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April 28th: Numbers 24 & Luke 1:24-56

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Balaam's further oracles. The annunciation of the birth of Jesus.

Some passages referenced:

Genesis 49:9-10 (blessings of Judah); Genesis 12:1-3 (blessings of Abraham); 2 Samuel 8:2, 11-15 (David's victories over other nations); Exodus 17:8-16 (battle against the Amalekites); Genesis 25:3 (Asshurim); Jeremiah 48:45, Daniel 11:30 (later allusions to Balaam's prophecies).

Daniel 8:16, 9:21 (the Angel Gabriel); Luke 1:76 (John the Baptist as the Prophet of the Most High); Isaiah 7:10-17 (the virgin giving birth); 2 Samuel 7:12-14 (the Davidic covenant); Genesis 1:2 (Spirit hovering over waters); Exodus 40:34-35 (cloud overshadowing the tabernacle); Genesis 18:14 (nothing impossible with God); 2 Samuel 6:14-16 (David leaping before the Ark); Judges 5:24 (blessing of Jael); Genesis 3:15 (crushing the serpent's head); Luke 23:44 (darkness over the face of the land from the sixth to the ninth hours); 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (Hannah's prayer); Psalm 113:7-9 (allusions to Hannah's prayer).

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglican church.net/>).

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Transcript

Numbers 24, When Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel, he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe. And the Spirit of God came upon him, and he took up his discourse and said, The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered.

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel, like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the Lord has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters. His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.

God brings him out of Egypt, and is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces, and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness who will rouse him.

Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you. And Balaam's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balaam said to Balaam, I called you to curse my enemies, and behold you have blessed them these three times.

Therefore now flee to your own place. I said I will certainly honor you, but the Lord has held you back from honor. And Balaam said to Balaam, did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, if Balaam should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own will.

What the Lord speaks, that will I speak. And now behold I am going to my people. Come, I will let you know what this people will do to your people in the latter days.

And he took up his discourse and said, The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered. I see him, but not now. I behold him, but not near.

A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. It shall crush the forehead of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed.

Seir also his enemies shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly, and one from Jacob shall exercise dominion, and destroy the survivors of cities. Then he looked on Amalek, and took up his discourse and said, Amalek was the first among the nations, but its end is utter destruction.

And he looked on the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock. Nevertheless Cain shall be burned when Asher takes you away captive. And he took up his discourse and said, Alas! who shall live when God does this? But ships shall come from Kittim, and shall afflict Asher and Eber, and he too shall come to utter destruction.

Then Balaam rose and went back to his place, and Balak also went his way. The story of Balaam continues into chapter 24 as Balaak's third attempt to get Balaam to curse Israel crashes and burns like the preceding ones. Balaam now seems to enjoy a vantage point that enables him to see all of the tribes.

He's standing on Peor, and the entire camp of Israel is now visible to him. There seems to be some shift in Balaam's approach at this point. Whereas he had previously looked for omens, and the Lord had placed words in his mouth, now the Spirit of God comes upon him, and he goes into a different state.

These words aren't placed into his mouth by the Lord so much as they seem to arise within him under the Spirit's inspiration. His introductory lines to his two oracles here describe his visionary state. The oracle of Balaam, the son of Peor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered.

The oracles that follow are not merely about God's blessing of Israel, as the preceding ones were, but they're about the future of the nation. They look far beyond the current situation. Like the blessings of Jacob in Genesis chapter 49, they anticipate what will befall Israel and other nations in the future and in the latter days.

Israel will defeat the Canaanites, they will settle and prosper in the land, and become a great and victorious kingdom. Israel's settlement, as Balaam looks out upon it, is beautiful. He's looking out upon Israel's camp and the way it is organised tribe by tribe around the tabernacle.

Israel has a well-ordered camp, described in the opening chapters of the book of Numbers. A camp with a symbolic order. Israel will be planted in the land, like great trees beside flowing water courses.

The imagery is that of a lush garden setting, a new Eden. Water flowing from buckets and seed in many waters is an image of fertility, both of nature and of humanity. And Balaam sees into the future, speaking of the rise of Israel as a kingdom and of the victory over Agag, king of the Amalekites, Israel's old enemies from Exodus chapter 17.

God brought Israel out of Egypt and he will grant Israel victory over all of its enemies. Verse 9 declares, he crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness, who will rouse him up? This recalls verse 24 of the previous chapter. Behold the people, as a lioness it

rises up and as a lion it lifts itself.

It does not lie down until it has devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain. As we have already noted, this recalls Genesis chapter 49 verse 9. Judah is a lion's cup. From the prey my son you have gone up.

He stooped down, he crouched as a lion and as a lioness, who dares rouse him? This, first of all, is kingly language. As the lioness or lion lifting itself up, it's the lion on the hunt. But in the third oracle, here, it is the lion that has settled itself after the hunt and which no one dare disturb.

This is Israel settled in the land, having won its victory and its spoils. Blessed are those who bless you and cursed are those who curse you. This concluding statement is one that recalls once more the blessing given to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 verses 1 to 3. By this point, Balak is furious.

He refuses to pay Balaam anything and tells him that he must flee, presumably lest he face the king's wrath and retribution. Balaam once again points out that he is not free to declare whatever words he wishes. He must declare the words that God gives to him and on this occasion he's not just had words dictated to him, these words have bubbled up from within by the inspiration of the Spirit.

He gives a further oracle concerning the latter days, looking further into the future. The latter days might be a reference to the future more generally or to events at the conclusion of the age in which they are currently in. Once again, it's introduced with the same words talking about the state that Balaam is in, as the one whose eyes have been opened by the Lord.

The prophecy of Balaam here especially seems to look forward to the reign of David and the dominance of Israel over the nations in the region in his days. David about 400 years later will fulfill these words. We might again be reminded of Genesis 49 and the blessing of Judah by Jacob in verse 10.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. The language of stars and scepters is the language of kingship and the defeat of Moab, Edom and Amalek and other peoples that are spoken of here are things that for the most part happened in David's reign. In 2nd Samuel chapter 8 verse 2 and 11 to 15 we read of some of these victories.

These also King David dedicated to the Lord together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek and from the spoil of Hadadizah, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000

Edomites in the Valley of Salt. Then he put garrisons in Edom.

Throughout all Edom he put garrisons and all the Edomites became David's servants and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. So David reigned over all Israel and David administered justice and equity to all his people. We should remember that Balak is the king of Moab.

He has summoned Balaam to curse Israel. However Balaam has just gone on to prophesy that Moab will be crushed at the hands of Israel in the future. This is definitely not what either Balaam or Balak wanted.

This oracle is followed by three mini oracles bringing the full number of the oracles to seven. These oracles look beyond Moab and Edom to speak of other nations. The first declares that the tribe of Amalek, the great enemies of Exodus 17, will be decisively defeated.

The second speaks of the Kenites, friends of the Israelites at this point. Jethro was a Kenite and Jael in Judges chapter 4 who crushed Sisera's head is also a Kenite. However they will face captivity to Asher, either Assyria or the Asherim mentioned in Genesis chapter 25 verse 3 about which we know hardly anything else.

In the concluding mini oracle ships will come from Kittim, Cyprus and afflict Asher and Eber. Eber might be the Hebrews. This might refer to the invasion of the Sea Peoples in the 13th and 12th centuries BC.

Read this way these prophecies relate to the earlier years of the Kingdom of Israel and its foundational victories and the events within that region from that point on. Yet later passages in Scripture also allude to these prophecies. Jeremiah chapter 48 verse 45 recalls verse 17 of this chapter.

In the shadow of Heshbon fugitives stop without strength for fire came out from Heshbon, flame from the house of Sihon. It has destroyed the forehead of Moab, the crown of the sons of Tumalt. The forehead of Moab is also referred to in Balaam's oracle.

Daniel chapter 11 verse 30 is another example. For ships of Kittim shall come against him and he shall be afraid and withdraw and shall turn back and be enraged and take action against the Holy Covenant. He shall turn back and pay attention to those who forsake the Holy Covenant.

The oracles of Balaam seem to have an initial and most immediate reference to the rise of the Davidic dynasty. They speak of the way that the throne of David and of Israel will be established over the other nations roundabout in the region, how God will establish his people through the kingdom of his servant David. But there seems to be something in these prophecies that look even further still.

Many in looking at the prophecy of the star coming out of Jacob have seen the larger story of the Davidic dynasty in Christ coming into view. This is a common feature of biblical prophecy where a prophecy can look towards an initial fulfillment and a primary fulfillment but beyond that there can be an indication of a greater event that's down the line, something that is witnessed to in details of the prophecy and sometimes an event that's straining for a greater fulfillment. We will often find the New Testament writers reading the Old Testament in this sort of way, recognizing prophecies that are initially fulfilled in the Old Testament but which have a fuller realization in the story of Christ.

Having read this story of Balaam we might wonder what on earth it's doing here. Why would we have this particular account of God blessing his people through this false prophet? As Jonathan Sacks observes it seems to perform a number of purposes here. First of all this is the blessing of someone who has every motive to curse them.

It's a mercenary prophet who's being told by a king to go and curse the people and going to be offered a king's reward for doing so. And he's someone who has no great honor or loyalty to the Lord. He's not a faithful prophet.

He has every reason to curse them and yet he doesn't. God uses his mouth to bless his people. This is an expression of God's power that no intent to harm them will succeed.

It is also a very powerful way of expressing God's love for his people. If you want to praise someone as Jonathan Sacks observes, the greatest praise can be found in the lips of enemies. Enemies are those who most want to speak ill of us, who most want to malign us.

And yet by using the lips of this enemy to praise Israel God has given a far more powerful demonstration of the way he relates to Israel than if these words had been born on Moses mouth. Finally as they're about to enter the land God reiterates in this most surprising way all the promises given to Abraham and these anticipations of the nation being established in this most glorious form with a kingly dynasty and dominance over all their enemies in the region. This is looking forward to the future and the full realization of God's purpose for his people.

As they stand on the brink of entering to the promised land they are being prepared for God's blessing to them. A question to consider, how does the Lord's relationship to Israel come into clearer focus through the story of Balaam? Luke chapter 1 verses 24 to 56. After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and for five months she kept herself hidden saying, thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among people.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David and the Virgin's name was Mary and he came to her and said greetings Oh favored one

the Lord is with you but she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be and the angel said to her do not be afraid Mary for you have found favor with God and behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will be no end and Mary said to the angel how will this be since I am a virgin and the angel answered her the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you therefore the child to be born will be called holy the Son of God and behold your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren for nothing will be impossible with God and Mary said behold I am the servant of the Lord let it be to me according to your word and the angel departed from her in those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth and when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb and why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me for behold when the sound of your greeting came to my ears the baby in my womb leaped for joy and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord and Mary said my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant for behold from now on all generations will call me blessed for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation he has shown strength with his arm he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate he has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty he has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his offspring forever and Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home for the second time in Luke chapter 1 the angel Gabriel appears to someone declaring the birth of a child he has already appeared to Zechariah in the temple to announce the birth of John the angel Gabriel is known to us already from Daniel chapter 8 verse 16 and 9 verse 21 where he declares the fates of nations and empires John is going to be the prophet like Samuel and Jesus is going to be the Davidic King in verse 76 John is declared to be the prophet of the most high and here Jesus is described as the son of the most high we've already seen parallels between the two annunciations the angel Gabriel appears to both them both them respond in fear both of them are reassured told not to be afraid and are told that they will have a son John will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb and the Holy Spirit will come upon Mary the future missions of both are described in detail and what they will do both Zechariah and Mary respond with seemingly similar questions how shall I know this for I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years and then in the case of Mary how will this be since I am a virgin although it is not explicitly mentioned

here as it is in the Gospel of Matthew Isaiah chapter 7 verses 10 to 17 is lurking behind the text in the reference to the Virgin here again the Lord spoke to a has asked a sign of the Lord your God let it be deeper she'll or high as heaven but a has said I will not ask and I will not put the Lord to the test and he said here then Oh house of David is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel he shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good for before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted the Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah the king of Assyria the foretold birth of the child to the young woman or in some translations the Virgin in Isaiah chapter 7 is a portentous sign to the king of Judah it's a sign of God bringing about a reversal in history in a short period of time and here there's something more going on it's a sign of new creation God is starting something new in history this is not just another descendant of Adam a new humanity is being formed in Mary's womb this child will be the son of the Most High now this looks back to 2nd Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 to 14 and the covenant with David when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son but there is something more going on here the expression son of God functions in a stronger sense here Jesus is not just going to be the Davidic King he will also be called holy the Son of God because of the manner of his birth his birth is not of man not of a human father but of God himself and so his sonship seems to be referring not solely to his status as the Davidic King but as one who has come from God himself here it is important that Mary is betrothed to a man of the house of David to Joseph it's through Joseph that Christ's royal heritage comes and the place of Joseph within the story is not so foregrounded within the book of Luke as it is in Matthew but Joseph's place should not be forgotten here both Mary and Joseph have crucial parts to play it is very important for those of us who are Gentile Christians who are accustomed to dulling ourselves to the political themes of the gospel and to the references to Israel as a nation to see just how charged the annunciation of Christ's birth and the songs and the prophecies that follow are with references to kingship with references to David with references to the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and God's blessing and visiting his people Israel Jesus will be the Davidic King he will be the deliverer of his people his birth comes in a context charged with the expectation of Israel in the context of Zachariah and Elizabeth in the context of Mary and her Magnificat in the context of Simeon and Anna who are praying for the deliverance of Israel if reading the beginning of Luke's gospel we start to feel some sense of discomfort about our spiritualized version of the Messiah and the way in which we've detached the Messiah from political themes and kingdom themes then that's good that's exactly as it should be because those themes are an important part of this story and we need to be careful not

to erase them the spirit will overshadow Mary just as it hovered over the waters of creation and how it covered the tabernacle in Exodus chapter 40 it's power from on high and this is also something that anticipates Pentecost many have spoken about this as a Marian Pentecost and I think that's exactly right there is a connection between the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary and the way in which the Spirit comes upon the church at Pentecost so that Christ is formed in his people perhaps we are supposed to hear themes of the reversal of the fall in the reference to the blessed fruit of Mary's womb the womb once mediated judgment to the woman in Genesis chapter 3 15 and now it becomes the means of blessing in the same way the tomb was the great sign of the judgment upon Adam and now at the end of the gospel of Luke we'll see the tomb opened up as a new womb and Christ coming forth as the firstborn of the dead the fruit of the garden which led to condemnation is replaced by the fruit of Mary's womb who brings salvation Jesus is the seed of the woman and the woman in particular as Mary is a virgin this is not the seed of a woman who has had relations with a man it's the seed of the woman in particular and he's the first of a new humanity to replace that of Adam the description of the Spirit coming upon and overshadowing suggests the creation of a new tabernacle or temple Mary her womb and her child are spoken of using temple imagery and like acts Luke begins then with the establishment of a new temple it's a sign of things changing nothing will be impossible with God recalls the angels words to Sarah in Genesis chapter 18 verse 14 Mary is told that Elizabeth her relative has also had a miraculous conception their stories are interwoven and the mothers of these two sons who will together deliver God's people are brought together at this point this would serve as an assurance to Mary but also a sign to them both Elizabeth also as a respected woman could vouch for Mary that she was a woman of good character and that this was not a child born of unfaithfulness she herself was given a sign of that as her infant leaped in her womb having asked the question of how those things would be not as a question of unbelief as in the case of Zachariah but as a question of belief Mary then speaks of herself later as the servant of the Lord she submits to the Lord readily accepting the vocation that's laid upon her when she visits Elizabeth John the Baptist leaps in the womb of Elizabeth for joy King David leapt and danced before the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought into Jerusalem in 2nd Samuel chapter 6 verses 14 to 16 in the garments of a child as Mary the new Ark bearing God's presence comes to Elizabeth the infant forerunner John dances before Jesus God's presence just as David danced before the Ark bring the presence of the Lord into Jerusalem Elizabeth speaks of Mary as the mother of her Lord and the leaping of her baby is taken as a sign of the superiority of the one over the other the language my Lord is very powerful testimony to the importance of the child that Mary is bearing and again would be assigned to Mary an assurance to her Mary is blessed in much the same way as jail is in judges chapter 5 verse 24 most blessed of women be jail the wife of Heber the Kenite of tent dwelling women most blessed jail was famous for crushing the head of Sisera and Mary and her child will be involved in crushing the head of the serpent Mary's song as we shall see is also like Hannah's from 1st Samuel chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 what we're seeing here is

that Mary is cut from the same cloth as the great heroines of the Old Testament in Mary we have a charge condensation of much of the imagery and symbolism associated with women in the Old Testament of the great women of the Old Testament their characteristics meet in her and she is someone who stands for the woman that spoken of in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15 and the promise of victory over the serpent many Protestants get nervous about this they get concerned that we don't have to higher view of Mary but yet scripture has a high view of Mary she is someone in which the destiny of God's people comes to a head she is someone who is an archetype and an exemplar of the church and the people of faith nevertheless contrary to the way that Mary is often treated in Roman Catholic circles this doesn't require exalting Mary above the ranks of mere mortals and treating her as if she was somewhere between God and humanity rather she is like other characters in scripture characters like Abraham or Sarah or Rebecca or Rachel she is a character who stands for a lot more than just an individual there is a confluence of destinies within her so that past stories reach their climax in her actions and later realities and persons can trace the origins back to her she is not unique in this respect while the church can appropriately see her as a mother figure that represents the church itself and Israel itself Sarah is also presented in a similar way as is Rachel and in the case of men Abraham is the one that sums up the history of and himself playing it out in advance Abraham is described as the father of us all we greatly underplay characters like Mary or Abraham if we just see them as individuals who manifest faith and are exemplars of faith yet their status is greatly overstated when there is the development of certain forms of devotion to them forms of devotion that collapse the greater realities that are at work manifested in those characters into a single individual Mary is one of a number of symbols of the church and of Israel and the meaning of these great realities is neither exhausted by or fully realized in her Mary stays with Elizabeth from the sixth to the ninth months of her pregnancy darkness was over the land from the sixth to the ninth hours in Luke chapter 23 verse 44 is there a connection perhaps one of them seems to hearken back to the ninth plague which preceded the death of the firstborn and this is something that might look forward to the birth of the firstborn but I wouldn't put much weight on it one of the first things that readers of Mary's song notice is its similarity with the prayer of Hannah in 1st Samuel chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 and had I prayed and said my heart exalts in the Lord my horn is exalted in the Lord my mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation there is none holy like the Lord for there is none besides you there is no rock like our God talk no more so very proudly let not arrogance come from your mouth for the Lord is a God of knowledge and by him actions await the bows of the mighty are broken but the feeble bind on strength those who are full have hired themselves out for bread but those who are hungry have ceased to hunger the baron has born seven but she who has many children is forlorn the Lord kills and brings to life he brings down to shield and raises up the Lord makes poor and makes rich he brings low and he exalts he raises up the poor from the dust he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor for the pillars of the earth of the Lord's and on them he has set

the world he will guard the feet of his faithful ones but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness for not by might shall a man prevail the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces against them he will thunder in heaven the Lord will judge the ends of the earth he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed this prayer is alluded to in Psalm 113 verses 7 to 9 he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes with the princes of his people he gives the barren woman a home making her the joyous mother of children praise the Lord this is the first of the cycle of the psalms sung at the Passover and hearing it in the background here we might recognize a new exodus style deliverance in the making Mary's Magnificat expands its focus from the Lord's attention to her particular situation to his attention to that of Israel as a whole as in the prayer of Hannah we here can see that God's attention to this young woman called Mary is his attention to the entire people his answer to her prayers is his answer to the prayers of his people God's deliverance of his people Israel does not come with dramatic fanfare it comes as in the case of 1st Samuel in response to a humble woman's prayers God's kingdom is one that comes like no earthly kingdom it comes not to the great and powerful of the earth first but to the meek and lowly it comes not in the thunder of chariots and the snorting of their horses but in the secrecy of a virgin's womb Mary's Magnificat ends with a reference to God's promises to Abraham and we've seen a number of allusions to Abraham within this chapter and these are not the last of the allusions to Abraham that come the descriptions of Zachariah and Elizabeth recalled Sarah and Abraham in their old age the annunciations of the birth of Jesus and John the Baptist recall the annunciations of the birth of Ishmael and of Isaac and the response of Zachariah recalls the response of Abraham and Sarah if Jesus comes as the son of David he also comes as the great son of Abraham the one who is the greater Isaac the beloved son that will later lay down his life in obedience to his father a question to consider thinking of the other places in biblical narrative where we have songs or great poems of the type that we see in Mary's Magnificat what might be the significance of its presence at this point