

“Share God’s Joy with Others”

Luke 1:39-56

I love how Luke weaves the narratives of John and Jesus’ births together. Unfortunately, we are so familiar with them that we miss out on the ‘aha’ moment of 1:36. Which moment is that? Luke begins talking about a random priest named Zechariah, who is old and his wife Elizabeth is old and childless, and yet both are righteous. Zechariah goes to the temple when his turn comes up, and in the performing of his duties the lot falls into his lap to do what every priest dreams of doing – burn incense in the Holy Place just this side of the curtain that separates him from the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies.

An angel – Gabriel – appears and tells him they will have a son and he will prepare the hearts of people for the Lord’s coming. Zechariah doesn’t believe him, is silenced until John’s birth and the people are a little freaked out by all this. Meanwhile he goes home, and Elizabeth gets pregnant.

Scene 2. A random teenager is now visited by Gabriel and he tells her she’s going to be the mother of the Lord; the very Lord Zechariah’s and Elizabeth’s son is going to prepare Israel for. She believes Gabriel’s message. Now pretend you are reading this for the first time and you’re probably thinking, ‘These two will have to meet somehow in order for God’s plan to work.’ And then we read in v.36

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

Aha, there’s the connection! And now Luke brings the two together in vv.39-56 as we read,

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.

Why does she want to go see Elizabeth? Mary lives in Nazareth in Galilee, the north. Elizabeth lives in the hill country of Judea in a village 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem called En Karem (according to tradition). That’s 90 miles south. A similar traveling distance to the one she and Joseph will take to get to Bethlehem in 8 ½ months or so. Hill country means a lot of climbing. On foot, probably with a caravan of people.

Again though why Elizabeth? Why don’t we read that she rushed to go see Joseph or her own family? Has she even met Elizabeth and when? At a family wedding, a bar mitzvah? How well did she really know her? The reason why she goes to Elizabeth is because Elizabeth is the only person who understands what is going on, how God is working in both their lives. And that’s a great thing to learn from these two:

Share How God is Working in Your Life **(1:39-56)**

Mary can’t share this with her parents or her closest friends or even Joseph – yet. Joseph has yet to come to the same place Mary is at spiritually. It will take Gabriel’s visit (probably sometime in the 3 months while Mary is away) before Joseph understands what’s going on. If Mary had shared

these things with her closest family members or friends, they would not have understood. Mary had the faith to believe that God was going to do His great work through her and as a sign to affirm God can do the impossible, Gabriel says Elizabeth your older cousin is now expecting; another impossible work of God. Not every believer has the same spiritual understanding that believes and accepts God's work. Mary ...

Shares the joy that comes through faith and obedience (vv.38-40)

After probably taking a week to get to Elizabeth on foot, down many valleys and up many hills, Mary arrives. She has believed Gabriel's words to her (which are God's words) and she wants to share them with Elizabeth who also believed Gabriel's words from God, about her being the mother of John who will prepare the way for the Messiah. Elizabeth has had no information about when, where or how the Messiah would come. Yet listen to her words in v.40,

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Again we see the Spirit's involvement in bringing about and affirming the work of God. Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit because she believes by faith in God's words that the Messiah is coming and that her son is the one who paves the way. The word for 'leap' is a joyous leap like a newborn animal finding his legs for the first time. The Septuagint uses this same Greek word in Malachi 4:2 when we read about our glorious future,

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

Jesus talked about the joy of obedience in John 15:10-11

¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

When God answers your prayers, when God meets your need or gives you direction or a family member or friend, you want to share this joy of the Spirit with others who will share in your enthusiasm. Maybe it's something you read in Scripture or a good book or sensed the Spirit leading you to do something. Who do you have in your life that you want to share that with? Who do you go to without even thinking about it because you know they will share your joy and praise God with you?

And this goes both ways. Who has Elizabeth had to share this with? Sure, many people would have rejoiced in that she was finally expecting but did she have anyone with whom she could share who this child was to be? Who would believe her, other than Zechariah – who surely now believed but couldn't say a word yet. When we share what God is doing with each other we both share the Spirit's joy together. We may not physically jump in the air like a newborn calf but inside we are.

When we share together what God is doing in our lives we're

Experiencing the Spirit's joy through fellowship of sharing (vv.41-44)

When we share what God is doing with each other, the Spirit in you and the Spirit in the other person produces the fruit of joy in us. We share that fellowship which you can't explain to people. Like when we're traveling somewhere and you meet someone new and you get this Spidey sense where you wonder 'I think these people know the Lord'. And you ask them and yes they are and there is this really neat connection that the Spirit of God brings in both of you that only comes through faith in Christ and when we're walking with Christ in obedience. Sometimes when we're not where we should be spiritually, we miss out on these kinds of blessings.

That's the word used here to describe what God is doing.

⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Elizabeth bursts forth in her own mini song of praise pronouncing how blessed Mary is but also the fruit of her womb. The fruit of her womb is the Spirit's work in Mary. Praise the Spirit of God who was doing the work of God in forming Jesus in Mary. And the Spirit is still doing the work of forming you and me into the image of Jesus so that we can be better prepared to bring Him to those around us who need to be saved from their sins. Elizabeth knows through the Spirit Mary is going to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary isn't even showing yet. She hasn't said anything yet as far as we know. The Spirit confirmed this in her as she felt John leap in her womb.

And both of them experience the blessing of

Trusting God together which glorifies God (v.45)

While Elizabeth said this for Mary, indirectly she's also talking about herself. They both believe by faith that God is doing a work in their lives that isn't just for them. As a matter of fact, it's going to be hard for them. John will suffer for sharing the truth about Jesus. He'll even die for it. Jesus would suffer as well and die for us. Mary lived through all that. We don't know about Elizabeth. This isn't a Hallmark movie. Just because God is going to do a great work in us and through us doesn't mean there isn't a cost. But when we trust God knows what He's doing we will praise Him because He deserves the glory. The work God is doing in us and through us is ultimately about Him being glorified. John would turn many back to the Lord. Jesus would die for the sins of the world. Their ministries were about glorifying God.

And this is what Mary does next in her song. She glorifies God for what He was doing but she also sees ahead through the eyes of faith and ...

Glorifies God for the Future Work He's Going to Do **(1:46-55)**

Mary knew what this meant; it meant the beginning of the end. The coming of the Messiah was the sign that God's end time program was starting and so she sings with this in mind. To steal an advertising phrase and to appropriately apply it, 'This changes everything.' Jesus coming in the flesh guarantees His return and everything else God is going to do. Mary was willing to be the Lord's servant and allow God to use her as she saw fit. And so she ...

Thanks God for His electing grace (vv.46-49)

My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name.

Mary thanks God for the part that she played in bringing Jesus to others. She prophetically by the Spirit sees the big picture. For future generations to call her blessed must mean that something wonderful is going to happen through her Son. Will it be hard? Very hard for Mary and Jesus. God's electing grace in our lives means He has a purpose to bring Jesus to others through us. Are we glorifying God and rejoicing in His choosing of us to be part of Jesus' body and servants to help others find hope in Christ? She acknowledges her unworthy-ness, of her 'humble state'. Like Mary, none of us deserve God's face to shine upon us and save us and use us for His purposes. Mary is humbled by God's grace as should we all. Mary has the Spirit-guided understanding to see beyond her own part. While vv.46-49 are personal and about the present work God was doing in her life, she knows by faith that she is part of a bigger plan of God's and in her song exhorts us to

Trust Him to complete His plan for the world (vv.50-53)

⁵⁰ *His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.*

⁵¹ *He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*

⁵² *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty*

While Mary speaks of these as if they are past tense, it's what's called the 'prophetic past tense'. In other words, God is so surely going to do these things that we can speak about them as if they are already done! He hasn't completed all these things yet, but He will. He does it here and there. Every generation can receive His mercy [Old Testament quote of Ps. 103:17 where the word is hesed in Hebrew]; God's covenant, and faithful love, if they choose to trust in Him. He has done many mighty deeds in the past (exodus language) where He has freed captives; especially from their sins. He has scattered many proud people and brought down many wicked rulers [even just last week in Syria]. He has filled physically hungry people through the kindness and generosity of us His children and turned the tables on the rich at times. Ultimately, at every death the rich go away empty-handed.

And God has chosen a specific people group through which these promises will come true. So Mary

Believes that all His promises to Israel will happen (vv.54-55)

⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."*

I do not believe we can spiritualize away God's literal promises to Israel. That Jesus will physically return and establish His rule on earth for a thousand years, ruling from David's throne in Jerusalem and leading the world as Isaiah 11 says in righteousness and holiness. When God spoke the promises of these complete New Covenant promises to Israel that we also are grafted in, He ended the prophecy by telling Jeremiah, to rebuke those who don't believe God will unite the nation under Him again,

Jer. 33:25 This is what the Lord says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, ²⁶ then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose

one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.'

In other words, it's going to happen. Mary believed that the arrival of Jesus at birth guarantees all God's future promises.

Then we read a simple statement that we just brush over,

⁵⁶ *Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

Why 3 months? Because she stayed until John was born. If she did then she would have heard Zechariah speak again just as God said. Just as God said. Mary and Elizabeth shared this great fellowship of the Spirit's joy in their lives because they were walking with God and being available for His purposes. And the 3 months stay reminds us that we all need to

Invest Time in Fellowship and be Blessed (1:56)

We're not told Mary had to stay with Elizabeth for 3 months. She chose that. We get the impression that all that we read in vv.39-55 happened on Mary's arrival. The song may have come a little later too. It may have arisen through their continued shared joy as they fellowshiped and got to know each other better and in the leading of the Spirit Mary wrote this. Hard to say.

But we won't experience the Spirit's joy if we are not getting together with other believers to talk about what God is doing in our lives. I asked you earlier, who do you go to when you want to share what God is doing in your life? Some of you may have struggled to think of someone right away. Is it because you hardly ever get together with anyone to share spiritual truths, to talk about God's Word, to pray for or at least to talk about God's answers to your prayers? And could that be because you're not growing spiritually the way you know you should be? Not spending time with God's people and listening and talking to God. Having genuine fellowship doesn't come easily. We need to invest time and let go of our own (usually selfish) agendas and fears to connect with people spiritually.

In Mary and Elizabeth we see an example of the fruit that the Spirit wants to produce in our lives. Fruit only grows when a plant is getting a healthy balance of water and sunshine at the proper time. If we're going to produce the fruit of the Spirit we're going to have to not just receive the watering of His Word personally but collectively through each other's Spirit-given gifts. We need each other for our own growth. We need each other to sometimes see how God is working in each of us and we need to share that with each other so we both be blessed and be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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