christ occurs in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel, and the “birth” of the Church at Pentecost occurs in the second chapter of the Acts to the Apostles (the sequel to Luke's Gospel).

In addition, Luke emphasizes the divine-human union between Mary and the Holy Spirit. Regarding the union whence Jesus comes, the angel Gabriel says, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). This proclamation of Gabriel to Mary is one of the most chillingly beautiful scriptures in the canon – in some awesome event, a holy God descended upon a willing mortal woman, and the fruit of her womb was a “holy thing,” the Son of God who was also wholly man. It is an event of divine and human unity that is replicated only in the

union of Christ with His Church in the power of the Eucharist, Christ's own body broken and given to men. In the mystery of Mary, the Church has a precedent for her own mysterious union with God, and this recognition makes Mary's song all the more meaningful to those who would magnify the Lord along with her. This understanding of Mary's character in Luke's Gospel will help our understanding of the themes Luke develops from her song. Here once again is the *Magnificat* in full:

46 Καὶ εἶπεν Μαριάμ, Μεγαλύνει ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν κύριον,
47 καὶ ηγαλλίασεν τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ σωτῆρι μου,
48 ὅτι ἐπέβλεψεν ἐπὶ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς δούλης αὐτοῦ. Ἴδου γὰρ ἀπὸ
τοῦ νῦν μακαριοῦσίν με πᾶσαι αἱ γενεαί,
49 ὅτι ἐποίησέν μοι μεγάλα ὁ δυνατός. Καὶ ἅγιον τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.
50 καὶ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ εἰς γενεὰς καὶ γενεὰς τοῖς φοβουμένοις αὐτόν.
51 Ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, διεσκόρπισεν ὑπερηφάνους
διανοίᾳ καρδίας αὐτῶν.
52 Καθεῖλεν δυνάστας ἀπὸ θρόνων καὶ ὕψωσεν ταπεινοὺς,
53 πεινῶντας ἐνέπλησεν ἀγαθῶν καὶ πλουτοῦντας ἐξαπέστειλεν
κενοὺς.
54 ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους,
55 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ
σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

(My translation: *And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoiced in God my Savior, because he looked down upon the humble state of his maidservant. For behold, from now all the generations will call me blessed, because the Mighty One has done great things for me. And holy is his name. And his mercy is upon generation and generation to the ones fearing him. He showed strength with his arm, he scattered proud ones in the intention of their heart. He took down rulers from thrones and lifted up the lowly, he filled the hungry with good things and sent away the rich empty. He helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, just as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.*)

The first theme that I will look at from Mary's *Magnificat* is that one for which the song is named: *the act of magnifying the Lord*. More than any word other in the poem, *μεγαλύνει* gives Mary's song its character. It summarizes what the rest of the song will

unpack: that the Lord is great and worthy to be magnified (as we saw in chapter one, Mary also urges others to magnify the Lord through allusion to Psalm 34:3: “O magnify the Lord with me!). Μεγαλύνει is not an extremely common word in Luke's work (he uses it twice in his gospel and three times in Acts), but he does use it more than the other gospel writers - Matthew uses it only once and the others not at all.⁵⁶ I will highlight one of the instances of μεγαλύνει in the book of Acts, as I believe the philological connection between the Acts passage and Mary's hymn communicates something important about Luke's understanding of the effects of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon believers.

The passage in question is found in Acts 10, the story of the Gentile Cornelius' conversion. Cornelius had sent for Peter in order to learn more about the Christian God, and while Peter was speaking to him about the faith, Acts 10:44-47 reports the following occurrence:

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter; because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

“They of the circumcision which believed,” i.e. the Jewish converts, are astonished to see that the Gentiles also received the gift of the Holy Spirit, proof of their belief and God's blessing. Peter and his companions recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit from two signs: they hear the Gentiles speak with tongues, and they hear them magnify (μεγαλύνει) God. The act of magnifying God, according to Luke, is one of the signs of the presence of the

⁵⁶ Albert Denaux & Rita Corstjens, *The Vocabulary of Luke: An Alphabetical Presentation and a Survey of Characteristic and Noteworthy Words and Word Groups in Luke's Gospel* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 389.

Holy Spirit in an individual's life.

This is an interesting idea when set alongside the use of *μεγαλύνει* in Mary's song. Mary is often referred to as the “first among believers” because of her immediate acceptance of the angel's words at the annunciation. When we compare Mary's magnifying the Lord with this passage in Acts, we can see this revealed even more clearly. Not only was Mary the first among believers, she was also the first upon whom the Holy Spirit descends (Luke 1:35). Her song, her *Magnificat*, is a testament to her belief and the Holy Spirit's power, as the Gentiles' magnifying God is such a testament as well.

Why is this the case? Why is the act of magnifying God especially indicative of the presence of the Holy Spirit? An answer arises from looking at the theology behind the verb *μεγαλύνει*. As the Greek theologian Origen understood, this word actually poses a theological question: “Now if the Lord could neither receive increase or decrease, what is this that Mary speaks of?”⁵⁷ Essentially, how is it even possible that Mary could “magnify,” literally “make great,” the Lord? St. Ambrose gives an excellent answer in the following commentary:

For the Lord is magnified, as ye have also read elsewhere “Magnify the Lord with me” [Psalm 33]; not that anything could be added to the Lord by a human voice, but because He is magnified in us. For the image of God is Christ [cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15], and, therefore, if the soul has done any righteous and pious act, it magnifies that image of God in the likeness of which it was created [cf. Genesis 1:27]; and, therefore, insofar as it magnifies, it becomes the more sublime by the participation in His greatness, so that it seems to manifest that image in itself by the shining colour of good deeds and by the emulation of virtue. So Mary's soul

⁵⁷ Origen, quoted by Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers, Vol. III, St. Luke*, trans. John Henry Newman (London: The Saint Austin Press, 1997), 42.

magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God, inasmuch as dedicated in soul and spirit to the Father and the Son, she worships with devout mind the One God from Whom and through Whom are all things [cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6].⁵⁸

St. Ambrose thus explains that the only way that Mary, or the Gentiles in Acts, or any believer for that matter, can truly magnify the Lord is through “dedication of the soul and spirit to the Father and the Son.” The praise of the lips is an outward sign of the inner commitment, as is beautifully illustrated by Mary's first line, “My *soul* magnifies the Lord” (and in contrast, the proud are scattered because of their *διανοία καρδίας*, “the intention of their heart,” v. 51). Luke brings Ambrose's theological understanding into relief through his use of *μεγαλύνει* in the case of both Mary and the new Gentile believers.

The second theme I will explore from Mary's hymn is that of *joyfulness* (v. 47). The verb *ἠγαλλίασεν* (aorist of *ἀγαλλιάω*, “rejoice”) is again fairly unique to Luke (Matthew uses it once), although even Luke uses it sparsely⁵⁹. The word is used to describe a rare kind of extreme joyfulness, as distinguished from the more ordinary joy of *χαίρω*. Mary's spirit (*πνεῦμά*) takes extreme joyfulness in God her Savior. The only other time that a character expresses this kind of joy in Luke's gospel is when Jesus Himself rejoices over his seventy apostles, who return from their successful journey of ministry in chapter ten. In this instance also, Luke pairs the word *ἀγαλλιάω* with *πνεῦμά* to invoke the image of a very deep inner joy: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from

58 Saint Ambrose of Milan, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke* (Etna: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998), 53-54.

59 Denaux & Corstjens, *The Vocabulary of Luke*, 3.

the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Luke 10:21).

Is there a connection between Mary's joy and Jesus' joy? I believe that there is when one considers that on each occasion, the identity of Christ is being revealed. In Mary's case, she rejoices because she knows her promised Son's identity: He is her Savior, Jesus (ישוע). In Jesus' case, He rejoices because *His apostles* know His identity. This becomes evident in the next several verses of Luke 10, in Jesus' powerful statement about himself which David Jeffrey glosses nicely:

What follows [10:21] is perhaps the strongest christological declaration so far in Luke's Gospel: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him” (10:22). This is a high point in the theme of identity in respect to Jesus and, by derivation, the disciples, as Luke has been developing. It is a powerful narrative moment, and when Jesus now turns to his disciples “privately” for an intimate recollection, he confirms the unprecedented blessedness of what has been revealed to them more fully than to previous mortals: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” (10:23-24). All of the yearning for the full disclosure of God's promised redemption, generation after generation, has been looking toward a moment, a presence, a “tabernacle not made with hands” (Heb. 8:2; 9:11). At the very threshold of this tabernacle, so to speak, the disciples now stand.⁶⁰

As Mary rejoices at the identity of the Son in her womb, Jesus rejoices in revealing His identity to His apostles. In both cases, Jesus is revealed as the promised one, the “tabernacle” of salvation.

Interestingly, in the two cases in which Luke uses the verb ἀγαλλιάω or cognate noun ἀγαλλίασις (“extreme joy”) in Acts, he is describing the great joy that the Christians

⁶⁰ Jeffrey, *Luke*, 148.

had when taking part in a meal – and not just any meal, but that meal in which Jesus' body is revealed:

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness [ἀγαλλιάσει] and simplicity of heart. (Acts 2:46, NKJV)

Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced [ἠγαλλιάσατο] with all his household that he had believed in God. (Acts 16:34, NKJV)

As we have seen already earlier in this chapter, Luke strongly emphasizes the identity of Christ revealed in this special meal, evidenced by his unique account of Christ's revelation of Himself to the two disciples at Emmaus in the moment of His breaking bread and blessing it. The believers in Acts rejoice (ἀγαλλιάω) in breaking their bread eucharistically, because in that moment, Christ Himself is made present to them (“This is my body”). Luke uses the word ἀγαλλιάω on rare occasions to depict a very deep and extreme joy – such a joy that one feels in the presence of his or her Savior.

The third theme follows closely from the second: *salvation*, as Mary rejoices (ἀγαλλιάω) in God her *Savior* (σωτήρ). This theme requires much more extensive analysis than I will cover here, and for a more thorough representation of the theme of salvation in Luke's Gospel, one should turn to I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Zondervan, 1971). The following is a brief summary of Marshall's claim, that the key to Luke's Gospel is his theology of salvation:

The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men. If we were looking for a text to sum up the message of the Gospel, it would undoubtedly be Luke 19:10: “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” With this verse Luke concludes the story of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee and Judaea...The saying of Jesus, therefore, stands as the climax of his evangelistic ministry and sums up its significance: Jesus

came to save. In singling out this feature as the decisive characteristic of the ministry, Luke was doing something novel as compared with the other Evangelists, and yet at the same time he was not imposing a new motif upon the Gospel tradition....Each of the Gospels is evangelistic; each of them is concerned to present Jesus as the Saviour. But, whereas the stress in Mark is on the person of Jesus, in Matthew on the teaching of Jesus, and in John on the manifestation of eternal life in Him, Luke's stress is on the blessings of salvation which He brings.⁶¹

Marshall's claim is perhaps reinforced by the fact that, as noted already in the first chapter, salvation is the most prevalent theme in the canticles as well. Mary, Zachariah, and Simeon all praise God for his salvation that is come through Jesus, יְשׁוּעָה (the angels also proclaim the Savior moments before their canticle):

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. (1:47, Magnificat)

[God] hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. (1:69, Benedictus)

That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us (1:71, Benedictus)

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins (1:77, Benedictus)

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (2:11, directly before the Gloria)

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation. (2:30, Nunc Dimittis)

Luke develops the theme of salvation in his gospel by expanding upon the ways in which salvation is depicted in these verses from the canticles. For example, Luke echoes two ideas about salvation present in the *Benedictus* (salvation that is “raised up” by God in Jesus, and connecting salvation with forgiveness of sins) in the narrative of Acts 5 (the second trial of Peter and the other apostles before the Sanhedrin):

61 I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 116-117.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.⁶²

Peter echoes Zachariah (Luke 1:69 and 77), and develops the theme of salvation by attributing to the Savior an authority that ought to be obeyed (for as Peter also says in Acts 4:12, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”). These ideas are repeated again in Peter's speech at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:22-24).

Luke also develops the sense of nearness and immediacy of Jesus' salvific presence that the angels proclaim (“For unto you is born *this day*...a Savior”). In Luke 19:9-10, Jesus says to Zacchaeus, “This day is salvation come to this house...For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Christ's saving, incarnational presence becomes his immediate gift to those who repent and believe in him.

Finally, Luke spends quite a bit of time developing the idea that salvation is a gift that may be accessed by all people – Jews and Gentiles alike (see the section below in the *Nunc Dimittis*). Salvation for the Gentiles may be summed up by Acts 28:28: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”

The fourth theme that I will examine from Mary's *Magnificat* is *servanthood*. Mary, as the first among believers, is the model servant of God: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:38). She reiterates this theme in her song, saying that God has looked

⁶² Acts 5:29-32.

upon the lowliness of her state as a servant (δούλης). Simeon also refers to himself as a δούλος in his *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29). Taking both Mary and Simeon as models, Luke develops the theme throughout his book, narrating key qualities that a true servant of Christ should possess in two lengthy parables spoken by Jesus.

The first of these parables is found in Luke 12:35-48, and in this parable Jesus underscores the true servant's *watchfulness*:

*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.*⁶³

A model for the watchful servant is found in Simeon, who patiently “[waited] for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25). In the parable of Luke 12, Jesus reveals that his servants must remain watchful for his second coming as well. He prepares his disciples for a time when he would leave them, a time when they would inhabit the world as servants waiting for the return of their master. Jesus stresses the need for faithfulness to the kingdom of God over attending to earthly affairs (As he says in Luke 16:23, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”). He sternly places this responsibility in the hands of all of his followers.

63 Luke 12:35-40.

The theme of the faithful servant awaiting his master is reiterated in the second of Luke's longer parables on servanthood (Luke 19:11-27). As the Luke 12 parable focuses on a good servant's watchfulness, this parable highlights his *stewardship* while he is watching. While his disciples are expecting the immediate appearance of the physical kingdom of God (19:11), Jesus brings them down to earth by preparing them again for the events that would shortly occur (his death, resurrection, and ascension) and for the role that their lives would take in relation to the kingdom of God and Himself as its master. This time he emphasizes the need for His followers' gifts to be made profitable for the kingdom of God.

Again, Mary is the model servant. She was “watchful” in the sense that she was prepared to take immediate action when the angel from God addressed her with the divine plan, and she was a faithful steward in the sense that she gave her gifts as a woman and a mother to God for His use. Just as Jesus said would be the case for faithful servants, Mary is called blessed – not only by God but also by men and angels. She is called “blessed” by both the angel Gabriel and Elizabeth, and in her song she prophesies, “All generations will call me blessed (μακαριοῦσίν).”

The fifth theme is the *God-fearing* (φοβούμενοις) individual or nation. In Luke 1:50, Mary sings, “And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.” In two other themes (joyfulness and salvation), I have mentioned Luke's interest in the relationship of God with the Gentiles as well as with the Jews. With the theme of godly fear as well, Luke develops the idea that Gentiles, as well as Jews, may be counted among those who do indeed “fear God.”

This may be seen by the description of Cornelius, Luke's eminent Gentile character, in Acts 10. Cornelius is introduced in verse 2 as “a devout man, and one who feared God.” This description is backed up by the men who are sent to find Peter on behalf of the Gentile (v. 22), and then affirmed by Peter himself at the end of the episode: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (v. 35). One scholar compares the Acts 10 narrative with Mary's reference to God-fearers in Luke 1:50:

Luke 1:50 applies [the term οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν] to a devout Jew; Acts 10:2, 22, 35 permit us to predicate it also of a pious Gentile. In this connection it is perhaps a little surprising that Luke 7:2-10 does not use it of the centurion described there as so highly regarded by the Jewish community. This raises the question of what Luke means by “pious”. It is spelt out in two places: Acts 10:35, 'fearing God and performing righteousness', and 10:2, 'giving alms generously to the people (= the Jewish community?) and praying to God continually'. That is, it is defined in terms of good works. What we have here is thus not so much a picture of Cornelius as a description of how Luke understands true piety – whether of Jew or Gentile.⁶⁴

As Wilcox aptly observes, Luke's focus here is drawing out the characteristics of a “true piety” that transcends distinctions of race and culture. Such piety is found in fearing God and in performing works for God that develop that fear in an active sense.

The sixth and final theme that I will look at from Mary's *Magnificat* is the pair of contrasts between rulers and the poor, hungry and rich. As mentioned in chapter one, verses 52-53 of Mary's *Magnificat*, where these contrasts occur, form a literary chiasmus. The theme of the reversal of fortunes is a major one for Luke, and for Christianity as a whole:

64 Max Wilcox, “The 'God-Fearers' in Acts – A Reconsideration,” JSNT 13 (1981), 107.

That God has reversed the normal order of things by raising Jesus from the dead was an insight which seemed thoroughly to have impressed itself on first-century Christians. 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner' (Lk. 20.17 and other texts). Moreover, the establishment of a church of the 'foolish in the world' reversed natural expectations (1 Cor. 1.26). And those who preached the Gospel, it was claimed, had 'turned the world upside down' (Acts 17.6). There seems to have been a strong sense among early Christians that God, by his acts among them, had definitively reversed the natural order of human life. Verses 52-53 of the *Magnificat* may be influenced by this widespread Christian perception.⁶⁵

There is much that one could say about Luke's development of this theme. A good place to start is Luke 6:20-23, the Beatitudes of Jesus:

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven.

The Beatitudes begin with a blessing of the two groups that the *Magnificat* also makes mention of in Luke 1:52-53: the poor and the hungry. Mary says that God “lifted up” (ὑψώσεν) the poor; Jesus blesses them with the “kingdom of God.” Mary says that God “filled” (ἐνέπλησεν) the hungry; Jesus also promises that the hungry will be filled. To these reversals, Jesus adds two more: the sorrowful will turn into the joyful, and the hated will be rewarded in heaven.

Although the references in the Beatitudes are to physical realities of “lowliness,” we see from Luke's development of this theme that blessing will only come to those who are lowly of heart, as well. Jesus urges his disciples to a humility toward their

⁶⁵ Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 123.

neighbor in Luke 14, and a humility toward God in Luke 18:

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.⁶⁶

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.⁶⁷

In the first passage above (Luke 14), the exalted man is the one who is humble before his neighbors, giving to others honor and prestige in place of himself. In the second passage (Luke 18), the exalted man is the one humbles himself before God in recognition of his sin and need for mercy.

In the six themes we have examined in this section (magnifying God, joyfulness, salvation, servanthood, God-fearers, and the contrast of rulers/rich vs. the poor/hungry), we see that Mary's *Magnificat* serves as an exposition of themes that Luke continues to develop in his narrative, just as Mary herself is an exposition of the humble servant and saved believer who magnifies God and rejoices in Him.

⁶⁶ Luke 14:8-11.

⁶⁷ Luke 18:10-14.

Themes from the Benedictus

In Luke's narrative, Zachariah, father of John the Baptist and husband to Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, is a foil character to Mary herself. Luke emphasizes this element by creating a narrative chiasmus with the intertwining stories of Mary and Zachariah:

- a. Proclamation to Zachariah (1:5-25)
- b. Proclamation to Mary (1:26-38)
- b'. Mary's hymn (1:46-56)
- a'. Zachariah's hymn (1:67-80)⁶⁸

Like Mary, Zachariah is visited by an angel; like Mary, he is promised a son; and yet unlike Mary, his response is disbelief. He asks the angel for a sign, "Whereby shall I know this?" (1:18), in contrast with Mary's request for further instruction, "How shall this be?" (1:34). While Mary is blessed for believing (1:45), Zachariah is duly punished for his presumption:

And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.⁶⁹

And yet Zachariah's story is one of redemption as well. When Zachariah does speak again, it is at the birth of the son the angel had promised, and in the very words that the Holy Spirit speaks through him (Luke 1:67):

68 Εὐλογητὸς κύριος ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ,
ὅτι ἐπεσκέψατο καὶ ἐποίησεν λύτρωσιν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ,

68 Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 145.

69 Luke 1:19-20

- 69 και ἤγειρεν κέρασ σωτηρίας ἡμῖν ἐν οἴκῳ Δαυιδ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ,
 70 καθὼς ἐλάλησεν διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ' αἰῶνος προφητῶν
 αὐτοῦ,
 71 σωτηρίαν ἐξ ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν καὶ ἐκ χειρὸς πάντων τῶνμισούντων
 ἡμᾶς.
 72 ποιῆσαι ἔλεος μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης
 ἁγίας αὐτοῦ,
 73 ὄρκον ὃν ὤμοσεν πρὸς Ἀβραὰμ τὸν πατέρα ἡμῶν, τοῦ δοῦναι ἡμῖν
 74 ἀφόβως ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν ῥυσθέντας λατρεῦειν αὐτῷ
 75 ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ πάσαις ταῖς ἡμέραις
 ἡμῶν.
 76 Καὶ σὺ δέ, παιδίον, προφήτης ὑψίστου κληθήσῃ προπορεύσει γὰρ
 ἐνώπιον κυρίου ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ,
 77 τοῦ δοῦναι γινῶσιν σωτηρίας τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν
 αὐτῶν,
 78 διὰ σπλάγχνα ἐλέους θεοῦ ἡμῶν, ἐν οἷς ἐπισκέπεται ἡμᾶς ἀνατολὴ
 ἐξ ὕψους,
 79 ἐπιφᾶναι τοῖς ἐν σκότει καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένοις, τοῦ
 κατευθῆναι τοὺς πόδας ἡμῶν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰρήνης.

(My translation: And Zachariah his father was filled of the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for he visited and worked redemption for his people, and raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, just as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from the beginning, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all the ones hating us, to accomplish mercy among our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham to give to us, having been delivered from the hand of our enemies to serve him fearlessly in holiness and righteousness in the presence of him all our days. And even you, child, will be called a prophet of the highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation for his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercies of our God, in which the dayspring from on high will visit us, to give light to the ones sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.)

I will consider three theological themes from Zachariah's *Benedictus* that Luke develops in the rest of his two-volume work. The first is one that is not specifically referred to in Zachariah's hymn, but which does provide the context for it: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (πνεύματος ἁγίου, Luke 1:67) in believers. For Luke, this theme is

hugely important, as we may see from the central role of Pentecost in his narrative, and multiple examples of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of the faithful. The following word groups related to the Holy Spirit may be found in Luke, and serve to illustrate the various and permeating uses of this theme throughout Luke's Gospel ⁷⁰:

βαπτίζω ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (“baptized with the Holy Spirit,” Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16)
διὰ πνεύματος (ἁγίου) (“through the Holy Spirit,” Acts 1:2; 4:25; 11:28; 21:4)
ἐκχέω/ἐκχύνω (ἅγιον) πνεῦμα (“I will pour out My Spirit,” Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45)
ἐπιπίπτει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (“receive the Holy Spirit,” Acts 8:15; 10:44; 11:15)
λαμβάνω πνεῦμα ἅγιον (“receive the Holy Spirit,” Acts 8:15,17,19; 10:47; 19:2)
πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον εἶπεν (“the Holy Spirit said,” Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2)
πνεῦμα = πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον (“Spirit” used to refer to the Holy Spirit, Luke 2:27; 4:1,14; Acts 2:4; 6:3,10; 8:18,29; 10:19; 11:12,28; 16:16,18; 20:22; 21:4)

In addition to these examples of the Holy Spirit's role in Luke's Gospel, David Jeffrey notices a great connection between the Holy Spirit and prayer in Luke, a connection that is present from the very beginning in the infancy narratives and hymns:

The theme of prayer and answered prayer is evident from the beginning in the annunciation and nativity narratives peculiar to Luke: Zachariah's prayer is answered (1:13), Simeon's prayer is a prominent prayer of grateful benediction (2:22-28), and the poems of both Mary and Zacharias (her Magnificat and his Benedictus) are highlights of Luke 1. When at his baptism Jesus prays, the heavens open and the dove of the Holy Spirit descends (3:21-22); when Jesus prays from the cross, the temple veil is rent from top to bottom (23:44-46).

The connection of prayer to a powerful presence of the Holy Spirit is thus especially prominent in Luke's writing. We may think, of course, of Acts 2. But the promise of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is already there in the words of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias as he serves at the altar (Luke 1:15), and the Spirit is promised to Mary on her prayerful

70 Denaux & Corstjens, *The Vocabulary of Luke*, 512-513

acquiescence (1:35-38) and then comes to Elizabeth and the babe in her womb simply at Mary's greeting (1:41); Simeon is filled with the Holy Spirit as he prays (2:26-32). These connections are not all unique to Luke (e.g., Matt. 18:20), but they are certainly prominent enough when taken together that we may regard the prayer of the Lord, the prayer of his disciples, and the presence of the Holy Spirit as among the major themes Luke chose to emphasize.⁷¹

Jeffrey's words summarize the way in which Luke introduces the theme of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the infancy narratives and hymns, and develops that theme throughout the rest of his two-volume work, in the characters of Jesus and his disciples.

A second theme is the act of *benediction* (εὐλογητὸς), for which Zachariah's canticle is named. As we have seen already from chapter one, a *benedictus* has its Hebrew counterpart in the prayer of *berakah*. Jewish usage of this blessing included two primary objects of the blessing: God Himself, and a meal. In Luke also, these are the primary objects of εὐλογητὸς, although he adds a deeper dimension to the relationship between the two: in Luke's Gospel, God and meal unite sacramentally in Christ's institution of the Eucharist, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter.

Thus, in the same way that Zachariah blesses the Lord God of Israel in Luke 1:68, and Simeon takes up the child Jesus and blesses God in 2:28, so Jesus as a grown man is blessed riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a sacrificial victim on his way to the altar: “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38). Jesus uses the same word, εὐλογητὸς, in blessing the bread at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:26, Mark 14:22), and again in Luke 24, he uses it in the blessing of the bread at Emmaus. It is in this moment, as we recall from the beginning of this chapter, that Christ's identity is revealed to the two disciples: “And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took

⁷¹ Jeffrey, *Luke*, 5.

bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight” (24:30-31). After Christ's ascension, his followers continued his practice of blessing bread, and blessing God. Indeed, Luke closes his Gospel with words describing this action: “And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (24:53).

The third and final theme from the *Benedictus* that I will consider here is one of Luke's favorite phrases: *the forgiveness of sins* (ἀφέσει ἁμαρτιῶν):

The expression 'forgiveness of sins' is a favourite of Luke's; 8 of 11 NT occurrences are found in Luke-Acts. The most important such occurrence for understanding its use here is Luke 3:3: John preached 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. That role is anticipated in 1.77.⁷²

As Farris mentions in this quote, the reference to forgiveness of sins in the *Benedictus* comes by way of Zachariah's description of his son John's mission. John will be called “the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:76-77). As Bock notes in his commentary,

John's mission as a preparer of the way fits the portrait of the other Synoptic writers, but Luke is the clearest in associating the forerunner role with the content of John's message: salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and baptism of repentance (Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 10:37). In Luke's eyes, the emphasis on forgiveness is also a major part of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:18, a double use of ἄφεσις, *aphesis*, forgiveness). In addition, Jesus' ministry and the apostolic preaching emphasize repentance (Luke 24:47 [the message of Luke's Great Commission]; Acts 5:31; 13:38; 17:30; 20:21). Luke presents the messages of John, Jesus, and the apostles as being in essential continuity with regard to a call to repentance. However, Jesus and the apostles have additional details because of the revelation associated with Jesus' ministry. Such revelation the church will

⁷² Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives*, 139.

incorporate into its message. Luke will spend some time developing this theme.⁷³

Bock rightly notices that the themes of repentance and forgiveness go hand in hand in Luke's Gospel. Luke says of John, "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (3:3). The theological pair of repentance and forgiveness characterizing Jesus' ministry on earth also constitutes the thrust his disciples' mission after He is ascended into heaven. Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 24:47 that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." We see in Acts 2:38 that the disciples obey this command: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

Also present in Luke's gospel is the understanding that Christ's ability to forgive sins identifies him as God, as displayed in the following passages in Luke 5 and 7:

And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.⁷⁴

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.⁷⁵

73 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 190.

74 Luke 5:20-24.

75 Luke 7:47-50.

We have seen in this section that Zachariah's *Benedictus* presents an exposition of three major themes in Luke's Gospel: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the benediction of God and man, and the forgiveness of sins. Zachariah himself is an exposition of the character of the one who has doubted God's plan, yet is redeemed through God's mercy.

Themes from the Gloria

The four canticles of Luke's Gospel literarily encompass the birth of the Christ Child. In Luke's narrative, the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* are presented directly before the scene of Jesus' birth, and the *Gloria* and the *Nunc dimittis* come immediately after it. With the *Gloria*, therefore, the reader enters the second half of a progression of hymns all pointing to the birth of Jesus at their center. Luke 2:9-14 provide the context for the canticle of the angels:

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The *Gloria* – one line of heavenly song – is a unique and beautiful moment in the Scriptures. It is clearly set apart from the other three canticles in Luke's gospel because of the identity of the cantors: they are angels, and not merely several, but a “multitude of the heavenly host.” Angels are the first to proclaim the good news (εὐαγγελίζομαι) of the Savior's birth, an act that Luke especially emphasizes in the rest of his Gospel: “All uses of the verb in the Gospels are found in Luke except one (Matt. 11:5; Luke 1:19; 2:10;

3:18; 4:18, 43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1).⁷⁶ Angels are also the first to give praise to God after the Savior is born. Because of the short, choral structure of their one line of praise, it is helpful to think of their hymn as does Bock: “Angelic praise serves the same function literarily for Luke as do choruses in Greek dramas (Schneider 1977a: 67) – they supply commentary. Thus, angels reveal to the shepherds through praise what the result of Jesus' coming should mean. Heaven addresses earth about Jesus' significance.”⁷⁷

There are two clear themes in the angelic canticle: *glory* and *peace*. These two themes highlight Jesus' dual nature as both human and divine, according to Bede: “Because He is both God and man, rightly do they sing Peace to men and Glory to God.”⁷⁸ In Christ, God's glory and man's image meet. As a more recent theologian wrote, “The whole movement of revelation has as its goal to make image and glory coincide in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁹

Turning to the themes themselves now, we begin with *glory* (δόξα). Luke emphasizes this theme more than do the other synoptic writers: while Matthew mentions it seven times and Mark a mere three, the word δόξα appears thirteen times in Luke's Gospel and four times in Acts.⁸⁰ How can we think about God's glory? As Bock notes, the word δόξα may be used in two different ways: “it may refer to an attribute of God, describing his majesty (Marshall 1978:112), or it may be used to ascribe praise to God.”⁸¹ Although Bock thinks that the latter is most likely the meaning of δόξα in the angels' hymn, I think it is more probable that both meanings are being invoked at once. The

76 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 215.

77 Ibid., 219-220.

78 Bede, quoted by Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 72.

79 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume VI.*, 15.

80 Denaux & Corstjens, *The Vocabulary of Luke*, 167.

81 Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 220.

angels both say that glory belongs to God as one of his attributes, and they give glory to him in their praise.

How does Luke develop the theme of glory in the rest of his work? In two places, he stresses that glory belongs to God alone. The very next instance of the word δόξα after the angelic hymn comes in a very opposite context. In Luke 4:6, the devil tempts Jesus, saying, “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.” Jesus responds with a stern rebuke, “Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” Again in Acts 12:23, King Herod was killed by the angel of the Lord, “because he gave not God the glory.” These examples develop the angels' initial statement at Jesus' birth, “Glory to God *in the highest* (emphasis added).”

In several other places, Luke describes scenes where the glory of God was (or would be) beheld. The Transfiguration of Luke 9:28-32 is one such example:

And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

Jesus prophesies the glory that men will behold when He comes again in Luke 21:27:

“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Finally, in Acts 7:55, Stephen sees the glory of God directly before he dies a martyr's death: “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” All of these scenes

reveal that the beholding of God's δόξα is a rare experience, one that will only become common among men at the return of Jesus. Jesus, then, is the harbinger of God's glory, both at his first coming (as the angels proclaim) and in his second.

The second theme in the *Gloria* is peace (εἰρήνη). Indeed, “the peace that God provides in Jesus is a key concept for Luke (Luke 1:79; 10:5-6; 19:38, 42; Acts 9:31; 10:36)”⁸² Luke develops the theme of Christ's peace in several ways. First, peace is the gift that Jesus gives to those who have faith in him: “And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” (Luke 8:48; cf. 7:50). Jesus also instructs his disciples to give the gift of peace: “And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again: (Luke 10:5-6). Indeed, Luke records that Jesus' first words to his disciples following his resurrection were these, “Peace be unto you” (Luke 24:36).

Two verses in Luke 12 seem to throw off this picture. Jesus says to his disciples, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three” (12:51-52). Origin notices the perplexity of this passage when it is compared with the angels' announcement in Luke 2:14, and he comments thus:

But the attentive reader will ask, How then does the Savior say, I came not to send peace on the earth, whereas now the Angels' song of His birth is, On earth peace to men? It is answered, that peace is said to be to men of goodwill. For the peace which the Lord does not give on the earth is not the peace of good will.”⁸³

82 Ibid., 220.

83 Origin, quoted by Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 72.

Origin's solution to the problem seems correct when one considers that in the examples listed above of Christ giving his peace, the receivers of that peace were those who had faith in Him, i.e., men and women of good will. Jesus even specifies in his command to his disciples, "if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon [his house]: if not, *it shall turn to you again* (emphasis added)." Another solution to the Luke 12 passage is the possibility that the angels were proclaiming an eschatological peace for those who have faith in God, while Christ in Luke 12 was referring to a kind of earthly political peace.

We have seen that the angels' *Gloria* serves as an exposition of the important themes of glory and peace in Luke's Gospel. In conclusion to this section, it is interesting to consider that the angels' song, "Glory God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," is echoed by the disciples' rejoicing at Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem:

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thy eyes.⁸⁴

As the canticles in the beginning of Luke's Gospel echo the rejoicing of David and the house of Israel at the entrance of the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6; see chapter one), now Jesus' disciples also echo that passage as the incarnate presence of God

84 Luke 19:37-42.

enters Jerusalem to be the one perfect sacrifice. Amidst their joy, only Jesus weeps over the fact that many in Jerusalem will not see nor know the peace that He brings to them.

Themes from the Nunc Dimittis

“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon...” (Luke 2:25). The name Simeon in Hebrew means “hearing” or “one who hears” from the verb שָׁמַע (*shema*). In the Hebrew language, hearing is deeply connected with obedience (one might think of the *shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”). When a man was said to “hear” (שָׁמַע) the voice of God in the Old Testament, it was implied that this man also obeyed that voice. Simeon, in his name and in his character as presented in Luke's Gospel, embodies the obedient man praised in the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Old Testament. He also symbolizes all of the Jewish people, who have waited for the Messiah since the promise was first given in Genesis 3. The following is Simeon's prayer, once again:

29 Νῦν ἀπολύεις τὸν δοῦλον σου, δέσποτα, κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου ἐν
 εἰρήνῃ,
30 ὅτι εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου τὸ σωτήριόν σου,
31 ὃ ἠτοίμασας κατὰ πρόσωπον πάντων τῶν λαῶν,
32 φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν ἐθνῶν καὶ δόξαν λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ.

(My translation: *And he took him into his arms and praised God and said, Now you are releasing your servant in peace, Lord, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared before the face of all the people, a light for the revelation of Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.*)

First, I would like to treat as interconnected two integral themes in the *Nunc Dimittis*: sight (εἶδον οἱ ὀφθαλμοί μου, “My eyes have seen”), and the light of revelation (φῶς εἰς ἀποκάλυψιν). In Simeon's hymn, he “sees” God's salvation both with his physical eyes (he holds the Christ Child) and with spiritual eyes (he understands the theological implications of Christ's salvation). Christ's salvation also gives light to spiritual understanding, as Simeon notes in calling salvation “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.”

Describing spiritual understanding in terms of sight, light, and revelation is a theme that Luke carries through his gospel, as we saw in the previous section when Jesus weeps over the Jerusalem inhabitants' lack of spiritual “sight” (Luke 19:42), and in the story of the men on the road to Emmaus who do not truly “see” Christ until he is revealed to them in the breaking of sacramental bread (Luke 24:31). Luke develops this theme again in Acts 9, when Saul loses his physical sight so that his spiritual sight might be made clear:

And as [Saul] journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Acts 9:3-9.

In this passage, Luke brings together the three elements of light, sight, and revelation to comment on the Saul's receiving of spiritual understanding. Surrounding the revelation of Jesus' identity ("I am Jesus whom thou persecutest") is a "light from heaven," and Saul's loss of physical sight is indicative of his loss of spiritual sight. Later in the chapter, Ananias, the man sent to lay hands on Saul, reveals to him why he is subsequently healed from his temporary blindness: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17). In this verse Luke connects the receiving of sight with the receiving of the Holy Spirit, pointing to the greater "sight" or wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit's revelation. Following Ananias' words, "immediately there fell from [Saul's] eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized" (Acts 9:18). In this sentence, Luke connects spiritual sight with baptism into the Christian faith.

The second major theme in Simeon's canticle is that of his inclusion of both Gentiles and Israelites as recipients of Jesus' salvation: "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared before the face of all the people, a light for the revelation of Gentiles (ἔθνῶν) and the glory of your people Israel." This, too, is a theme that we have already touched on several times with the story of the Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10. As noted in chapter one, Simeon is the first character in Luke's gospel to understand and proclaim this integral theme, giving evidence to the spiritual understanding attributed to him above. One major way in which Luke develops this theme is through the ministry of Saul in the book of Acts. As the Lord tells Ananias in chapter 9, "[Saul] is a chosen

vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (v. 15). Another way in which Luke develops the theme of Gentile inclusion is his description in Acts 15 of the Jerusalem council held to determine whether Gentile converts to Christianity should be circumcised as their Jewish counterparts were. One of the elders, James, refers to Simeon's words in the *Nunc Dimittis* in his speech to the council:

And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.⁸⁶

James' speech is the turning point in the council, and it leads to greater acceptance of the Gentile community into the new Christian faith. From this example and others, we have seen that Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* serves as an exposition of two themes that Luke develops in his Gospel: spiritual sight and revelation, as well as the inclusion of all peoples in God's plan for human salvation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that the four canticles of Luke's Gospel provide an exposition for themes that Luke develops in the rest of his two-volume work. This analysis establishes the second half of the hermeneutical “harmonic” of ancient Jewish

⁸⁶ Acts 15:13-19.

and early Christian themes that come together in these four special songs, and concludes the argument of this thesis.

By way of epilogue, I would like to reflect briefly upon the deeper understanding that one might take from the work I have presented. Throughout this thesis, I have made connections between the four canticles and other Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old Testament and in Luke-Acts, in an effort to illuminate the great symphony of theological themes that unites in their poetry. However, the lessons that we draw from the songs of Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon must go deeper than merely textual connections of words or the aesthetic beauty of literary structure and order, if we are to respond to them in the way that Luke and the cantors themselves intended. The great beauty of language and music that emerge from this reading of the canticles is only the lovely frame around the picture to which our eyes must look if we are to behold the True Beauty that Mary, Zachariah, the angels, and Simeon saw. This Beauty is the great love and person of Jesus Christ, who “being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:6-11). Mary, Zachariah, Simeon, and the angels, in their canticles, confess with the tongue the great Beauty that they see with their eyes. They

confess, in the deepest level of their meaning, that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This is a fact that the careful reader cannot ignore. Thus the reader's eyes, if they take the cantors at their own words, must shift from the canticles to the One Whom the canticles praise. The reader's heart, if touched by the beautiful words of the poetry, is in reality touched by the Beauty of Jesus Christ. And the reader's lips, when themselves proclaiming the words of the canticles, have the opportunity to confess along with the Gospel cantors that Jesus Christ is Lord, and to give thanks for His salvation in תודה praise.

Score

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

A Setting of Four Canticles in the Gospel of St. Luke

Evangeline M. Kozitza

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Alto, Bass, and Violin. The score is in 4/4 time and the key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The Alto and Bass parts are mostly silent, indicated by rests. The Violin part has a melodic line starting in measure 4. The score is divided into three systems. The first system covers measures 4-6. The second system covers measures 7-8 and includes the lyrics "Megalunei" and "Me - ga -". The third system covers measures 9-10. The Violin part continues with a melodic line, and the Alto and Bass parts remain silent.

Alto

Bass

Violin

A

B

Vln.

4

7

Megalunei

Me - ga -

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

10

A

- lu - nei he psu - che mou ton kur - i - on kai engal - li - a - sen to

B

Vln.

14

A

pneu - ma mou e - pi to The - o to so - te - ri mou hoti epeblepsen epi ton tapeinosin

B

Vln.

18

A

tes doules autou i - dou gar apo tou nun makariousin me pasai hai geneai

B

Vln.

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγέλιου

21

A

hoti epoiesen moi mega la ho dunatos kai ha-gi-on to onoma autou

B

Vln.

25

A

B

Vln.

29

A

B

Vln.

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγέλιου

32 Eulogetos

A

B

Vln.

Eulogetos kur-i-os ho The- os tou Is-ra-el hoti

35

A

B

Vln.

epeskep-sato kai epoiesen lutrosen to la-o autou kai egeiren keras soterias

38

A

B

Vln.

he min en oi - - - ko Da - - vid pai - dos autou

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

41

A

B

Vln.

45

A

B

Vln.

48

Doxa

A

B

Vln.

Do - xa! Do - xa! Do - xa! en

ff

Do - xa! Do - xa! Do-xa en

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

55

A

hup - si - stois The - o! Do - - - - - xa! Do - - - - -

B

hup - si - stois The - o! Kha - vod l'E - lo - him Kha -

Vln.

62

A

- - - - - xa! Do - - - - - xa en hupsis stois The - - - - - o!

B

- vod l'E - lo - him Do - - - - - xa en hupsis stois The - - - - - o!

Vln.

69

A

en an - thro - pois

B

kai e - pi ges ei - re - ne - -

Vln.

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

73

A

sha - lom l'a da - mah eu - - - - do - ki - a. Do - - - xa!

B

sha - lom l'a da - mah Ei - re - ne!

Vln.

78

A

B

Vln.

82

A

B

Vln.

Nun

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

85

A

B

Vln.

ap-o-lu - eis ton doulon sou despota ka-ta to re - ma sou en ei - re - - - - ne

93

A

B

Vln.

ho - ti ei-don hoi ophthalmoi mou ton soterion sou.

101

A

B

Vln.

Ψαλμοὶ Εὐαγγελίου

105

A

B

Vln.

108

A

B

Vln.

Detailed description of the musical score: The score is for a string ensemble. It consists of two systems. The first system covers measures 105, 106, and 107. The second system covers measures 108, 109, and 110. The key signature is G major (one sharp, F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system has three staves: two for strings (A and B) and one for Violin (Vln.). The string parts (A and B) are mostly rests with some notes in the final measure. The Violin part in the first system has a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes and some slurs. In the second system, the Violin part has a simpler melodic line with some slurs and a final whole note.

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