

The logo for Trinity Bible Church Dallas features the words "TRINITY BIBLE CHURCH DALLAS" in a bold, sans-serif font. The text is centered within a light gray rectangular background. Behind the text, there is a faint, stylized graphic of a cross with a vertical line extending downwards, resembling a church steeple or a cross with a base.

T R I N I T Y
B I B L E C H U R C H
D A L L A S

The Sermon

Dr. Michael Staton

Luke 1:39-45

"The Forgotten Virtue of Christmas"

November 19, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

Luke chapter 1. It's an added blessing to me to get to be here to preach and dealing with these themes around Christmas, which we all love so much, and the events leading up to the birth of Christ, which is such an amazing thing to study anytime; and for it to coincide with this time of year is an added blessing for us.

Luke 1, I'll read verses 39 to 45. It says, "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.'" Would you pray with me?

[Prayer] Our Father in heaven, it is with great excitement and expectation that we approach Your word today. We also do so with a bit of trembling knowing this is Your inspired, inherent word that is the most important thing we could ever consider. I do ask that what I say would be true and helpful and that You would use these few moments we have together today

for me to serve faithfully this dear congregation. They've come today I know not to hear me, but to hear Your word. So make my thoughts clear. May my words simply be a clear explanation of what You have already said to us. We ask these things for the glory of Your Son, who is our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. [End]

Well, it was 1998. My wife and I had been married for a couple of years when we decided to begin praying that the Lord would bless us with a child. We began to pray that way around January of that year and found out in June that she was pregnant with our first baby. We were obviously very excited. We were nervous. We were anxious. We were thrilled. And mostly, we were poor. And while my wife immediately went to what room is going to be the nursery and how will we change this and what needs to change in our house to prepare for this, my mind immediately went to how are we going to afford diapers and how expensive is all of this going to be.

But through all sides of that, we were so excited to tell people. We talked about how long do we wait until we tell people, and we waited as long as we possibly could until it was becoming a bit awkward. And as we told people, of course, they were so excited for us. We took a picture of the sonogram of the baby and we put it in the middle of a stack of pictures. Now, for those of you who are younger, I know this sounds really strange. When I'm when I got married, we're like Civil War, like it's long time ago - no Instagram, no Facebook, no texting. So you had to tell people one at a time. And so you would take a bunch of pictures, take them to get developed, you' get them back. So we just made up a reason to take all these pictures. But in the middle of it, we in the sonogram picture.

So we'd show it to friends and family they're looking through these pictures like, "That's great. Who cares, who cares, who cares," and then there'd be a picture of our baby. And so we would tell people, and they rejoiced with us, and they were excited for us. And even though it was a lot of individual conversations, every single one of them was filled with joy and excitement and celebration. And we begin to talk about things like, "This is our last meal with just a family of two," or, "This is our last outing before our baby

comes." And life was going to be different, but it was going to be so good and so exciting, as everyone was supportive with us.

Of course, the same can't be said for Mary. It was quite a different situation for her. When she is told that she is going to have the Messiah, while Gabriel's words would be exciting to her, they would, no doubt, be words that would make life hard for her. Lots of challenges. I mean, she's got to tell her parents and her friends. She's got to tell Joseph. What are they going to say? Are people going to believe her?

It wasn't that angelic appearances were common back then. Remember, it's been 400 years since the last prophetic word from the Lord came in Malachi, four centuries. Mary was no more used to an angelic appearance than you are, and she's going to tell her family and friends, "Here's what the angel said." And she's going to tell her family and friends that she of all people of all generations, the Lord has chosen her to carry and give birth to Messiah. Not to mention the fact that while betrothed, she's not married yet. And so if she really does turn up pregnant, it's going to cast dispersions either upon Joseph. Or if he says, "It's not mine," it's going to make her look really bad. And so it's a bit of a different situation. Some might think she's delusional. Some might think she's dishonest. Some might think she's unfaithful.

So far, here in Luke as you've been studying, there have been two separate events of the miraculous. Elizabeth is old, childless, and barren; and now she's conceived. Mary, on the other hand, is young, unmarried, and a virgin. And now it's come for her as well. Both events, the angel Gabriel tells them the news. Mary immediately leaves to go see Elizabeth. It would be about a 70-mile journey for Mary. It would take her 3 to 4 days to get there. Some questions we don't know: Did Mary travel alone? She's a young teenager. Did she set out by herself? Was there a group that went with her? Were there people that maybe accompanied her, and when she made it to where she was going they left her and went back?

And there's some things in this story we don't know. What we do know, though, is what we must know; and that is why she went. She went because the word of the Lord has come to her and revealed all that is taking place, and she's going to go visit Elizabeth. It makes sense, doesn't it? Not many people could understand what Mary's going through. But as she's been told, Elizabeth can. So she sits out on this 70-mile journey, takes her three or four days to get there, and she's going to go and spend time with Elizabeth. And I want to show you in this text what happens in their conversation and why it's so important for us to understand it.

As we walk through this text, let me give you three headings. Number one, make note of this, that our faith strengthens the faith of others: "Our faith strengthens the faith of others." The text begins, verse 39, "In those days Mary arose." "Those days" just refers to it's the days right after the angel Gabriel has made the announcement. Right at that time she leaves.

We keep looking, "Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah." Here's what we know. Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Mary found out what was happening. We know that she's with Elizabeth for three months, just before she gives birth to John the Baptist. So if you put that together, what that means is as soon as Mary found out, she had to have left immediately. So she sets out immediately, goes on this journey of three or four days, about 70 miles. "She enters the house" - verse 40 says - "of Zechariah and she greeted Elizabeth." Well, remember that Zechariah so to speak here, remains mute off stage at this point.

Verse 41, "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." Now, we're accustomed to hearing something about that, right? If you've been pregnant, ladies, you felt the baby move and the baby kick. I remember when my wife was pregnant, she would grab my hand and say, "Hey, you can feel this. The baby's kicking, the baby's rolling around," and something that pregnant ladies get to experience.

Elizabeth, obviously though, feels this is a different kind of movement. This is something a bit different, something a bit abnormal. You could say

that John got a kick out of Mary's arrival. Or you could say that Elizabeth got a kick out of Mary's arrival. By the way, just a side note. The word used for "baby" here is the same word used in Luke 2:16 about a baby in Scripture. A baby in the womb and outside of the womb are both considered as babies.

Now remember, it's easy for us to read this and think, "Well, everybody's familiar with the miraculous. Everybody's familiar with angelic appearances." But that's not the case. Again, it's been 400 years since the word from Malachi. This is unusual. These are two ladies, Mary and Elizabeth, who have been chosen by the Lord for this very unique work, but it's a work that many people would have met with such skepticism: "Who do you think you are? You think that God chose you for this? Mary, you're telling me you're pregnant? I don't see any evidence that you're pregnant yet."

And in time and there is physical evidence she's pregnant, what happens when Joseph says, "It's not mine"? I mean, all the neat part of the Christmas story has quite an earthy element to it, and that earthy element is, "How would people have responded and reacted to the news?" Not to mention that for Mary, while this is exciting, it's got to also be overwhelming. I mean, who can Mary talk to about an angelic announcement of a miraculous birth related to the coming of Messiah?

Well, the only one she can talk to is Elizabeth. So she goes with haste to talk to Elizabeth. And Elizabeth says that something abnormal happened. The baby moved. "The baby leaped," the word says. In fact, it's interesting to note that in this the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in Psalm 114 the exact same word is used there that's translated here as "leaped." In Psalm 114 it's translated as "to skip." This is an active movement. Something happens, and Elizabeth knows something special is happening here.

Now we know from Luke 1:5, that you've already studied, that John the Baptist is filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb. In the Old Testament, to

be filled with the Holy Spirit was often associated with some kind of a prophetic word. And here, as Mary greets Elizabeth, John the Baptist, in the womb of Elizabeth, reacts and responds. He kicks. He leaps. John the Baptist is already, in one sense, doing his work of affirming the arrival of Jesus. It's amazing.

"Elizabeth" - the text tells us - "was filled with the Holy Spirit." It means she was being led, being controlled by the Holy Spirit. We don't know all the details of exactly how Elizabeth knew what was happening; what we do know is the Holy Spirit is unveiling this and revealing this to her. Mary and Elizabeth here, two ladies who both show exemplary faith when it would not have been easy to do so. And what this tells us is that our faith helps to encourage the faith of other people.

Can you imagine Mary making that 70-mile walk to go see Elizabeth, all the while rehearsing in her mind of all the people in the world, the one person who I can talk to about what's going on that will believe me and understand me is Elizabeth. And when she greets Elizabeth, Elizabeth, right away through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, recognizes exactly what's going on, and Elizabeth affirms, she believes the word that Mary tells her. And Mary has to think, "What a blessing that she believes in the same God and the same word that I do," and their faith encourages each other - which is, in one sense, what we do here every Lord's Day, isn't it? We encourage each other.

It's true, you can read your Bible at home by yourself, and I hope you do. You can pray at home by yourself, and I hope you do. But each Lord's Day, we come in this place and we look eye-to-eye with each other and we're saying, "You believe God's word and so do I," no matter what the world says, no matter what the skeptics say, no matter what the unbelievers in your office say, no matter how mocked you may be even by your own family. When you come in this place, you look at people and you say, "We believe in the same God and we believe in His word, and your faith encourages mine and my faith encourages yours because we both have faith in God." That's what's happening here in this conversation. Mary tells

what's going on, Elizabeth rejoices, and their faith is strengthened with each other.

There's a second thing happening. Not only is our faith going to strengthen the faith of others, but, secondly, our joy expands the joy of others: "Our joy expands the joy of others." Look at verse 42: "And then she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'" Without, really, any explanation, other than just she's filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth knows what's happening here, and she believes. And then Elizabeth does something here that is so winsome and so lovely: she rejoices in the blessing of Mary.

Now, you may read that too quickly and think, "Well, of course she does; it's Mary. I mean, Jesus is being born. Yes!" But understand the reality here. Elizabeth, who had longed to have a child, barren, unable to do so, finally, against all odds, other than the plan and decree of God, is now pregnant; and not just pregnant, she's pregnant with the one who will be the forerunner of Messiah. And it would have been very easy for her when Mary should showed up to want the spotlight for herself, to want the recognition to stay on her. But what Elizabeth does is reveals to us this forgotten virtue of Christmas: humility. At Christmastime, we speak a lot about joy and love and hope and peace, and rightly so; those are good parts of the Christmas story. But so is humility.

In Philippians, it speaks of the humility of Christ, who humbled Himself and took on flesh. And here we see the humility of Elizabeth as she rejoices with great joy at the words that greet her from Mary. And just, I mean, just imagine for a moment this scene. If you're pregnant, you want to talk about it. You want people to be excited about it. You want people to celebrate with you. And what happens for Elizabeth when Mary walks in is Mary greets her, Elizabeth's baby leaps for joy. Elizabeth knows, being filled with the Holy Spirit, something unique and special is going on here, and she rejoices with Mary. She does not demand the spotlight for herself.

I mean, for those of you who are grandparents, can you imagine, if you've got a new grandbaby and you've got a picture on your phone of this brand new grandbaby, and you come to church one Sunday and you go up to somebody and say, "I had a grandbaby born this week, I want to show you a picture." And your friend at church says, "Oh before you do, let me show you a picture of my grandbaby." Who's going to say, "Okay, sure. I'll just put my phone up; let's look at yours." No. Why? Because in the flesh, "Let's talk about my grandbaby. Let's talk about what's happened to me. Let's talk about my life and my joy and what I'm excited about."

What Elizabeth does here is she says, "Wherever God is at work, I rejoice. Whatever God is doing is something worth celebrating." And she says, "You're blessed." This is a blessed occasion. And just a quick note about what it means to be blessed. Being blessed is a statement not just about how you feel, but about who you are, which means if you rightly understand what it means to be blessed by the Lord, you can feel blessed right in the midst of the hardest circumstances of your life. Even if life is far different than you'd prefer them to be, if you know who you are and whose you are, it's not just about how you feel, it's about who you are. And so we can be blessed no matter what we are facing. And one of the realities of this brief conversation is the response of Elizabeth to Mary to rejoice in this great thing expands the joy for both of them.

We miss this so often, don't we? Maybe you've been working really hard for promotion at work, and you come to church and somebody says to you, "Hey, I've got great news. I got promoted." And your first thought in the flesh is going to be, "Why you and not me? Why is your career advancing so splendidly and I feel stuck?"

Or maybe you are single and you want to be married and you're praying for a spouse, and one of your single friends texts you and says, "You're not going to believe what happened last night," and just sends this picture of their finger with an engagement ring on it. And if you're not careful, your first response is going to be, "That's not fair. How come you got the blessing when I didn't?"

And it happens in churches. The Lord is doing something special at one church, and another church hears about it, and the first response, rather than gratitude and worship, can be, "God, why there and not here? God, why is it that You're blessing that church and that congregation and not ours in that way?"

It can also happen within the same church, with one ministry that, maybe, is really exploding and another ministry that's not, and both places have faithful, diligent workers, and if you're not careful even in the same congregation, you can look at where you're working and you're serving and you can look at somebody else and say, "Why are they getting the recognition? Why are they getting the attention? Why are they getting affirmed? Why do I feel overlooked? Why is it that I'm working and studying and praying and inviting and my ministry is not growing, but that ministry that meets in the room next door is?" Sometimes the hardest thing to do is to find joy when somebody else has something great happening. And we learn this beautiful part of the Christmas story that Elizabeth shows us, that we can rejoice wherever and however the Lord is at work.

In my own life, I want to live this out as best I can. I'm human like you, and I've got to fight the same struggles that you do of envy or jealousy or pride. And so one of the ways that I have found to try to combat that in my own life is each Lord's Day I get to my office very early, and the very first thing I do is I open up my middle drawer there in my study and I take out a card. And on this card, I've got about 80 names of pastors and their church, and I pray by name for those pastors and for that church. Now, hear my heart. I don't tell you that for you to think, "Oh, what a pious man that prays a lot." No, let me finish. I do that, and then I send them a text and tell them, "I had just finished praying for you."

I pray for this church every Sunday morning. I pray for Dr Lawson. I pray for whoever is preaching if he's out. I pray for your elders every Sunday morning, send a quick text, "Just finished praying for you." I do that for about 80 guys around the state, around the country. And I've got some friends I pray for overseas as well. And one of the reasons I do that is I know my own heart, and I know that just because you're involved in

ministry doesn't mean you're immune from envy or pride. And if I don't pray that way, what I can be prone to do is wonder, "God, why is it You're blessing this church in this way? What about us? God, why is it You did this special thing to this congregation, why not here?"

And I want to combat that by striving as best I can to rejoice wherever and however the Lord is at work. So I pray every single Sunday for these 80 men, these 80 churches. I send them a text every single Sunday, and it's one way for me to say this: "I want to pray for you and intercede for you, and I'm asking for God to do great things in your church," so that when I hear about it, rather than being envious or jealous, I can instead say that I've been praying for that. This is an answer to prayer.

Now, please hear me. Don't hear me saying, "I'm so holy I just pray for everybody." I'm telling you, transparently, it's one of the ways I strive to fight against any kind of sinful pride I don't want in my heart. I don't want to be jealous. I don't want to be envious. But I've got to pray through that, and I've got to make sure and orient my mind every week to say whenever God is at work, we can rejoice in that. And however God chooses providentially to carry out His work, we can say wherever God is moving that is something for us to give thanks.

And we see that lived out in Elizabeth. We see the example from her not demanding that they talk about her pregnancy and her baby, but instead, saying, "Mary, this is a great thing. My own baby has leaped in my womb as he responds to the truthfulness of what you have experienced." So, together, our faith strengthens the faith of others. Our joy expands the joy of others. And then, thirdly, our humility encourages others to humble themselves before the Lord. "Our humility encourages others to humble themselves before the Lord."

Look at verse 43. She says, "And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" In this simple statement or question, there is some rich theology here, as Elizabeth declares that Mary is the mother of the Messiah because Jesus is a baby, which speaks of His humanity. But she

also says that "it's the mother of my Lord," affirming that Jesus is her Lord because He is divine. And now when Elizabeth confesses this, if anyone hears this, if anyone finds out about it, they may think she's really out of her mind: "You're telling me you believe that Mary is pregnant though a virgin, and you're telling me you believe that the baby she's caring is the Messiah, the Redeemer?" Not to mention that when Elizabeth confesses that, Mary would not yet look pregnant at all. The only thing Elizabeth has to go by here is the word from heaven, and that was enough.

That's why I love coming to church on the Lord's Day, because whether at my church or whether I'm here or some other place that I may have the privilege to preach at, when I gather with God's people, when I gather with my brothers and sisters in Christ, here's what I believe we're saying to each other when our bibles are open: "God has spoken; and for us, that is enough." Amen? That's why you've come today, that's why you're here, because we believe God has spoken to us, and we believe His word, and His word is enough.

Verse 44, "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." That word "joy" there is a significant word, and it makes a connection with what's just happened and what's about to happen. Go back to verse 14 that you covered a few weeks ago: "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." All of this is about joy. You go to verse 47, as Mary begins her song of praise: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Wherever God is at work is a time and a place of joy. And my dear friends, I want to encourage you to seek the humility that allows you to rejoice however God chooses to work. It may be in the blessing of somebody else at the church; rejoice in that. It may be a ministry different than the one you labor in that God is blessing in a very tangible way; rejoice in that. It may be in another congregation where something really special is happening by the work of God; rejoice in that. Train your mind to interpret life's events as such, that wherever, however, and whoever you see receiving the blessing of God is an invitation to you to stop and rejoice and to worship, and to find joy that God has once again proven Himself powerful. If we

only rejoice and worship at things that happen directly to us, we will go through life and miss most of our opportunities to give praise to the Lord. And so it's an act of humility.

Verse 45, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." Mary believed. Mary trusted. It didn't make life easy for her. In fact, life was going to get quite hard for her, and not just at Christmastime. I mean, fast-forward 33 years and just consider how hard was Mary's life when her son goes to the cross. You have to trust. You have to trust, not just when what God is doing is carefree and wonderful, but also when what God is doing through you is costly.

And Elizabeth recognizes this: "You're blessed because God has kept His word." Here's Mary and Elizabeth. Neither have great fame, neither have the highest status, but they both are examples of great faith. And Elizabeth says, "This is a great blessing that's taking place." And just for a moment, let me kind of just pull the veil back on the language here for a minute for you. The word "blessed" we find in verse 42 and verse 45. In English, translated the same way. Original language, it's two different words. One word speaks of God's blessing on Mary, the other word speaks of how others will see and regard her as blessed, which is why I said a moment ago that to understand you are blessed has much more to do with who you belong to than it does the circumstances of your life.

So just a quick thought here about this forgotten virtue of Christmas: humility. Elizabeth could have been very jealous and envious that Mary could one-up her. I mean, here's Elizabeth. Didn't think she was going to have a child; now she's going to have a child, a very special, unique child. And here comes Mary, and the Holy Spirit reveals to Elizabeth that "Your child you're caring has a significant role, but his role is going to be to point to another."

Now watch this. When Mary greets Elizabeth, John in Elizabeth's womb leaps. He's already pointing to Jesus, affirming Jesus. Elizabeth, in humility, does not demand a spotlight but immediately rejoices and

celebrates with Mary. Thirty years later, John the Baptist is preaching, he's got his followers, and here comes Jesus' public ministry starting, and there's people going to start to leave John to go listen to Jesus. And some of John's guys will come up to him and say, "We've got a problem here. We're losing the crowds; they're going to Jesus." And John's going to say of Jesus, "He must increase, I must decrease." Watch this. It's exactly what he learned from his mother, who in humility rejoiced at what God was doing in her, but delightfully acknowledged the baby Mary was carrying. When John spoke out in humility, he was just living out the character of his mom.

It matters how you live. It matters the example that you give. And you know as well as I do, the people who always want to try to one-up you, you say, "Hey, I'm so excited; I bought a new car." They say, "Well, that's great. I just bought a new house. Why don't you use your car to go by and see my new house?" Or you say, "We just got back from a great vacation. We spent a week on the beach in Florida." And your friend says, "Oh, I saw that. At the month I spent in Italy on vacation I saw your pictures you were posting. Look nice, look cute."

No matter what you've done, there's somebody that can one-up you, right? Don't you find those people just really fun to be around? Me neither. But there is something really attractive and winsome about someone who is so confident in the providence of God, that however, wherever, and whoever God chooses to bless, they find a reason to rejoice. Amen? And that's what we learn from this story. It's humility, it's gratitude, and it's love.

So, let me ask you three questions as we close this morning. Number one: Do you believe the word of God? Do you believe it? Do you read it, you hear it? Romans 8 says, "His Spirit bears witness with our spirit letting us know we are children of God." Do you believe it? Do you believe it even if nobody else in your office does? Do you believe it even if people in your own family would mock you for it? Do you believe it even when the world parades their rebellion and hatred for the things of God? Can you say that "if the Lord has said it, that's sufficient for me"? It was for them.

Second, are you acting upon the word of God you believe? Are you acting upon it? Are you living it out? When Mary finds out what's going on, she immediately goes to visit with Elizabeth. She wants to see what God is doing and learn more of how this plan is unfolding. She's going to have to leave family. She's going to have to walk 70 miles, maybe with some people with her, maybe by herself, it doesn't tell us. She's going to go be away from home for a number of months. That was common in that day. People would go on these long, extended visits and stay because it was so hard to travel. Once you did it, you would stay and camp out for a while; it didn't make it that easy. How do you know Mary acted upon what she believed? Because she followed through.

So, I ask you, brothers and sisters, do you believe the word of God, and are you acting upon the word of God you believe? And then, third, are you telling others about the word of God? Are you telling others?

Mary makes this long journey and she goes in to see Elizabeth, and they just immediately greet each other and begin and talk about what God is doing. How could you talk about anything else? Reminds me of Acts 4, doesn't it you? We cannot help but speak of that which we have seen and heard.

If you, brothers and sisters, really believe the word of God and you're truly acting upon it, one of the things that should be evident is you're telling others all about it. I hope that you are. I hope you're telling others how God is at work in your life. I hope you're telling others about His blessings He's given to you. I hope you're telling others about the trials you're going through, and how you're trusting in the Lord, and how you're seeing the Lord prove Himself faithful. I hope you're telling others about how God is enough; and even if He's not doing what you hoped or expected, that He's still worthy of your worship. I hope that you're tell telling others, when you see something good happening in their life that you can rejoice with them, and you can build their faith, and you can encourage them, because you would truly believe that anywhere God is at work is an invitation for you to give glory to the God who is faithful and has kept His word.

Believe, obey, and tell. And as we study here in Luke 1 – and soon you'll be in Luke 2 with the birth narratives – of course, we understand that Mary is going to soon give birth to Jesus, and she will hold Him in her arms. But soon, He will hold the weight of our sin upon Himself, because Mary and Elizabeth, while faithful, are sinners in need of a Savior, in desperate need of a Redeemer.

And in about 33 years from Luke 1, Jesus is going to hang on a cross, and it will be the hardest thing Mary's ever had to experience. But for her own sin, Jesus must die; and for Elizabeth's sin, He must die; and for your sin, He must die, which is why to truly understand Christmas, you must understand the cross. And it's why you must trust the Lord, because as much celebration has happened at the birth of Jesus would be infinitely more sorrow at His death, both according to the plan and purpose of God. And so we trust, we believe, and we obey.