

In 1820 Fanny Crosby was born into an impoverished, devout Christian family. Losing her sight due to incompetent medical treatment in the first weeks of her life. Her dad dies when she is 8 months old. In her teenage years Fanny begins to write poetry becoming a regular contributor to the poetry columns of New York newspapers. Thirty eight years old when she marries. Her only child dies in infancy. From the age of 40 until her death just short of her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, she writes over 8,000 hymns. Fanny Crosby wrote, 'To God be the glory, great things he has done.' Through these words, she joins a rich biblical tradition of God centred praise. The song of Moses and Miriam after crossing the Red Sea. The song of Hannah after the miraculous birth of Samuel. The Psalms of King David and others. The songs of salvation in Isaiah 12 Reaching a crescendo in today's passage, Mary's song. In traditional Anglican liturgy, known by its Latin name, Magnificat. Let's listen to it together (reading here) Sisters and brothers how much is praise part of your response to the living God? What is the central focus of your praise? Mary's song a blueprint to renew a life of praise in us. A song flowing from the heart. While dealing with a tumultuous time in her life. An encounter with God. Divine promises given. She is to be an unmarried mum bearing the son of God. Promises confirmed and enlarged in the prophetic actions and words of an unborn baby boy and his mother, Elizabeth. A song flowing out of an overwhelming thankfulness. Founded on the character and works of God. **Verses 49-50** *'for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.'* An outpouring of praise for what God is doing in her life and what God is doing in the world. Mary's praise shaped by her knowledge of her powerful, holy, merciful God. Creating the world. Parting the Red Sea. Pouring out manna from heaven. Raising the dead. Creating new life in a virgin's womb. God, perfectly holy, set apart from his people. In whose presence human beings cannot be without atoning sacrifice for sin. Giver of mercy in every age. This mighty, holy, merciful God has done great things in Mary's life. God knows her humble state. Not her financial circumstances. Her impoverished state before God. Unable to come into God's presence. Unable to overturn the unbridgeable gap between her and her creator. Into that humble state the God she praises as Lord and Saviour comes. Through the baby she is chosen to bring into the world. **Verse 48** *'for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,'* In humility Mary praises God for

her future fame as the mother of Jesus. This mighty, holy, merciful God has done great things in Israel. Mighty reversals turning the values of the world upside down. Bringing restoration and salvation to those humble enough to receive. Judgement for those too proud to see. **Verses 51-53** *'He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.'* The Old Testament testifies to these great things God has done. Mary's words more than a history lesson. The words of **v51-53** also prophetic. Pointing forward to the ongoing mighty reversals flowing from the ministry of the child she is bearing. The Lord Jesus Christ. The future work of God so certain it presented as past and accomplished. God's action in the Lord Jesus turning the world upside down. He will humble the proud; lift up the lowly; satisfy the hungry. A continuation of the mercy God shows to Abraham and promises to Israel's ancestors. **Verses 54-55** *'He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.'* Promises we know fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Recorded in the New Testament. Experienced in the lives of every believer. The focus of mature, godly praise. Praise like that flowing from the pen of Fanny Crosby. Focused on the great things God has done. *'O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, To every believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives. Great things He has taught us, great things He has done, And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son; But purer, and higher, and greater will be Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.'* The Mighty One who has done great things for Mary creates in her a wellspring of praise. God is enlarged in Mary's inner life. All that she is magnifies and praises the Lord. Mary sings, *'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,'* **v46-47** Brothers and sisters, is that the song of your heart? Do you recognise God has done great things for you? He has transformed your lowly status and exalted you. From sinner to saint. Rebel under judgement to child of the living God. Allow that to sink in. It ought to move us to praise. Mary praises God for the past. Also for the future. Fanny Crosby does likewise. Praising God for redemption and forgiveness of sin. Praising God also for the glory to come when we see Jesus face to face. How much are you praising God for your inheritance? The Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. Sisters and brothers, what is the central focus of your praise? Remember Fanny

Crosby's opening lines, *'To God be the glory great things he has done, he found me a car park out of the sun.'* Not her opening lines. Those words echo the shallowness of praise of many a twenty first century Christian. Thanking God for making our life more comfortable, fixing up our problems. Attending to our needs as our heavenly servant. Hoping our praise of God somehow dignifies our fundamental self centredness. No, Fanny Crosby wrote, *'To God be the glory, great things He has done; So loved He the world that He gave us His Son, Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, And opened the life gate that all may go in.'* The greatest thing God has done. When was the last time you praised God in words such as these? Brothers and sisters, repent of the absence of God centred praise. It dishonours God, in Christ, who gave his very self for us. Ask God to renew in you a thankful heart. Feed your praise with the word of God. Look for examples of praise in your bible reading. Turn those examples into personal praise. Praise God in the midst of suffering and setback for his mighty, merciful works. Praise God when he fails to do what you want because he has done what you need most of all. Praise God for his work of salvation in your life. For the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The ways in which Jesus' character shines through you. For little and big victories over sin. Praise God for the spread of the gospel throughout the world. For our mission partners in that work. When we gather together let us join with the long line of saints down through the ages, including Mary. Let us sing songs of praise from the heart, with conviction encouraging one another in a life of praise. For the great things he has done. Praise God because he has already done everything needed for us to enjoy eternity with him forever. *'Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the earth hear His voice! Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Let the people rejoice! O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son, And give Him the glory, great things He has done.'*