

# Luke

*A Tale of Two Women  
(Luke 1:39-45)*

*With Study Questions*

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Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed *is* she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:39-45).

## Introduction

There are very few high schools in the Southern California region that boast the athletic dominance of the Roman Catholic school, Mater Dei. I’ve always enjoyed watching some of our more local teams get a win over this powerhouse. But there is something else that nags at me whenever I step on their campus-their name, Mater Dei, which means Mother of God. Does God really have a mother?

I don’t wish here to overly-argue my point. The First Council of Ephesus in 431AD used that title, Mother of God (*Theotokos*) in reference to Mary, so there is some legitimacy to it if properly understood. Not to take too deep a dive here, but in that council, they were addressing the heresy of Nestorianism (named at Nestorius, 386-451). This was a teaching that Jesus existed as two persons, rather than one person with two natures, a human and divine.

The difficulty here is that the Bible doesn’t always make that distinction clear. Our confession addresses this problem in chapter eight where we read,

**...that which is proper to one nature is sometimes in Scripture attributed to the person denominated by the other nature (WCF 8, 7).**

For example, in Acts 20:28 we're told that God purchased the church with **"His own blood."** But, of course, God doesn't have blood. Neither does God have a mother, unless we understand that term in light of its historic/theological significance. Mary is the mother of Jesus, in terms of her substance, her humanness. At the same time, Jesus is God, which is not of the substance of Mary.

Biblical references to Mary include the one we're currently reading (Luke 1, 2); the similar story in Matthew (Matthew 1, 2); the wedding in Cana (John 2:1); the attempt to see Jesus while He was teaching (Mark 3:31); when she's identified as Jesus' mother (Matthew 13:55); at the cross with John (John 19:26); and as part of the church (Acts 1:14).

I think it would be an error to suggest that Mary is a relatively insignificant figure in the record of Scripture. Yet the theology derived from Scripture in all these accounts is relatively minimal. Generally, she is asking a question or used to identify Jesus. *The Magnificat*, as we shall see in a future message, contains a wonderful message. But the deep theology around Mary has to do, as we discussed last time, with the virgin birth. John does not write of her, Peter does not write of her, and Paul only writes of her by extension with the focus being that Jesus was **"born of a woman"** (Galatians 4:4).

Yet, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Saint Alphonsus de Liguori managed to write an 800-page volume that is still in print, *The Glories of Mary*. This book continues to be the Roman Catholic gold standard on the role of Mary in the life of the Christian. The contents of this book include:

- **Mary, the Queen, Mother of mercy**
- **Mary, our mother and her great love for us**
- **Mary, who renders death sweet to her servants**
- **Mary, the hope of all**
- **Mary, to whom we cry**
- **Mary, who protects those who invoke her**
- **Mary, whose intercession we need for our salvation**
- **Mary, our advocate...powerful to save all**

- **Mary, the peacemaker between sinners and God**
- **Mary, with the eyes of mercy**
- **Mary rescues her servants from hell**
- **Mary conducts her servants to paradise**
- **Mary, preserved from original sin (Immaculate Conception)**
- **Mary, the treasurer of all the divine graces**
- **The Assumption of Mary where she ascended to heaven**
- **Mary, the queen of martyrs**

It goes on and on. I must admit time did not allow me to read all 800 pages, but the contents are staggering. The general feel of the book is that where Jesus might be less inclined to mercy, an appeal to Mary can change His mind. Almost the way most households have a parent who is more of an enforcer and the other more of an advocate.

You may ask, how are all these biblically justifiable? Where in the Bible do we find such a message(s) regarding Mary? It requires quite the skilled chiseler to create this type of Mariology/Mariolatry from the Bible alone. I daresay it cannot be done.

But according to the doctrines of Rome, it needn't be found in Scripture to be the authoritative teaching of the church. For the church of Rome holds its own traditions, magisterium (Pope and bishops' interpretation of the word and tradition) and Pope, commensurate with the Scriptures. It is enough, according to Rome, for the church to put forth these teachings.

It can easily be argued that the most significant issue of the Protestant Reformation boiled down to *formal* versus *material* principles of theology. When the Reformers argued (rightfully so) that man finds peace with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that was the material of the message. When they argued that we have an inerrant and infallible record of the message of God found in Scripture alone, that was an appeal to the formal principle.

I do not open with this merely as a critique of Roman Catholicism. I mention this because the introduction of error has a two-fold injury. We don't merely understand the passage incorrectly, we at the same time fail to understand what the Spirit would have us know. Casting Mary into the realm of idolatry, we lose Mary as the "**lowly...maidservant.**" Viewing

Mary as a co-redeemer extracts Mary as a young woman rejoicing in her own redemption.

**Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah <sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. (Luke 1:39, 40).**

## **A Visit**

We are not specifically told whether Gabriel instructed Mary to take this trip, which by no means would be a short one. Perhaps in mentioning Elizabeth's pregnancy in the previous passage, he was hinting she should visit her older cousin. Though I am no egalitarian, it is here that we see a distinct disadvantage in accessing only male commentators. It has been my observation that women who are with child are generally quite ready to meet with others in the same condition. How much more with Elizabeth and Mary!

These two women are not only pregnant and related, but are both involved in miraculous conceptions, albeit Mary's more miraculous than Elizabeth's. Note, that even though she had conceived the Savior, it was Mary who would make the trip. Perhaps it was because she was younger and only newly pregnant. Or perhaps she was already providing an example of servanthood that would be amplified by her child in His redeeming of mankind.

Nonetheless, it should be of no surprise that Mary would seek the wisdom and encouragement of an older woman. Perhaps Mary was counting on that which Paul would later write to Titus...

**...Older women...train the younger women (Titus 2:3, 4).**

Matthew Henry perhaps catches the chord of Mary's heart when he wrote that she...

**...yet longed to *talk over* a thing she had a thousand time *thought over*, and knew no person in the world with whom**

she could *freely* converse concerning it but her cousin Elisabeth, and therefore she hastened to her.<sup>1</sup>

I do pray we all have at least one Elizabeth in our life.

And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> But why *is* this *granted* to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy<sup>2</sup> (Luke 1:41-44).

### A Joyful Meeting

When my children were little, I would walk into my front door after a day at work to a sprint of excitement. At some point I started working out of an office in my house and my children got older. Now the excitement is relegated to Jack, my dog. Excitement may be an insufficient word to describe Elizabeth’s reaction to the visit from her young cousin.

When Elizabeth hears Mary’s voice, the babe in her womb (John the Baptist) leaps for joy. It is always worth noting, in light of current moral trends, that the word for “**baby**” *brephos* in Elizabeth’s womb is the same word Luke uses in the next chapter to describe the “**baby**” Jesus in swaddling cloths in the manger (Luke 2:12). The Scriptures make no distinction between the born and unborn baby.

What we have here is a Spirit-filled response, from mother and child to the yet unborn Jesus. The angel Gabriel had prophetically anticipated this. Speaking to Zacharias of John (the Baptist),

**He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15).**

Intellect is great and necessary. If, as the Bible teaches, “**faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ**” (Romans 10:17)

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<sup>1</sup> Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 1824). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>2</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Lk 1:42-44). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

we need ears and an understanding of words (specifically the words of Scripture). But I fear that we too often wish to reduce God to the limitations of these mechanics and our abilities to observe them work. A routine criticism against infant baptism is the infants inability to intellectually grasp the Gospel and respond in faith. But clearly, from this passage, babies can be filled with the Spirit.

It was not mere wishful thinking that led the divines of Westminster to write,

**Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word (WCF 10, 3).**

It was by good and necessary consequence that they arrived at this conclusion, deduced from Scriptures such as,

**Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts. <sup>10</sup> On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been my God (Psalm 22:9, 10).**

**Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you (Psalm 71:6).**

I do agree with Dr. Sproul in his lecture, *Have You Lost Your Mind?* when he lamented that we are living "in the most anti-intellectual climate in the history of the church." One need merely endure the mindless and contradictory rhetoric of the political world to conclude that post-modernism's attack on truth, logic and ethics is in strong stride. Yet, let us not respond to that error by seeking to reduce God to a formula that fits within the boundaries of our creaturely mind. Incomprehensibility is an attribute of God.

The uncatechized, unbaptized, unevangelized, unborn John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit. And somehow, when Mary spoke,

that baby leaped. Would it not be wonderful if we evangelized, baptized and catechized Christians would leap like this unborn baby!

And even though it was long before Pentecost, Elizabeth will be **“filled with the Holy Spirit.”** Elizabeth then begins an accurate, biblical and apparently loud Mariology. Initially, she announces that Mary is blessed. She also announces that the fruit of her womb is also blessed. These are utterances of a woman filled with the Holy Spirit, so we deem them accurate. We generally like the idea of being blessed.

But this blessedness *eulogemene* is not the same as the blessedness in the Beatitudes *makarios*. The word in our current passage means to speak well of, to praise, to celebrate. Mary may not be everything Rome says she is, but **“all generations”** including ours **“will call me [her] blessed” (Luke 1:48).**

Both Mary and the fruit of her womb would not find this blessing, this high praise, a comfortable journey. Though blessed, Mary’s own heart will be pierced (Luke 2:35). Though blessed, the fruit of her womb would endure the wrath of God to save His people from their sins. And Mary, like any other sinner, including you and me, will be blessed because she believed.

**Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:45).**

It was the faith of Mary in the faithfulness of God that, like every other saint in Scripture and history, brought true peace and redemption to her soul.



## Questions for Study

1. Does God have a mother? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. How does the Roman Catholic Church come up with so much theology on Mary (pages 3, 4)?
3. What are some reasons Mary would have visited Elizabeth (pages 5, 6)?
4. Does John the Baptist's preborn response tell us anything about how God might work with the unborn (pages 6, 7)?
5. What are some things we learn about Mary from Elizabeth's response (page 8)?