

Our theme for today: Mercy

Do you ever consider the past? And, if so, what lens do you use? In other words, how do you mostly look at the past? For Mary, she clearly considers the past. At this time, her predominant view is all that God has done for her country, Israel. It's not so much about her, it's about her people. She knows that God has been faithful to her nation; she brings *these things* to her mind. Mary knows that God has proven time and time again that He is a God who shows up. As Mary rejoices (even in her circumstances), she also thinks back on the lessons Israel has learned – she shares in Israel's joy.

Scripture

⁵⁰ *His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

Luke 1:50

Thought provokers

- As you consider all you might know about the rich Biblical history of Israel and their God, there are, of course, many themes. You could probably list many right now. One of those themes is mercy.
 - Do you think that mercy is a strong theme in the Old Testament? Why does Mary sing that God's mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation?

Reflections

For a lot of people, the first reflection about the Old Testament is that it is a story of judgment and wrath, even of the anger of God. It's just not easy reading. Some of these folks might even say, "*look, let me just read the New Testament! That's where I'll finally see mercy.*" But, in reality, if you read the Old Testament carefully, you'll see that bright thread of mercy woven amidst all the themes and stories. In fact, if you study extremely carefully, you'll see that mercy is the preferred way God deals with his people. Here is one wonderful passage from King David.

*"The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.*

*For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.” Psalm 103:8-13*

There are a lot of reasons that could have led Mary to focus on the negative. She could have been anxious, she could have worried; she might have said, “*what hope is there to be found that might recover joy; is there any hope that might bring joy?*” She might even have felt that God had forgotten her.

But she says that for those who fear God, they do not need to fear the judgment. Why? Because God will give mercy. In God’s providence, our fear of God will overcome our fear of judgment.

Prayer and Song

Take time to pray and sing praises to Him. Here is one we’ve provided by Henry Francis Lyte.

God of Mercy, God of Grace

*God of mercy, God of grace,
show the brightness of your face.
Shine upon us, Savior, shine;
fill your world with light divine;
all your saving health extend
unto earth's remotest end.*

*Let the people praise you, Lord;
be by all that live adored.
Let the nations shout and sing*

*glory to their gracious King;
at your feet their tribute pay,
and your holy will obey.*

*Let the people praise you, Lord;
earth shall then its fruits afford.
Unto us your blessing give;
we to you devoted live,
all below and all above,
one in joy and light and love.*