

He Has Mercy on Those Who Fear Him

The Exultant Joy of Hannah and Mary in the Face of God's Mercy toward them

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Introduction

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Lk 1:46-47 *RSV*).¹ These words of Mary poured forth from her soul, filled with gratitude and awe at the wonders of the God of Israel, are in many ways an extension of the praise of the Chosen People Israel so often sung out in the Old Testament. Mary is seen as the fulfillment of many types present in the story of Israel contained in the Old Testament.

Throughout the course of Salvation History despite dwelling in exile, conquered and defeated, far from the Land of Promise, the Prophets entreat the People of God, the Children of Israel to rejoice. Isaiah speaks, “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her...” (Is 66:10a). Zechariah invites, “Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem” (Zec 9:9a). Zephaniah declares, “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (Zeph 3:14). The prophet Baruch encourages, “Arise, O Jerusalem, stand up on the height and look...see your children gathered...rejoicing that God has remembered them” (Bar 5:5). Each of these calls for rejoicing is a signpost pointing toward the true joy of Israel, the Messiah, who will come to set his people free.

In each of the passages above the rejoicing is called forth from Jerusalem, “daughter of Zion”, the People of Israel, that fickle bride who vacillates between her fidelity and harlotry

¹ The Holy Bible : Revised Standard Version, Catholic ed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994. Note: All scripture citations are RSV unless otherwise noted.

throughout the various periods of her development.² Daughter Zion is a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the faithful, spotless, Virgin Mother through whom the promised savior will come into the world to accomplish the mission of the Father that will bring about the salvation and redemption of all creation.³ Her joy, expressed in the singing of the Magnificat at the visitation is truly a fulfillment and answer to the call for rejoicing presented by the prophets to the Israelites.

Exploring the links between the figure of Hannah and her canticle in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and person of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55, this paper will explore the themes of Mary's Magnificat as they relate to the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. Comparing these two women from the Old and New Testament, the paper will show how Hannah can be seen as a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as one who places her trust and faith in the Lord, intercedes on behalf of her nation, and offers to God, for the fulfillment of his promises and plan the on fruit of her womb.

Hannah, the Mother of Samuel

The First Book of Samuel begins with the narrative of how the birth of Samuel came about. The story contrasts the two wives of Elkanah. Of the two, Peninnah is fruitful, the mother of children, while Hannah is barren (1 Sam 1:2). As was the case with Sarah and Hagar in the story of Abraham (cf. Gen 16) and with Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob (cf. Gen 30:1), there was tension between the two women regarding the fertility of one and barrenness of the other (1 Sam 1:6-7). Despite the special care and love Elkanah had for Hannah, the bitterness of her barren state prevailed year after year (1 Sam 1:8-9).

² Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 22-23.

³Ratzinger, 22-23.

On an occasion when Hannah had gone to the temple with Elkanah, her distress moved her to cry to out to God in faith. It is here that we see a difference between Hannah and some of the other barren women of the Old Testament. Sarah took matters into her own hands in a different way. Despairing of having a child of her own she gave her maidservant, Hagar, to Abraham.⁴ Rachel entreated her husband, Jacob, to give her children. When Jacob responds in anger, saying, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (Gen 30:2), she, similar to Sarah, gives Jacob her maidservant to lie with.⁵ Rebecca receives the intercession of her husband Isaac, and she conceives.⁶ In the case of the wife of Manoah, the mother of Samson, there is no indication that she was in bitter straits regarding her barrenness, nor that she offered any reaction whatever to God, but received in faith and joy the announcement, when the angel of the Lord appeared to her, that she was to bear a son. Manoah, though, does seek a confirmation, of sorts, from the Lord by asking for further instructions.⁷

In each of the above situations, the involved parties sought their own wills, apart from God. Hannah, also seeking her own will and miserable in her barrenness, seemingly takes matters into her own hand and approaches the Lord to request a child. Rather than entreating another human person, even her husband, without, it seems even his knowledge, she goes directly to the Lord and declares the desire of her heart to him:

O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head (1 Sam 1: 11).

⁴ See Genesis 16

⁵ See Genesis 30: 1-8 for the details of this encounter.

⁶ Adele Berlin, “Hannah and Her Prayers,” *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in South Africa* 87 (2004): 227-232, Accessed June 9, 2019, <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC100688>.

Also, see Genesis 25

⁷ See Judges 13:1-21.

Hannah, here, serves as a model of bold faith, freely expressing her heart, before the Lord, but also taking a very active role in prayer as she calls on the Lord confident that he will hearken to her prayer.⁸ Her faith is also evident in the almost immediate confidence she takes in her prayer. Prior to offering this plea before the Lord, scripture says Hannah would not eat with the rest of her family, despite Elkanah's encouragement.⁹ After she makes her prayer, however, "Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad" (1 Sam 1:18). Her countenance is restored, and her confidence strengthened by her act of prayer, though her prayer has not been answered, she believes she has been heard and acts accordingly.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that Hannah's prayer for a son does not seem to be as a means to fulfill any desire for motherhood in the way one might imagine. She says, "I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life," thus setting up a total dedication and not reserving for herself the role of raising the child. Some commentators see this as a means by which Hannah, an ambitious mother, desires to bear a child who will have some power or influence in the future of Israel.¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to look into Hannah's intentions in desiring a child, though one can likely say that even if this were her primary intention, the influence which Samuel had over Israel was almost

⁸ Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Evans, Mary J., ed. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002, p. 155.

⁹ See 1 Samuel 1:7.

¹⁰ Berlin, 228

¹¹ David Jobling, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry, 1 Samuel*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 132.

certainly not what Hannah may have had in mind.¹² Regardless of her intention, the Lord will hear Hannah's prayer and bring about great things through the fruit of her womb.¹³

The narrative goes on to explain that shortly after offering this prayer and returning to her home with her husband, Hannah conceived and bore a son. Hannah accepts this as the Lord's answer to her plea and names her child Samuel, "for she said, 'I have asked him of the Lord'" (1 Sam 1:20). After the birth of Samuel, Elkanah calls his wife to accompany him to Shiloh. She refuses, however, saying, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and abide there forever" (1 Sam 1:22). Here, Hannah delays fulfilling the custom of the law, but it would seem to be for a greater good later on. It is not yet the time for the child to be dedicated, that is given over totally to the Lord.¹⁴

Once the child, Samuel, had been weaned, Hannah fulfilled her promise to the Lord. Taking him to the temple she offered him to the Lord. It is interesting to note, here, that the text indicates Hannah, and not Elkanah, arranged for the sacrifice and brought the child. Indeed, the passage does not mention the presence of the child's father at all.¹⁵

¹² Jobbling, 133. It should be noted, however, that God seemingly blesses Hannah's generosity in her offering of Samuel by making her fruitful through the blessing of Eli, after which this previously barren women bore five more children. See 1 Samuel 2:20-21).

¹³ Jobbling, 136.

¹⁴ In the RSV, Elkanah responds to Hannah, "Do what seems best to you...; only, may the Lord establish his word." According to David Jobbling, in the Bert Olam Commentary on 1 Samuel, the Septuagint translation has Elkanah's response as, "May the Lord establish what comes from your mouth." Though Jobbling does not refer, here, to the custom of the law, one wonders if this latter translation may indicate that the Lord's plan for the child, according to Hannah's vow, is that the custom of the law be delayed until the time when he can be left in the temple all the days of his life. See Jobbling, 133

¹⁵And when she had weaned him, *she* took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine; and *she* brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slew the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And I said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:24-26, emphasis mine). Also see Jobbling, 133.

After offering the customary sacrificial worship, Hannah presents the child to Eli with these words:

And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. 27 For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me my petition which I made to him. 28 Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:26-28).

Hannah’s sacrificial offering is truly complete. It is not enough that her child be redeemed by the blood of a bull and ephah of flour, she means to give all to the Lord in total sacrifice.¹⁶ Here, we can see patterns of Hannah as a type of Mary begin to develop.

Hannah and Mary: Contrasts and Comparisons

In considering the motherhood of Hannah and that of Mary, it is an obvious contrast that the latter is ever-virgin while the former is a married woman suffering the pain and humiliation of barrenness. In both cases, however a seemingly insurmountable human obstacle lies between the womb of each woman and a child—namely infertility which one cannot heal on one’s own and the state of being an unmarried virgin which in and of itself precludes the conception of a child.¹⁷

A further contrast is that Hannah actively seeks a child from the Lord while no request is made by or on behalf of Mary, who is surprised when the announcement of her impending motherhood comes to her from the message of the angel. The future of Hannah’s son shows that God uses human initiative to bring about the fulfillment of his promises and plans throughout

¹⁶ Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 156.

¹⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 38.

salvation history. While at the same time, as in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he directly intervenes according to his own design.¹⁸ Indeed, according to St. John Paul II, it is the very

...intervention of God, who at important moments in the history of his people, caused certain barren women to conceive, prepared for belief in the intervention of God who, in the fullness of time, would make a virgin fruitful for the Incarnation of his Son.¹⁹

In the Hannah narrative, after she offers her plea to the Lord in Shiloh, Eli the priest approaches her and rebukes her for her drunken display.²⁰ Hannah, however, clarifies that this is not the case.

No, my lord, I am a woman sorely **troubled**; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your maidservant as a base woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation (1 Sam 1:15-16, emphasis mine).

Similarly, in the Gospel of Luke the angel appears to Mary and:

...he came to her and said, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly **troubled** at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be (Luke 1:28-29, emphasis mine).

Both Hannah and Mary experience what one can assume is an interior turmoil surrounding the state of their wombs. Hannah is troubled because she has not conceived a child, and Mary because she is being told that such will happen to her despite her position as a virgin. The responses of Eli and the angel, though, are similar in putting their interlocutors at ease. Eli

¹⁸Joan E. Cook, *Hannah's Desire, God's Design: Early Interpretations of the Story of Hannah*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1999), Accessed June 14, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, 120. (Cf. 1 Sam 1:10-11 and Luke 1: 29).

¹⁹Saint John Paul II, *Theotokos: Woman, Mother Disciple*, (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), 71.

²⁰ See 1 Sam:12-14)

responds to Hannah, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him” (1 Sam 1:17), while the angel meets Mary’s questioning with the words, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (Luke 1:30). In both cases, the troubled hearts of the women are assured through reference to the providential care of God accompanying them in regard to their conceptions.

In the book of Samuel, Hannah is an image of one who prays. As mentioned previously she went alone to the temple to offer her prayer to God, and as will be seen later, offered a hymn of praise after the birth of her son. Hannah’s prayer reveals her trust in God as one who looks upon those in affliction and responds with due praise and thanksgiving in the face of an answered prayer. In the end, Hannah’s prayer leads to a deeper bond with the Lord as it is the very answer to her prayer that provides a closer bond with the Lord.²¹ Pope St. John Paul II puts it well when he says, “Given by God to Hannah and then given by Hannah to God, the little Samuel became a living bond of communion between Hannah and God.”²²

The Blessed Virgin Mary, too, is a model of prayer *par excellence*. She makes herself available to the Lord’s will, and upon hearing it, offers herself to fulfill his plan, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Her prayer, then, is one of a silent listening heart, that she might, “...hear the Word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:28). As she hears the Word and prays not by expressing her own thoughts and feelings, as Hannah did. Mary hears his plan and as she sees it unfold before, she ponders the mysteries silently in her heart (See Lk 2:19, 51) and enters into them in prayer and contemplation.²³

²¹ John Paul II, 70.

²² John Paul II, 70.

²³ John Paul II, 230-231

Hannah and Mary show themselves models of faithful prayer with Hannah stepping forward in faith, boldly sharing the desires of her heart with the Lord, and Mary receiving, in quiet reflection the desire of God for her. Both women seek the Lord and recognize his providential guidance, but they do so in unique and distinct ways. Their songs of praise, however, closely associated with the destiny of their sons show them similar in many ways as they offer thanksgiving to God for his goodness.

Both Hannah and Mary brought their sons to be presented in the temple. Hannah brought Samuel it seems, as noted above, without her husband. While it is clear in the Gospel of Luke that both Mary and Joseph presented the child Jesus in the temple, the figure Joseph seems to shrink into the shadows once the offering of the two turtle doves was made. Mary then interacts directly with the priest or, rather, he with her.

Simeon, who speaks to Mary alone and not Joseph, when he prophesies that a sword will pierce her heart. Maximus the Confessor points out that Simeon was surely aware of the unique situation Joseph and Mary were in. While Simeon, “blessed them both because he knew of Joseph that he was a righteous man and he was serving well the mystery of the Lord,” he then, “delivered his remarks to the glorious Mary... because he knew that she was a treasure house of good things, receiving such a wonder and accomplishing this strange birth.”²⁴ Thus both Mary and Hannah, though in different ways, take leading roles in their sons’ entrances to the temple, showing the unique role their motherhood would have in the history of Israel.

The Canticle of Hannah and Mary’s Magnificat

²⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *The Life of the Virgin: Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Stephen J. Shoemaker, (London: Yale University Press, 2012), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unistthomas-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3420884>.

Perhaps the way in which Hannah and Mary are most often associated is through their songs of praise and thanksgiving to God after, for Hannah, the birth of Samuel, and for Mary following the Annunciation. These hymns of praise have so much in common, in fact, that some posit Mary was simply reciting Hannah's prayer from memory, or at the very least the prayer was just "a mosaic of Old Testament citations."²⁵ Looking at the two prayers, it is clear that while the similarities are, indeed, present between the two songs of praise, the Magnificat is far more than a mimicking of prayers from memory, and very much a fulfillment of the joy called forth from Daughter Zion by the prophets of the Old Testament.

Comparing the Prayers

While the two prayers have many similarities, it does not seem fair to accuse Mary of simply repeating the prayer of Hannah, as some scholars have done in the past. While there is no doubt the prayer of Hannah was in the mind of Mary as she uttered her Magnificat, it is relatively clear that Mary's prayer is neither a plagiarized version of Hannah's canticle, nor a "patchwork quilt from Old Testament texts."²⁶ This section of the paper will compare the words of Hannah with Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat.

Prayer of Hannah

My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in thy salvation (1 Sam
2:1).

Prayer of Mary

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, (Luke 1:46-47).

²⁵ Sally Cuneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1996), 40. See also, Stefano Manelli, *All Generations will call me Blessed*, trans. Fr. Peter Damian Fehlner, (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2005), 187-188.

²⁶ James Forestell, "Old Testament Background of the Magnificat," *Marian Studies*, 12, 12 (1961): 205-244, accessed June 14, 2019, https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol12/iss1/12/, 205.

In the first verses of their thanksgiving to God, both Hannah and Mary take a very personal tone in their prayer. Interestingly, though, the vast majority of Hannah's canticle is not directly connected to her circumstances, but rather what is to come about at a later time.²⁷ Mary's prayer, by contrast, will go on to speak of what God has accomplished in Israel and how he will bring about the fullness of his plan through the fruit of her womb.

The words exult and magnify can be seen as parallel. The New American Bible translates the Latin "*magnificat*" as "exults".²⁸ In both cases, the women are acknowledging the greatness of the one who leads, directs, and orders all things, acknowledging that "with God all things are possible" (Luke 1:35) and that the Lord is the one who ultimately brings his designs to fruition, regardless of past or current circumstances.²⁹ In both cases, the women are recognizing not their own worthiness, but rather, the goodness of God who, despite their unworthiness, chooses them to accomplish his will for Israel.

The theme of rejoicing follows upon that of exulting and recognizing the primacy of the Divine plan.³⁰ Hannah rejoices, "in thy salvation," (1 Sam 2:1), while Mary, "rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). The women, though, are not rejoicing in a general way. Both prayers emphasize not simply joy, but joy in salvation. Hannah, one may presume recognizes, in a certain sense, salvation from her barrenness. Her words, though, in the end, are rather more prophetic that perhaps even she realized, as it is this child whom she is dedicating to the Lord who will initiate the Israel as Kingdom, and thus the line of David from whom Israel's ultimate

²⁷ Cook, 40

²⁸ See New American Bible Luke 1:46.

²⁹ Cook, 41

³⁰ Cook, 122

salvation will come in the person of Jesus Christ.³¹ Mary, on the other hand, received direct information that she would,

“conceive ...and bear a son...and call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:31-33).

In both cases, there is joy over salvation, and that salvation is intimately linked in that the first child will bring about the reign of the first kings of Israel, and the second will be the fulfillment of the line of David and the King of Kings from whom will come the salvation of the world.

Hannah rejoices in the Salvation that God will bring about. Mary, on the other hand, rejoices in her son, her savior. The latter’s rejoicing points to the prevenient grace given to her in the Immaculate Conception, whereby

the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful.³²

Prayer of Hannah

...look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget they maidservant... (1 Sam 1:11).

Prayer of Mary

for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; (Luke 1:48).

While the above quote is not from Hannah’s canticle, properly speaking, it is helpful to see Hannah’s reference to herself as “maidservant” in conjunction with Mary’s recognition of her

³¹ Cook, 115

³² Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*. <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

own identity as handmaiden. Here, both women are placing themselves at the service of the most high God. Although the translation is different in each case, the Greek word, *tapeinosis* is used in both the prayer of Hannah and the Magnificat.³³ The word is used to indicate, in the case of Hannah her sense of humility, or rather humiliation and weakness, arising from her barren state, while for Mary, it is used to indicate her understanding of her littleness before God and her submission as servant to His divine will.³⁴ Referencing the above argument that Hannah was an ambitious mother seeking a son who would be a prominent ruler, the use of this word, identifying herself with the lowly of Israel, contradicts that view of Hannah's motives.

A possible connection between Samuel and Jesus can be seen in relation to the use of the term *tapeinosis*, as it was frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to those in exile. Hannah's use of the word may be seen as a foreshadowing of the exile to come after the division of the Kingdom which would come about through Samuel's anointing of Israel's first kings; in the case of Mary, it is a recognition of God's goodness in bringing Israel out of their exile, raising her, again, after the lowliness and suffering of her exile. In commenting on the use of this word by both women, James Forestell writes,

The exile was considered punishment for sin. In the exile Israel repented and mourned for her past infidelities. God looked favorably upon this repentance and when the time of her humiliation was ended, he delivered her from exile and restored her to Sion.³⁵

Prayer of Hannah

The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces
Against them he will thunder in heaven

Prayer of Mary

for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

And his mercy is on those who fear him

³³ St. John Paul II, 142

³⁴ John Paul II, 142.

³⁵ Forestell, 212

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, from generation to generation (Luke 1:49-50).

And exalt the power of his anointed (2 Sam 10).

The “great things” Mary references are, in the present, related to the salvation that is to come about through the saving work of her Son. The phrase, though, can also be used in light of the history of the Lord’s conquering of the enemies of Israel. Throughout the ages, the Lord delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, and exile in Babylon.³⁶ Indeed, in those cases, “the adversaries of the Lord [were] broken to pieces... [He]...judge[d] the ends of the earth; he [gave] strength to his king[s] and exalt[ed] the power of his anointed” (2 Sam 10). In both instances, the Lord brought about the salvation his people through the work of his own mighty hand.

Another instance where Hannah’s prayer does not mirror that of Mary, but her other recorded words are apt in the comparison occurs after Hannah makes her prayer, scripture records, “And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her; and in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked him of the Lord’” (1 Sam 1:19-20). In the Magnificat, Mary speaks of the great mercy of the Lord. The biblical understanding of the mercy of God is that of his loving kindness, often referred to in the psalms as his *hesse*d. Mercy was seen not so much as a forgiveness of transgressions, but as an outpouring of loving kindness by God upon his people. God’s mercy was seen in his fidelity.³⁷ In the story of Hannah it was the mercy of God, his *hesse*d which brought about the conception of Samuel, for God truly, “remembered his maidservant”

³⁶ John Paul II, 143

³⁷ Forestell, 213

(Hannah), but he also remembered his people. The theme of mercy, God’s fidelity, is closely linked with the covenant imagery of the Old Testament. Through his mercy to Hannah, God was preparing his servant Samuel for the events that would lead to a new covenant in David, and ultimately the everlasting covenant in Jesus, the son of Mary.³⁸

The remainder of the comparisons between the canticle of Hannah and Mary’s Magnificat are all based on the similar parallelisms present in each text. The structure of parallelisms is a common one in Hebrew poetry, seen frequently in the psalms and other canticles of the Old Testament. Authors use this construction in several different configurations, but the primary form used in both the Magnificat and the prayer of Hannah is that of antithetic parallelism.³⁹ These parallels are written so that the first line makes a statement and the second line states the opposite. The interesting thing regarding this use of parallelism is that there are examples of “parallel parallelisms” between the two prayers, which show the role of God in bringing about reversal of fortunes.

Prayer of Hannah

4 The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
5 Those who were full have hired themselves out for
bread,
But those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
But she who has many children is forlorn.
6 The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
8a He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap... (1 Sam 2:4-8a).

Prayer of Mary

51 He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
52 he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity forever.

³⁸ Forestell, 213

³⁹ Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford *Introduction to the Psalms: A Song from Ancient Israel*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004), 10.

Power is beyond human comprehension and he brings about the reversal of fortunes for those who have faith in his promises.

For Hannah, the words are both a declaration of faith, as she speaks in the present, but also a foreshadowing of what is to come in the future of Israel as a people. The Lord will show his might and his goodness by reversing the situations of peoples. Those who are strong are deprived of their strength, while the weak ones are given the power to overcome (1 Sam 2:5). In the prayer of Hannah we see that the text,

Contrasts the situations of the poor and the rich on the basis of their need to work. The normal arrangement has been upset; it is now not the poor who must earn their food, but those who are accustomed to having an abundance...contrasting circumstances of the mighty, the wealthy, and the fertile and their opposites, the weak, the poor, and the barren.⁴⁰

Mary, utilizes the antithetic parallelism to show how God looked not only on her own lowliness but the lowliness of Israel throughout history. She points to God as a good Father who remembers his promises and brings about the salvation of his people, overturning the status quo, and carrying for the *tapeinosis* who trust in him.⁴¹

These verses too, show that the Lord,

bends down to the humble, the powerless, the rejected, and in this condescension the love of God, which truly saves, shines forth both for Hannah and for Mary, in the remarkable phenomenon of unblessed-blessed women.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cook, 44.

⁴¹ Brittany E. Wilson. "Between Text and Sermon: Luke 1:46-55," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 71, no. 1 (2017): 80-82, Accessed June 11, 2019. doi:10.1177/0020964316670946.

⁴² Ratzinger, 19.

These lines from Cardinal Ratzinger point to the true work of God among his people who, although they have gone astray and fall into infidelity again and again, constantly raises them once more, lifting up the lowly who cry out to him for mercy and compassion. That is the cry of Hannah, the cry of Mary, who praise God not simply for all he has done, but for who is he is for his people. Their life, their salvation, their hope.

Mary as Daughter Zion

The figure of Hannah serves as a type of Mary, particularly as shown in how their feminine boldness and receptivity shaped the history and salvation of Israel. Mary can be seen as the, “culmination of the history of the great women of Israel.”⁴³ However, the Magnificat, more than tying Mary back to the prayer of Hannah, fulfills the image of “Daughter Zion” called to rejoice in the goodness of God. Looking at the whole text of her prayer, one can see the joy in God’s goodness to his people as manifested through the course of Salvation History.

It is in her Magnificat, that Mary becomes the fulfillment of Daughter Zion who answers the call of the prophets to rejoice, and exults the name of the Lord who has wrought wonders for Israel, and in this way, “The Magnificat is above all the canticle of praise and hope of the Chosen People through Mary.”⁴⁴ Her song harkens back to the history of Israel, remembering with gratitude the wonders God has worked for his people, “He has shown strength with his arm...he has put down the mighty from their thrones...He has helped his servant Israel...”(Lk 1:51-52,54),

⁴³ Henry L. Novello, “Daughter Zion and the Advent of Salvation: Mary in the Eschatological Perspective,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 76 no. 3 (2011): 238-258, accessed June 14, 2019, DOI: 10.1177/0021140011405725, 242.

⁴⁴ Manelli, 188

and promises the mercy of God will always be with his people, "...in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever" (Lk 1:54-55).

Conclusion

Mary, being the perfect model of the spiritual life, in her Magnificat offers Christians a template of praise. While Hannah's canticle is a foreshadowing of what the Lord *can* do, in Mary's Magnificat the wonders of the Lord are realized, they are completed, and the promise that they will continue is given. So from Hannah we can learn the potential of the Lord's power, but with Mary we realize the Glory of his movements within his creation. The Canticle of Hannah speaks of the destruction the Lord will bring about of those who oppose his people. The Canticle of Mary extols the greatness of God for the mercy he has on his people by bringing them the gift of salvation.

From Mary the Christian learns that it is truly God who is at work in all things, all is grace, even the goodness that each individual possesses, "for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Lk 1:48). In echoing the song of Mary, one is truly able to recognize the mercies of God, placing one's trust in the Lord who always remembers his promise of mercy made to his people.

The voices of the prophets speak from ages past to the New Jerusalem, the Church. They call upon her as they called upon Israel to rejoice because the Lord is in her midst. He is in her midst in the Word proclaimed, he is there in the Eucharist, and he is there in her very being as the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church, proclaiming the Magnificat is stepping into her role of Daughter Zion the People of God of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, responding to the prophets call and echoes the canticle of the perfect Disciple of Jesus Christ, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Lk 1:46).

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