

**CHAPTER EIGHT**  
**“MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD”**

**E**LIZABETH’S REPLY TO MARY’S GREETING MOST LIKELY catches Mary by surprise. Mary has not come just to share news of her astounding experience with the archangel Gabriel but to assist her cousin during her pregnancy and to celebrate this great gift and action of God. Mary’s haste to see Elizabeth challenges the idea that God’s privileges set people apart from others. What God has done for Mary is not for her alone. His actions have immense implications for all people.

Since Mary knows the exceptional circumstances of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, it is easy to imagine that her greeting of Elizabeth might imitate the one Gabriel spoke to her in Nazareth, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). Elizabeth’s question, “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43), certainly mirrors Mary’s initial feeling of “How can this be?” At the outset of this family reunion it is clear that these two women are united in faith just as they are through blood.

Two cousins, who surely have spent time together before, now face one another with wonder. I imagine their feelings to be not unlike those of the two disciples who will meet the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:13–35). Mary’s heart and Elizabeth’s heart “burn

within” them. The Word of God has taken hold of their lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit they are no longer the persons they were before, not to themselves and not to each other.

The women stand transparent before one another, perfect mirrors for the divine action that now determines their places in the world. Elizabeth is not content simply to accept Mary’s greeting but feels compelled to state plainly the mystery of divine favor that each of them has come to recognize: “Why is this granted me?” The joy they experience as a result of having opened their lives to the possibility of God extends to the child in Elizabeth’s womb, who leaps at the sound of Mary’s greeting (see Luke 1:44).

Elizabeth’s words clarify the message of the archangel Gabriel and affirm what the Holy Spirit has accomplished both in her and in Mary. Her bold proclamation, inspired by the same Spirit who has overshadowed her cousin, pulls together the range of thoughts and emotions that were awakened in Mary at her encounter with the angel and encourage her to give full voice to all that she is holding inside.

Although Mary has come in order to help Elizabeth in her time of need, God provides in the person of Elizabeth someone in whom Mary can confide. Elizabeth’s home is a secure and familiar environment in which a conversation between two women highly graced can take place. And Elizabeth’s words are an open invitation for Mary to share what’s burning inside her heart. It is as if Elizabeth is saying, “It’s all right; I know.”

Surely these words are comfort and encouragement for Mary. She finds herself able to share with another human

being the victory of God that is the reality of her life. She can find the words to sing God's praises.

The first line of Mary's song leaves no room to doubt that God lies at the heart of her outburst. Her choice of words in no way implies that her life expands or enhances the divine being. Mary's song simply personalizes the words that begin Psalm 19, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; / and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." Mary recognizes that just as the heavens and the earth wordlessly proclaim the greatness of God, so also does her life. Her soul has become a lens through which others might better see God and his divine mystery. Mary's life is an instrument through which the world can see more clearly the Love that God is.

This first line of Mary's song describes God's vulnerability toward her in a profoundly personal way. God allows Mary to enable others to see and to consider him in a new light and from a new perspective. Her life hasn't added to, changed or perfected the life of God; she herself has done nothing and accomplished no victory. The free and total giving of herself to God has allowed God to radically affect her life and that of the world. Now her whole being is able to bring into better focus the dynamic loving that is the life of God. Mary's humanity is God's love-in-action enlarged for everyone to see.

Through the lens of Mary's sinless, feminine, virginal humanity, God has forever fixed himself before our eyes. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Mary has become an icon of divine love, a way for others to perceive the true nature of divinity her son reveals as a Trinitarian commun-

ion of love. Because Mary has already been assumed into this loving communion by freely consenting to God's plan, everything she is and all that she does become ways of perceiving the mystery as humanity never could have considered.

Although Mary is young and humble, her life now expresses the immensity and audacity of God's love for humanity. Standing before the mirror of her cousin's life, she is able to sum up what every person baptized into the life of her son is re-created to express: "My soul magnifies the Lord!" There are no more fitting words to express the truth of what her life has become by the power of his word at work in her through the action of the Holy Spirit.

The song Mary sings is called a victory song precisely because her life shows the personal and universal love of God on a grand scale. God achieves victory through Mary's submission to his freedom and by her willing embrace of his plan. Her openness to the divine initiative allows her distinctive human life to reveal new insights about the mystery of God. By accepting God's plan Mary becomes an expression of God's victory over human failing and the effects of original sin. Her submission to the Holy Spirit allows God to order the whole of her physiology, psychology and spirituality toward the divine plan of redemption.

God's victory will forever be manifested in the distinctive and particular details of Mary's life. Her history has become the history of God. God's victory is the union of humanity and divinity in a relationship of love that will never end. Mary can say with total and complete genuineness that her life magnifies the Lord. The song the Spirit has scored in her heart is the ultimate song of victory.

CHAPTER NINE  
“MY SPIRIT REJOICES IN GOD MY SAVIOR”

**T**HE JOY THAT CAUSES ELIZABETH’S UNBORN CHILD TO LEAP IS the same as that which fills the soul of Mary. The intimate bond she shares with her cousin—and now with her cousin’s child—is the work of the Spirit of God, who has overshadowed all three lives. “In the shelter of the Most High,...in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1), these people have been brought together. Their spiritual union gives rise to a joy that is more than simple contentment or emotional happiness; it is a joy that flows from the knowledge of God’s saving action.

Mary’s experience of the Holy Spirit is one of being totally free, for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Nothing can limit, constrict or hinder her, because she lives entirely for God. Her joy is the authentic expression of the full and abundant life that God wants for all human persons.

Mary has passed through the difference that has touched her life since the moment of her conception. All the ways in which God’s creative initiative has marked her life as a woman and as a member of the chosen people have now fallen into place. Her sinless condition, far from being a burden, is revealed as the intricate care God has taken in order to free humanity from its slavery to sin and death.

Mary rejoices in the knowledge that God's ways are not the ways of men and women; he has been up to something in and for her. Her spirit is in such harmony with the Spirit of God that she is literally all joy.

Within the comfort of this intimately spiritual encounter with her cousin, we can sense that Mary feels completely at ease. The security of her bond with Elizabeth allows her to distill the experiences that have brought about her joy. This joy is not so much unbridled and exuberant as it is intensely refined, as her further words confirm. Mary must speak of the one who is responsible for her current state. The words of her song naturally "magnify" God.

Indeed, there is no real joy apart from God. The surest sign of knowing God and experiencing his love is the joy that infuses every facet of one's humanity. Because God is supremely personal, true knowledge of him and his love is never abstract or purely conceptual. Mary boldly proclaims that God's love is realized concretely in definitive moments and precise circumstances. Her song is a personal testimony that God's action is always directed at salvation.

Love, joy, God, salvation—all is intertwined for Mary, and so she speaks of God as Savior. She has personally experienced God's love and its effects. He indeed has saved her and not only from the stain of original sin. He has saved her from the desert wasteland that is human separation from Trinitarian communion. He has saved her from the waters unleashed by Satan in an attempt to sweep her from the face of the earth (see Revelation 12:13–16). God has saved her from a life of questioning whether or not her openness to him and her total gift of self have been found pleasing in his sight.

Mary's words do not merely borrow Scripture's words to form a theologically accurate picture of God's actions. Her personal experience of God is as substantial as the new human life growing within her womb. The Spirit has placed her within the courts of God, where "a day...is better than a thousand elsewhere" (Psalm 84:10). Mary serves there at the pleasure of the King, and her place with him is a sign of the victory he has achieved in her life.

This noble state doesn't isolate Mary from others but draws her ever more toward them in the hope that where she is they may be also. The court of God is not closed to those over whom he rules; it has been opened to them in a new way. The banquet God sets is ready, and the Lady of his courts throws open the doors of the banquet hall. God's Son will now go and bring in all who have been invited. He wants all his subjects to join the Queen Mother at court.

The salvation God has won for Mary will be physical as well as spiritual. Her body will bear the means of accomplishing God's victory. In her we see the expression of the mystery of God's love that only a woman can give: the physical nourishment and bringing forth of life—in her case, the Life of the world. Mary brings forth the very Word who orders and directs her life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, salvation takes bodily form.

Mary sings of God's victory in a humanity being made whole. She sings from the depths of the royal communion into which her life has been assumed and of the unity of spirit she shares, even physically, with Elizabeth and her child. Her words form the first liturgical song of the new covenant, describing what lies at the heart of the Christian

dispensation: God's victory over sin and death. In the grace of this encounter, joy is born into the world through the noble handmaid of Nazareth, "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

CHAPTER TEN  
“HE HAS REGARDED THE LOW ESTATE  
OF HIS HANDMAIDEN”

**T**HE WORDS OF MARY’S SONG ARE MORE THAN A REFRAIN FOR greeting Elizabeth. Mary’s words give form to what God has accomplished for her and shape the way we should understand the expression of God’s love. The regard that Mary describes is not benign tolerance, condescending affection or feigned interest, nor is it self-absorbed benevolence seeking to reaffirm its generosity by seeing to the needs of others.

The favor to which Mary’s life has been exposed is the active concern of the almighty and ever-living God. Mary triumphantly declares that God’s favor does not tolerate distance and separation but seeks to eliminate them. God refuses to be silent before anything that would prohibit, limit, lessen or smother human life and human fulfillment. Mary knows divine favor as love in its greatest and most comprehensive expression; she knows that God has nothing to gain and everything to give. She knows that God’s favor is the real experience of his love, which reaches toward us before we are formed in our mother’s womb (see Jeremiah 1:5).

God looks toward us and favors us that we might know ourselves as he knows us. “Draw near to me, hear this,” he says through the prophet Isaiah. “I have not spoken in secret” (Isaiah 48:16). From the beginning he openly communicates his divine countenance in numerous and varied

ways. He desires that our “peace...[be] like a river, / and [our] righteousness like the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:18).

Mary grew up knowing that one could not look upon the face of God and live; the human heart cannot, of itself, bear the weight of such love. The fact that she can sing in the face of God’s arresting gaze is a result of God’s having acted upon her at the moment of her conception. Her sinlessness, the difference that set her apart from the rest of her race, was the divine love’s preparation for her to one day bear the full weight of his favor. She now bears this weight in her womb. Mary has given herself to God’s favor, and God has respected her self-giving and transformed it wonderfully.

The favor of God has borne fruit in the life of this trusting handmaiden. Mary’s child, conceived entirely in grace, will become the living sign of the divine favor. God’s own Son has been conceived in an active freedom, more dynamic than mere self-surrender. The child Mary bears takes human life through her embrace of God’s favor and embodies God’s victory.

Through the mutual subjugation of God and this woman, divine favor enters human history in a definitive and unrepeatable way. In order to appreciate fully God’s love-in-the-flesh, in order to appreciate Jesus fully, one also must know this woman. God looks at her with a view to all human persons. Mary sees in the favor of God’s glance an opportunity not simply to experience his love in the definitive way of giving birth but also to give her life as a gift on behalf of all men and women.

Mary’s lowliness is the truth about her humanity before the awesome wonder and power of God. It is rooted in the

nothingness out of which all things came to be. No one can stand on equal footing with the God of all creation. Mary knows herself to be radically other than God.

But Mary also knows that the divine favor, which has fixed its gaze upon her, can change the condition of her existence. Her lowliness becomes a statement of God's victory insofar as the divine favor holds her in its loving glance. God respects the initial gift of self her virginity signifies, and he unites her fertility with his own generative power, thereby transforming Mary's lowliness in a miraculous way. This is consistent with God's saving action throughout Israel's history: "Though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly" (Psalm 138:6).

Our Lady of Victories is the spokeswoman of humanity held captive by God's love, of humanity no longer separated from the God of creation. Humanity has been pulled from the nothingness into which it slid as a result of original sin, a lowliness Mary never knew personally but observed in the darkness of the world that surrounded her. Our Lady of Victories is a triumph of that love that has looked past human weakness and seen into the heart of the human family.