

## **A Bible Lesson on Luke 1:39-56 (ESV<sup>1</sup>)**

**Luke 1:39** In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,

After the visit from Gabriel, Mary immediately makes what is probably a 60-70 mile journey to the south to see Elizabeth. This is no easy trip, and this young woman is not one of any great means or advantage. But Gabriel's announcement was practically an invitation to her to go and see what God was doing, and she went.

**40**and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

**41**And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,

What comes pouring out of Elizabeth is at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The picture that Gabriel had given Zechariah wasn't complete enough that she could have otherwise known that Mary was to be mother to the Savior. And she shouts out an excited blessing. What she says is what should have come pouring out of Zechariah, except for the small problem that he was dumb because of his unbelief on the smaller matter of Elizabeth being with child.

**42**and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

This is really a precious picture. Here is this pious wise old saint, beyond natural child-bearing years, yet with child, seeing her young cousin, quite likely in her early teens and knowing by the grace of God that this simple young Jewish peasant woman is going to be mother to Messiah, the One Israel has been longing for from the first days, the One who is going to fulfill the merciful promises of God dating back all the way to Genesis and the fall of humanity. And she can't contain her joy!

**43**And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Humility is a family characteristic of all those genuinely saved. We have seen it in Mary last week. Here it is in Elizabeth. "But why am I so blessed?" That's the right question for any of us.

Elizabeth surely doesn't grasp the full implications of what she's just said. With the advantage of the full New Testament revelation, we seem to be able to keep it in focus only for short brilliant glimpses. But by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit she nails it. Indeed this is the mother of her Lord!

**44**For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

**45**And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

---

<sup>1</sup> Scripture taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. Copyright 2000; 2001, by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This is a truly beautiful picture of real humility. Elizabeth knows and absolutely doesn't buck the fact that it's Mary who is carrying Messiah. She and her son aren't the main show, and that's fine. What matters is God's gracious provision.

How does Elizabeth know what Mary has been told? We're not given that information. What we are shown is that Elizabeth knows that to take God at His word is essential. Blessed/happy and to be envied/ (Amplified) is she who has taken God at His word.

J.C. Ryle wrote concerning this picture, "We need not wonder that this holy woman should thus commend faith. No doubt she was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. She knew the great things that faith had done. What is the whole history of God's saints in every age but a record of men and women who obtained a good report by faith? What is the simple story of all from Abel downwards but a narrative of redeemed sinners who believed, and so were blessed? By faith they embraced promises. By faith they lived. By faith they walked. By faith they endured hardships. By faith they looked to an unseen savior, and good things yet to come. By faith they battled with the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith they overcame, and got safe home. Of this goodly company the virgin Mary was proving herself one. No wonder that Elizabeth said 'Blessed is she that believed.'"

It's the story of the Book from one cover to the other. God's people take Him at His word and obey. The first temptation was "Did God really say?" and "You need not obey." Ever since, that has been humanity's characteristic problem. In the other side, it is the great privilege and mark of God's redeemed people to believe and to obey.

**<sup>46</sup>And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,**

"My soul glorifies/magnifies the Lord." This song is called "The Magnificat" because of the first word of it in the Latin translation. What comes from her is stunning in its depth and simple honesty. This young woman delivers a response that shows her entire frame of reference to be the Scriptures and her heart to be right before her Maker.

It's important to see that the terms/language she responds in are those of the Biblical revelation. She's clearly got the Word in her heart and now it comes pouring out of her ... the handout gives OT sources for essentially everything she utters here ... there is a lesson in this for us ... we fool ourselves if we think that we can improve on the language and categories that God has provided for us in the Scriptures ...

**<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**

Mary says "God my Savior." Gabriel has promised that He will be "the Son of the Most High" and that He will sit on David's throne and reign forever. She recognizes that she has been chosen to do what all Jewish women had long prayed to do, to give birth to Messiah.

**<sup>48</sup>for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;**

Again there is humility of this young woman. That's Mary's attitude, and ours as well, if we have any sense.

She will be called "blessed." Indeed. The Jews had been waiting and longing for the promised deliverer and Mary will be the one to give him birth.

**<sup>49</sup>for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.**

Note how quickly Mary's thoughts turn from the grace that God has shown her in particular, to reflection on the character and nature of God. He is holy, apart, separate, in His own class.

**50And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.**

And yet there is the understanding that God's grace/protection/mercy extends particularly to His own people, to those who fear or have a reverent awe and respect for him.

**51He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;**

God is active in the affairs of men, and He simply will not brook arrogance/rebellion. That is as fundamental as the fact that humility is a family characteristic of His people.

**52he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;**

**53he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.**

God sovereignly, in His own time and for His own purposes, causes whatever reversals of human fortune that He wills. There is in this a special concern for the weak and downtrodden. God will act on their behalf.

**54He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,**

**55as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."**

This is in general true, but in the context that Mary speaks it, it is especially pointed. God is in the process of fulfilling His most solemn promise to Israel, that of sending a Redeemer. This is His ultimate act of mercy!

**56And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.**

### **Old Testament Language in Mary's Song**

**1:46/ My soul Magnifies the LORD: 1 Sam 2:1, Ps 69:30, 34:3, 35:9**

**1:47/ my spirit rejoices in God my Savior: Hab 3:18, Ps 25:5 (LXX)**

**1:48/ for he has looked on the humble state of his servant: 1 Sam 1:11, 9:16 c.f. Gen 16:11, 29:32; Ps 113:5-6**

From now on all generations will call me blessed: **Gen 30:13**

**1:49/ for the Mighty One: Ps 89:8 (LXX), Zeph 3:17 (LXX)**

has done great things for me: **Deut 10:21**

holy is his name: **Ps 111 :9**

**1:50/ His mercy is for those who fear him: Ps 103:13, 17**

from generation to generation: **Ps 89:2**

**1:51/** He has acted mightily with His arm. **Ps 89:10**

**1:52/** He has brought down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of humble estate: **1 Sam 2:4,7; Job 12:19; Ezek 21 :31**

**1:53/** He has filled the hungry with good things: **1 Sam 2:5; Ps 107:9**

and has sent the rich away empty: **Job22:9**

**1:54/** He has helped his servant Israel: **Isa 41 :8-9**

In remembrance of His mercy: **Ps 98:3**

**1:55/** and his offspring forever: **2 Sam 22:51**

our fathers: **Mic 7:20**