
Advent: The Acclamation

Luke 1:39-56¹

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Introduction

The story of Mary and Elizabeth as told in Luke 1 is an example of a genuine friendship that shines brightly right up until our time. Both Mary and Elizabeth were exceptionally God-fearing. Both had found favor with God, and both were chosen by Him for special tasks. Mary and Elizabeth found grace with God.

Elizabeth was pregnant at that time with John the Baptist. God had entrusted her with the task of being the mother of a man who had been prophesied about generations before. She had found great grace with God because of her godly fear. However, as we know, Mary received an even greater commission. After the angel had visited her and she had heard the extraordinary news of the grace that was coming her way, she hurried to Elizabeth's home and shared her joy with her.

From <<https://activechristianity.org/mary-and-elizabeths-absolutely-proven-guide-to-friendship>>

God Works Through Relationships

In the context of Luke 1:39-56, it is important to think of this passage not just as an isolated event, but as a significant part of God's unfolding plan of redemption. The miraculous pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth are seen as divine interventions that set the stage for the coming of Jesus, the son of God, the ultimate act of redemption. Elizabeth's prophetic blessing and Mary's song of praise (Magnificat) are understood within the larger context of God's promises and faithfulness.

These two women had a relationship that believers should emulate. Unity in the Spirit that comes from God's grace and favor and knowing one another so well that Mary would risk a trip to see her cousin Elizabeth.

The Meeting of Two Miraculous Mothers (Luke 1:39-40)

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.

A Dangerous Journey

“It is traditionally believed that Mary received the message of Elizabeth's pregnancy while residing at her home in Nazareth. Elizabeth was living in Ein Karem at the

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time, and the distance between the two villages is one hundred miles. Ein Karem is on the outskirts of Jerusalem and is about 2,474 feet above sea level, while Nazareth is at 1,138 feet. This means Mary had to trek uphill 1,336 feet in elevation. Besides the physical toll it must have taken on the newly pregnant Virgin Mary, the path she took had many hidden dangers. The dirt path that wound through the mountainous region is believed to have been a popular place for bandits, who would surprise unsuspecting travelers. The good news is that the Virgin Mary was not alone. While the Gospel only mentions Mary, it makes sense that Joseph would have ensured the safety of his betrothed."

From <<https://aleteia.org/2019/05/31/mary-traveled-a-highly-dangerous-path-to-visit-elizabeth/>>

Put yourself in Mary's situation. Consider how your brain would be reeling and confused from the visitation and news from the angel Gabriel. It would take time to process, but God's word makes it clear that Mary did not hesitate to act upon God's word from the angel Gabriel.

Despite the potential challenges and risks of traveling while pregnant, Mary promptly set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth, to confirm the message from Gabriel and to see Elizabeth for herself. Such a trip began in obedient faith, but also would confirm the Holy Spirit's work in Mary's life and pregnancy. She was willing to follow God's plan without hesitation.

Faith in God's Word

Mary's journey reflects her faith in God's word. Gabriel told her that Elizabeth was also expecting a child, despite her old age. By setting out to visit Elizabeth, Mary shows that she believes this impossible news. Her lack of hesitation to make such a difficult journey shows faith in God's word.

Desire for Fellowship

Mary's visit to Elizabeth also illustrates the importance of fellowship and community in God's plan of redemption. Mary and Elizabeth were both part of God's extraordinary plan, and their shared experiences provided them with unique comfort and understanding. It is as if Mary could not wait to see Elizabeth and follow through and confirm in her own heart God's plan.

Elizabeth's Prophetic Blessing (Luke 1:41-45)

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."

Elizabeth's Reaction

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb, and after being filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth responded with a loud cry of worship to the

Lord. Elizabeth recognized the reality of the coming birth of the Savior through Mary, and she treats Mary's visit as a direct visitation from the Lord.

Recognition of the Messiah

The leap of John in Elizabeth's womb is a sign of recognition of the presence of Jesus, a powerful testament to the identity of Jesus as the Messiah. Elizabeth and her baby rejoiced in the presence of God's only son. The baby's reaction was miraculous and could only be demonstrated through the power of the Holy Spirit!

A Spirit-filled Greeting

Elizabeth recognizes Mary as "the mother of my Lord" and acknowledges the blessedness of Mary and her faith. In the Old Testament, some of the saints had the Holy Spirit come upon them. Being filled with the Holy Spirit was typically temporary before the coming of Christ. The Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell or live within the believers until after Christ's death and resurrection. This did not happen to believers until the day of Pentecost. The fact that Elizabeth had the privilege of being the mother of John strongly suggests she was certainly a righteous and God-fearing woman. Therefore, one of the reasons Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit was to recognize and confirm Jesus as the son of God and the prophesied Messiah of all people.

Humility, Joy, and Gladness

Elizabeth humbly expresses her joy and gladness at the visit and the confirmation of God's wonderful work. She recognizes the work of the Lord, after the silence of God for four hundred years between the completion of the Old Testament and the birth of Christ.

Fulfillment of Prophecy

Mary and Elizabeth's pregnancies are fulfillments of Old Testament biblical prophecies. Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, is prophesied in the Old Testament (Malachi 3:1) as the one who would prepare the way for the Lord. Mary's son, Jesus, is the long-awaited Messiah, whose coming was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. This event underscores the fulfillment of biblical prophecy in redemptive history. Prophecy serves as the revelation and confirmation of God's promises and redemptive plan. Elizabeth's prophetic blessing aligns with the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah and sets the stage for the fulfillment of these prophecies in Jesus.

Divine Intervention

The circumstances of their pregnancies—Elizabeth conceiving in her old age and Mary conceiving as a virgin—demonstrate God's absolute power and sovereignty. These miraculous events show that God is actively working in the world to bring about His redemptive plan through the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Preparation for Christ's Ministry

John the Baptist, born to Elizabeth, plays a crucial role in preparing the people for the coming of Jesus. He is the voice crying out in the wilderness, making straight the way of the Lord.

Isaiah 40:3-5 This prophecy speaks of "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Malachi 3:1, "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

John becomes the prophet who prepares the way for the Savior, as prophesied in the Old Testament, and fulfilled through the pregnancies of these two righteous women.

Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the Elijah who was to come before the Messiah in the fulfillment of the New Covenant. John fulfilled this prophecy of Elijah coming in preparation of the LORD. (Matthew 11:14-15, 16:14, 17:9-13; Mark 6:14-16, 9:11-13; Luke 1:16-17, John 1:21)

Incarnation of the Savior

Mary's pregnancy results in the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Because Jesus is born of a virgin, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is fully God and fully man. Fully man, born of a woman, but without original sin transmitted physically through man. Through His life, death, burial and resurrection, Jesus accomplishes salvation for all who believe in Him. His birth marks the pivotal point in God's redemptive history for all men who believe.

Mary's child would be *holy*. Since the basic meaning of this word is 'separated to God' rather than 'morally upright', it can simply mean 'divine', 'sharing in the nature of God' (cf. Ps 89:5, 7).

To confirm the message, the angel spoke of the miracles already experienced by Elizabeth, and Mary quietly accepted the promise without any hint of the doubts that had worried Zechariah.

The story emphasizes not so much the virginity of Mary but rather the positive fact that this child would be conceived by God's power and not by human sexual intercourse. He would nevertheless be a descendant of David through being accepted as the legal son of Mary's husband.²

Models of Faith

Both Mary and Elizabeth serve as models of faith and obedience. Their acceptance of God's will, despite the unusual, unclear, and uncertain circumstances, should encourage us to trust in God's plan and timing in our lives. I wonder how any of us would respond to similar circumstances in our own lives. If we were put in similar circumstances; without the indwelling Holy Spirit, after four hundred years of silence from God, with increasing legalism within the Jewish faith, and the continual dominance by other

² Marshall, I. H. (1994). [Luke](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 982). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

governments and cultures, would we have the same faith and obedience as these two Godly women? The pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth are not just personal blessings but noteworthy events in God's grand narrative of redemption. Through these events we can see the hand of God at work, affirming the identities and roles of Jesus and John in His redemptive plan.

Mary's Song of Praise (Magnificat) (Luke 1:46-55)

Mary's Magnificat is a powerful hymn that speaks to several profound themes. Magnificat is the Latin verb for "glorifies".

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."

Old Testament Allusions

The shape of the song is that a shout of exultation to God is followed by a series of clauses indicating why he is to be praised. After the briefest reference to Mary's own reason for thanksgiving, the song tells of what God does for his people, speaking quite concretely of his judgments on the mighty and his blessings for the humble – all in fulfillment of his promises to his people long ago. The past tenses in vs 51–54 most probably express what God is going to do in the future through the Messiah – actions that have already begun to take place in that the Messiah has already been conceived, and actions that are of the same kind as what God has done in the past history of Israel.³

There appear to be pronounced allusions to the Song of Hannah, a poem from the Books of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1–10). Hannah sang her song when she presented Samuel to Eli the priest. It was a prayer to give thanks to God for the birth of her son, Samuel, and a hymn of praise to Yahweh for good fortune. The theme of reversal includes reference to a previously barren woman.

There are additional Old Testament references and similarities in the Magnificat, which you can easily reference online or with a commentary. These references show how the Magnificat is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and continues the themes of fulfillment of God's faithfulness, mercy, and redemption.

³ Marshall, I. H. (1994). [Luke](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 983). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

God's Mercy (Luke 1:46-50)

Mary praises God for His mercy, demonstrated by God's choice of Mary, a humble servant, to be the mother of the Messiah. This reflects God's promises of God's mercy extended to all, regardless of their social economic or political status. In God's economy, fear of the Lord, humility and righteousness are the true indicators of belief, faith, and action on that faith.

God's Justice (Luke 1:51-53)

The Magnificat speaks of a God who ignores societal norms and structures, at least according to how man typically thinks of himself. The New Covenant often manifests itself as a reversal of worldly expectations. Man's values are the opposite of what God values. God will not let the proud and the mighty prevail, and there is a sense that justice will be served with the birth of Jesus, because God's plan of redemption is for those who are humble enough to turn to Christ and accept his Lordship. This is typically not the case with the rich and powerful throughout history. God's very plan of salvation begins and ends with humility. Those who are starving for the food of God's word will eventually be filled with the goodness of the recognition and reality of the Messiah's coming.

Mary speaks of how God has scattered the proud, brought down rulers, and lifted the humble. This would not be clearly evident in the world the Jewish people were living in at the time and throughout their existence.

God's Faithfulness (Luke 1:54-56)

Mary's song is a testament to God's faithfulness, as she recognizes the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham in the coming of her son. This truth reflects the New Covenant's fulfillment of Old Testament promises.

Mary's Magnificat is a song of praise, faith, and trust, reflecting Mary's deep faith and her understanding of God's character. It serves as a powerful reminder of God's enduring promises and His commitment to keeping his promises.

Redemption for All Humanity

The Magnificat speaks to God's redemptive plan for all humanity. Mary's song is not just about her own joy, but also about God's plan to bring salvation to all people through Jesus. Her song anticipates the salvation that will come through Jesus, not just for Israel, but for all who believe, no matter what their socio-economic status, nationality, gender. Mary recognizes that by God's unmerited grace she was chosen to be the mother of God's son!

Fulfillment of God's Promises

The pregnancies of both women are a direct fulfillment of God's promises to His people. Elizabeth's son, who will be born first, prepares the way for Mary's son, Jesus. Mary sings, "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." This reflects the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in these events. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesies about Mary's child (Luke 1:41-45). This divine intervention underscores the significance of these pregnancies in the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. The pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth are not just personal blessings to these two righteous women but are part of God's larger redemptive plan for Israel and all humanity.

The Expectation and Anticipation of the Coming Messiah

Mary's Magnificat is a profound song of praise that praises God for his plan of redemption and anticipates the coming of the Messiah to fulfill that plan.

Anticipation of the Messiah

Mary's song anticipates the coming of the son of David who will initiate the New Covenant. This coming New Covenant will be an age when the Spirit of God lives in God's people, enabling them to live obediently for the Lord. This reflects the Jewish expectation of the Messiah as a deliverer and king. Obviously, they have no idea how God's plan of redemption will work, but like the great fathers of faith in the Old Testament, these ladies act on their belief.

God's Redemptive Plan

The Magnificat outlines God's redemptive plan for Israel and all humanity. Mary recognizes that the coming of her son, Jesus, is a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. She sees that God has chosen her, a humble servant, to play a crucial role in this plan.

God's Action

The song emphasizes the actions of God, beginning with Mary, but then to all Israel. It is the "mighty one" who has done great things for the sake of his holy name. These are key terms used in the Hebrew Bible for God, especially when he acts to save his people.

Reversal of Expectations

The Magnificat speaks of a God who is not bound by man's plans and structures. Throughout Christ's life and ministry, he often reverses man's expectations of what the coming of the Messiah should look like. This sets up the scenario where Christ will fulfill the Old Testament Law but will continually fight against the legalism within the Jewish system. He will break the old legalistic norms and call the poor and needy to come and accept eternal life. The powerful within the Jewish system and within the secular government will typically reject Christ as Messiah because the reality of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection is not the story that the rich and powerful perceived to be true.

Mary's Stay with Elizabeth (Luke 1:56)

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Strengthening faith and encouragement together

The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, as depicted in scripture, is a powerful example of mutual encouragement and strengthening faith. When Mary and Elizabeth meet, the Holy Spirit inspires and enables them to understand God's action more fully in their own lives and in the world. Their encouragement and support for one another leads to the most beautiful words of praise to the Lord in Mary's Magnificat.

Elizabeth instantly and prophetically knows what has happened to Mary. As soon as Mary greets her, she is filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaims, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!" Elizabeth blesses Mary with the same blessing that Deborah, the judge, and prophet, once pronounced to the brave and bold Jael (Judges 5). Mary is blessed for believing the Lord's promises. In this way, Elizabeth's words anticipate Jesus's blessing of those who hear the word of the Lord and obey (Luke 11:28). She encourages Mary by celebrating her faith as well as her role as mother of Jesus. In the same breath, Elizabeth speaks of the child still in Mary's womb as "Lord" – the Bible's first Christological confession!

This mutual encouragement and affirmation of faith between Mary and Elizabeth highlight the importance of community and shared faith experiences in understanding and responding to God's word and the circumstances that God allows in our lives. Spirit-filled relationships are an important aspect of our Savior's birth that we can apply to our own lives.

Reflect and Respond

Faith and Obedience

Mary and Elizabeth's stories remind us of the importance of faith and obedience to God's will. They both trusted in God's promises, even when circumstances seemed impossible. Just as Mary and Elizabeth trusted in God's promises, we are called to trust in God's promises in our lives. Do you read and know God's promises that encourage and grow your faith?

Humility

The passage shows that God's favor is not dependent on our social status or human standards. Mary and Elizabeth were humble women, yet God chose them to play significant roles in His redemptive plan. This teaches us that God values faithfulness and humility, and He can use anyone for His purposes. These women were simply living righteously and faithfully each day, no doubt watching, praying, and hoping for the Messiah to come during their lifetime.

Community

Mary and Elizabeth's relationship illustrates the importance of Christian community and mutual encouragement. They supported and encouraged each other in their faith. This highlights the importance of fellowship and community in our spiritual growth. Community is vital for spiritual maturity and spiritual growth. They stayed together for three months of encouragement and supporting one another in their special God-given historical roles.

Worship

Mary's song, the Magnificat, is a beautiful expression of praise and worship. It reminds us to continually praise God for His goodness and faithfulness. Mary's praise was simply a natural outgrowth of her faith and worship of God in her daily life. What does your daily worship look like? Are you giving God the daily worship that he deserves?

God's Redemptive Plan

The passage reveals God's redemptive plan for humanity. It reminds us that we are part of this plan, and that God is actively working in the world. This gives us hope and assurance in God's ultimate victory. Those of us who have been called to believe are called to be salt and light to those who do not believe. We now have the Holy Spirit inside of us, and access to God's word. Consider what your role is in God's redemptive plan.