

B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

Canticles of the Christ-Child

Mary's Magnificat: Luke 1:46-55

By Pastor Mark Bernthal

Luke 1:46-55 ⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 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 offspring forever."

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One of the best ways to look forward in faithful joy is by looking back. Mary's joy was increased as she saw herself as a participant in the whole history of God's blessings on His people Israel. What a great blessing was hers alone by God's grace: to be chosen as the mother of the Savior of the world. Indeed as long as generations come and go she shall be called blessed; for God has done great things for her. But we also see in Mary's song of praise that God has done great things for His children throughout all ages and will continue to do so until the end of time. Mary's joy was further increased as she professed this blessed paradox; that those who have, have not; while those who have not, have.

Mary's soul magnifies, that is exalts, praises, glorifies and adores her Lord God. Her

whole being rejoices in God her Savior. These are indeed precious words. Mary is clearly showing that the child she is carrying is not only the Savior of the rest of the world, but her Savior as well. Mary was blessed by being chosen to be the human mother of Jesus, to bring Jesus into this life; but this same baby Jesus was chosen by the Father to bring eternal life to His human mother. Mary proclaims Jesus to be her Savior. She needed a Savior just like you and me, and every single person ever conceived of a human mother and father. For she too had a sinful heart just like you and me.

But she was also unlike you and me in the fact that she, out of the millions of possibilities, had been chosen, chosen by God for this special purpose, to bear His Son. Mary again puts it this way in her hymn of praise: **FOR HE HAS RE-**

GARDED THE LOWLY STATE OF HIS MAIDSERVANT; FOR BEHOLD HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED. FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME, AND HOLY IS HIS NAME.

We see that Mary was a child of the Old Testament. She knew her scriptures well. Almost every single line in her song of praise has a corresponding passage written somewhere in the Old Testament. When Mary spoke in praise to her Lord God she spoke the words of her God, the words of Scripture. She didn't have to look up these passages, she knew them by heart and they flowed freely from her heart to her tongue and out of her mouth off her lips. These verses of Mary's song are found in Psalms, Genesis, Job, Isaiah and Micah. Mary's knowledge of the Old Testament was thorough.

Mary humbly acknowledges that this blessing of being chosen to be the mother of God's Son, the Savior of the world, was not because of anything she had done. It was not because she had earned this calling by being so humble, obedient, chaste, pure and sinless. It was simply because of the grace, the undeserved love of her God. Mary is not making some proud, self-righteous claim that people should worship her when she says: **FOR BEHOLD HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED.** She simply is stating a fact, prophesying the truth. Down through all generations Mary has been called blessed because of this wonderful calling. Mary is not saying "from now on all generations will call me sinless, holy and pure" but "blessed, happy." The reason that all generations shall call Mary blessed and happy is because as Mary herself says: **FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME.** And that is our theme:

MARY SHOWS US HOW TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

I: WITH A HAPPY HEART OF JOY, GIVING ALL GLORY TO GOD FOR THE WONDERFUL THINGS HE HAS DONE FOR HER AND US.

Our Christmas celebration can be joy filled and happy not only now, but throughout the new year and beyond when our hearts and minds are focused upon Christ and the message of our salvation. God has chosen us to also bear and carry His Son, in our hearts; to have His Word---the proclamation of Jesus' sacrifice for us, His suffering, death and resurrection live in our hearts and carried out to the world with our lips and voices. When the message of God's great love for all of us sinners is imparted to each of our hearts; when Christ and all He has done for us--beginning with the cradle and continuing through the cross and the empty tomb--when all of that is the center of our Christmas worship and celebration then the joy and happiness of Christmas will not end, but ever live in our hearts and be proclaimed by our mouths.

In the second half of her song of praise:

MARY SHOWS US HOW TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

II: BY PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ACTS OF MERCY HE HAS DONE FOR ALL BELIEVERS.

In verse 50 we read: **HIS MERCY IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.** When father and mother live in humble repentant faith in Jesus and loving obedience to His Word, and this same type of lifestyle is taught to their children through the Word, then this promise is fulfilled: **from one generation to another the Lord's mercy shall extend.** What a blessing of God's grace when several generations of one family is found in His Word, in His house faithfully living in and enjoying their salvation through Jesus. What eternal blessings they and future generations will have as they continue to teach each new generation the Good News of a Sav-

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When father and mother live in humble repentant faith in Jesus and loving obedience to His Word, and this same type of lifestyle is taught to their children through the Word, then this promise is fulfilled:

ior born like us, to save us. May these words be an encouragement for us to continue to do this consistently with our children and grandchildren.

Throughout this last portion of Mary's song of praise there is a contrasting picture being drawn. A Moral contrast; a Social contrast and a Spiritual contrast. Mary says that those who revere His name shall receive blessings from one generation to another; but those who are proud in their own imagination, look upon themselves as being the important ones, look to themselves and neglect God and His Word; they will be scattered. We read verses 51-53: **HE HAS SHOWN STRENGTH WITH HIS ARM; HE HAS SCATTERED THE PROUD IN THE IMAGINATION OF THEIR HEARTS. HE HAS PUT DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR THRONES, AND EXALTED THE LOWLY. HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND THE RICH HE HAS SENT AWAY EMPTY.**

A **moral contrast** between the reverent, repentant faithful and the proud, self-centered unbeliever. A **social contrast** between the ones of low estate and the rulers of this world. A **spiritual contrast** between those who hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness and those who believe themselves to be rich with their own good works.

These words of Mary came true in Jesus' day. The proud, the mighty rulers, the rich of His day didn't want anything to do with Jesus. So to whom did Jesus turn? To whom did He bestow His blessings of forgiveness and salvation? Upon whom did Jesus perform His miracles? To the reverent faithful, the people of the streets, the ones of low estate, those who hungered and thirsted after Him and His promises of forgiveness, everlasting life and salvation.

We are the spiritual lowly, the destitute, without any merit or worthiness of our own. By the power of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through the Law we are led to realize our hunger for the spiritual blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation. There is an emptiness in the heart and soul of all who do not know Jesus as their Lord

and Savior. But they cannot realize that emptiness unless the Spirit works true repentance in their hearts, a godly sorrow over their sins and their lost condition.

Thank God that when we look back on our past we see times when the Lord has scattered the sinful pride that was in our hearts, and put us down and laid us low. Thank God that He at times sent us away empty when we were expressing thoughts of self-righteousness and self-reliance and let us come crashing down. Those times in our lives are also clear evidences of God's great love for us, for His mercy is given precisely to those who need it most...that is, to those who have been led to acknowledge their lost, depraved condition.

What a marvelous lesson for us to learn as we rapidly approach another Christmas celebration. May the Holy Spirit fill us with **HUMBLE** hearts that simply believe this message of a virgin born Son of God; humbly stand in awe of this great miracle of time: God has become man in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the God-Man Savior.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with **HAPPY** hearts to acknowledge all of the wonderful things that God has done for us; sending His Son to suffer and die for us, to earn our salvation and for having chosen us to carry this message of Christ to the world.

And may the Holy Spirit fill us with **REPENTANT** hearts that leads us to realize that we have no righteousness of our own, but we are those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that Christ gives to us freely through His perfect life and His atoning death. Then generations to come will also call you and me **BLESSED, Happy in Christ.**

Amen.

The Augsburg Confession: Article 28 Of Ecclesiastical Power

By Pastor Nathanael Mayhew

Of the Power of Bishops

The title of this article as it is found in the Augsburg Confession is “Of the Power of Bishops” or “Ecclesiastical Power” (Latin). Another title for this article is “Of the Power of the Keys” which is also an appropriate summary of its content. The purpose of this article is two-fold: The first is to show that there must be a distinction between the roles of the church and the state. This line has been blurred throughout history (with many ugly consequences) and was prevalent in Europe at this time. This article was a major concern for Eck and the Romanists, since this directly rebelled against their power and authority. The second purpose of this article is to re-emphasize the true role of bishops, namely, to administer the keys given by Christ to His church on earth.

Most of the articles in the Augsburg Confession are based on those previously found in the Torgau and Schwabach Articles, but this one is somewhat different. There is no article in those statements that corresponds directly to this article. Now, this is not completely new material, but this is the first time that an entire article is devoted to it, and it becomes the longest article in the Confession! The reason for this is the author’s fervor for this particular subject. During the meetings at Augsburg Melancthon wrote to Luther saying, “*In all our discussions no topic troubles me more than this one.*”

A Brief Summary of Article XXVIII

Part 1 - Separation of Church and State

Lines 1-4: Introduction. There is a distinction that must be made between spiritual and temporal power. Both are important and are established by God but they must be kept separate from one another since their roles are distinct and different. Many serious problems have resulted in confusing these roles.

Lines 5-11: The role of the church. The power of bishops is that command given by Christ to proclaim the Gospel, to use the ministry of the keys to forgive or retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. The purpose of the church is to care for the spiritual and eternal welfare of people through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The purpose of the church is NOT to interfere with the affairs of government whose responsibility it is to care for the physical welfare and protection of the people.

Lines 12-19: Separation of church and state roles. These two estates, one spiritual and the other temporal, must both be honored, but not mingled. The church should not involve itself in the affairs of government since they have a responsibility of their own to fulfill. When bishops do have political office they must remember that this role is separate from their spiritual role.

Lines 20-29: Obedience and disobedience. The bishop’s role is to “*preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine*

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that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest" (§ 21). To carry this out bishops are to use the Word of God alone and not temporal authority. If the bishops are true to the Word of God and follow it, the people are to be obedient to them. If, on the other hand, the bishops teach contrary to the Word, the people should not obey. An example from Augustine is given. When matters within the church get out of hand and threaten to cause rebellion, the government has the responsibility to step in to prevent disorder in the land.

Part 2 - The Bishop's Power to Introduce New Ceremonies

Lines 30-33: The Romanist arguments concerning the right of bishops to introduce new ceremonies and regulations. As evidence that bishops do have such power the Romanist offer the matter of the Sabbath, which they say, the church changed from Saturday to Sunday.

Note: We reject the idea that the church has the power to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Rather, the Sabbath was abolished in the New Testament, not changed (cf. Colosians 3:16, Romans 14:5-6). This has been misunderstood even in our own country by many who have tried to take the Old Testament laws connected to the Sabbath and apply them to Sunday. The choice of "when" to worship is a matter of Christian Liberty.

Lines 34-41: Bishops cannot establish anything which is contrary to the Gospel. Once again it comes back to work-righteousness: *"It is patently contrary to God's command and Word to make laws out of opinions or to require that they be observed in order to make satisfaction from sins and obtain grace, for the glory of Christ's merit is blasphemed when we presume to earn grace by such ordinances" (§ 35). The issues, as have been stated in previous articles are: new holy days (Article 15), prescribed fasts (Article 26), and the veneration of saints (Article 21), as well as other ceremonies. The problem with these teachings is*

that they are taught as a way of meriting God's grace. There is nothing wrong with holy days, fasts, or celibacy in themselves, but because they are taught as a means of earning God's grace, they become contrary to the Gospel.

Lines 42-49: Scriptural support for the Lutheran position. Scripture clearly forbids any regulation which is set up for the purpose of earning God's grace and favor. The thought that the bishops have the power to establish such practices cannot be true, otherwise the Holy Spirit is mistaken in these many passages.

Lines 50-52: The role of Christian Liberty. Christian liberty in essence is this: *"that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification" (§ 51). The heart of the Gospel is "we do not merit [the grace of God] by services of God instituted by men" (§ 52) and this teaching must be maintained!*

Lines 53-60: Guidelines for ordinances and practices. Bishops and pastors should make changes as necessary for the orderly conduct of the church, but not as a means of making satisfaction for sins. Such ordinances which are established for the sake of good order and are not made a means of earning God's grace ought to be kept by the church for the sake of love, peace and order in the church. The abrogation of the Sabbath and the custom of the New Testament church of worshiping on Sunday is used as an example of this Christian liberty.

Lines 61-68: The faulty arguments of the Romanists. The faulty reasoning of the Romanists (and other) is *"the false and erroneous opinion that in Christendom one must have services of God like the Levitical or Jewish services and that Christ commanded the apostles and bishops to devise new ceremonies which would be necessary for salvation" (§ 61). Such actions bind consciences and destroy the righteous-*

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ness of faith and Christian liberty. Some of these regulations were also temporary in nature, and not meant to be a permanent custom of the church.

Lines 69-75: The error of the bishops. The Lutherans ask that the bishops change their insistence on human regulations like celibacy (Article 23), the sacrifice of the mass (Article 24), and communion under one kind (Article 22) since they were introduced contrary to the custom of the church. If they will not do so, the Lutherans would be forced to follow the will of God and disobey them.

Lines 76-78: Conclusion. The intention of this article is to convince the bishops not to coerce people to sin by following these humanly devised ordinances for forgiveness of sins. If the bishops refuse, they will be held accountable

before God for their actions.

Conclusion

The church should keep to its work of preaching the Gospel for the salvation of souls, and not mettle in temporal affairs. The role of the pastor (and the church) is to lead people to the salvation won by Christ, and not invent customs by which people think they earn their own salvation, which destroys the Gospel and leads people to destruction. Lord, bless our Gospel preaching!

THIS CONCLUDES OUR STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION