EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

*Author of “Home Truths,” etc.*

ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

LONDON:  
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.

CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE I. 46–56.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

60 And his mercy *is* on them that fear him from generation to genera­tion.

61 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath holpen his servant Is­rael, in remembrance of *his mercy;*

66 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

66 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

THESE verses contain the Virgin Mary’s famous hymn of praise, in the prospect of becoming the “mother of our Lord.”—Next to the Lord’s Prayer, perhaps, few passa­ges of Scripture are better known than this. Wherever the Church of England Prayer-book is used, this hymn forms part of the evening service. And we need not wonder that the compilers of that Prayer-book gave it so prominent a place. No words can express more aptly the praise for redeeming mercy which ought to form part of the public worship of every branch of Christ’s Church.

Let us mark, firstly, *the full acquaintance with Scripture which this hymn exhibits.* We are reminded as we read it, of many expressions in the book of Psalms. Above all, we are reminded of the song of Hannah, in the book of Samuel. (1 Sam. ii. 2, etc.) It is evident that the memory of the Blessed Virgin was stored with Scripture. She was familiar, whether by hearing or by reading, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke, she gave vent to her feelings in Scriptural language. Moved by the Holy Ghost to break forth into praise, she chooses language which the Holy Ghost had already consecrated and used.

Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture. Let us study it, search into it, dig into it, meditate on it, until it dwell in us richly. (Coloss. ii. 16.) In particular, let us labour to make ourselves familiar with those parts of the Bible which, like the book of Psalms, describe the experience of the saints of old. We shall find it most helpful to us in all our ap­proaches to God. It will supply us with the best and most suitable language both for the expression of our wants and thanksgivings. Such knowledge of the Bible can doubt­less never be attained without regular, daily study. But the time spent on such study is never misspent. It will bear fruit after many days.

Let us mark, secondly, in this hymn of praise, *the Virgin Mary’s deep humility.* She who was chosen of God to the high honour of being Messiah’s mother, speaks of her own “low estate,” and acknowledges her need of a “Saviour.” She does not let fall a word to show that she regarded herself as a sinless, “immaculate” person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Saviour for her own soul. We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to reprove the honour paid by the Romish Church to the Virgin Mary, than the Virgin Mary herself.

Let us copy this holy humility of our Lord’s mother, while we steadfastly refuse to regard her as a mediator, or to pray to her. Like her, let us be lowly in our own eyes,and think little of ourselves. Humility is the high­est grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is a true saying of an old divine, that “a man has just so much Christianity as he has humility.” It is the grace, which of all is most becoming to human nature. Above all, it is the grace which is within the reach of every converted person. All are not rich. All are not learned. All are not highly gifted. All are not preachers. But all children of God may be clothed with humility.

Let us mark, thirdly, *the lively thankfulness of the Virgin Mary.* It stands out prominently in all the early part of her hymn. Her “soul magnifies the Lord.” Her “spirit rejoices in God.” “All generations shall call her blessed.” “Great things have been done for her.” We can scarcely enter into the full extent of feelings which a holy Jewess would experience on finding herself in Mary’s position. But we should try to recollect them as we read her repeated expressions of praise.

We too shall do well to walk in Mary’s steps in this matter, and cultivate a thankful spirit. It has ever been a mark of God’s most distinguished saints in every age. David, in the Old Testament, and St. Paul, in the New, are remarkable for their thankfulness. We seldom read much of their writings without finding them blessing and praising God. Let us rise from our beds every morning with a deep conviction that we are debtors, and that every day we have more mercies than we deserve. Let as look around usevery week, as we travel through the world, and see whether we have not much to thank God for. If our hearts are in the right place, we shall never find any difficulty in building an Ebenezer. Well would it be if our prayers and supplications were more mingled with thanksgiving. (1 Sam. vii. 12. Phil. iv. 6.)

Let us mark, fourthly, *the experimental acquaintance with God’s former dealings with His people, which the Virgin Mary possessed.* She speaks of God as One whose “mercy is on them that fear Him,”—as One who “scat­ters the proud, and puts down the mighty, and sends the rich empty away,”—as One who “exalteth them of low degree, and filleth the hungry with good things.” She spoke, no doubt, in recollection of Old Testament history. She remembered how Israel’s God had put down Pharaoh, and the Canaanites, and the Philistines, and Sennacherib, and Haman, and Belshazzar. She remembered how He had exalted Joseph, and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel, and never allowed His chosen people to be completely destroyed. And in all God’s dealings with herself,—in placing honour upon a poor woman of Nazareth,—in raising up Messiah in such a dry ground as the Jewish nation seemed to have become,—she traced the handiwork of Israel’s covenant God.

The true Christian should always give close attention to Bible history, and the lives of individual saints. Let us often examine the “footsteps of the flock.” (Cant. i. 8.) Such study throws light on God’s mode of dealing with His people. He is of one mind. What He does for them, and to them, in time past, He is likely to do in time to come. Such study will teach us what to expect, check unwarrantable expectations, and encourage us when cast down. Happy is that man whose mind is well stored with such knowledge. It will make him patient and hopeful.

Let us mark, lastly, *the firm grasp which the Virgin Mary had of Bible promises.* She ends her hymn of praise by declaring that God has “blessed Israel in remembrance of His mercy,” and that He has done “as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever.” These words show clearly that she remembered the old promise made to Abraham, “In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed.” And it is evident that in the approach­ing birth of her Son she regarded this promise as about to be fulfilled.

Let us learn from this holy woman’s example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest im­portance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilder­ness of this world. We see not yet all things put under us. We seenot Christ, and heaven, and the book of life, and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith, and this faith leans on promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like the Virgin Mary, that God keeps His word, and that what He has spoken, so He will always in due time perform.

NOTES. LUKE 1. 46-56.

47.—[*My* *Saviour.*]Let us not fail to notice the Virgin Mary’s expressions of need of salvation. It would be difficult to find amore complete answer to the Romish doctrine respecting her, and especially the doctrine of the immaculate conception, than her language in this hymn.

51.—[*His arm.*]A remark of Whitby on this expression is worth notice. “God’s great power is represented by His finger,—His greater by His hand,—His greatest by His arm. The produc­tion of lice was by the finger of God. (Exod. viii. 19);—His other miracles in Egypt were wrought by His hand (Exod. iii. 20); the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, by His arm. (Exod. xv. 6).”