

JOY IN THE LORD ! **LUKE 1:39-56**

Do you hear the common refrain? Christmas is a time of joy and rejoicing. It is a time of good news of great joy (Lk 2:10). And, as we study Luke 1, we see that joy is one of the initial responses to the good news of Christmas.

In Luke 1 the Gospel writer tells us four responses to the good news of Christmas. The first response is the unbelief of Zechariah. The second response is the faith of Mary. Today, we look at the third response of the joy of John the Baptist, Elizabeth, and Mary.

From beginning to end our passage talks about joy as one of the responses to the good news of Christmas. Why is there joy?. As Christians we rejoice in this season of Advent and Christmas because God put aside the laws of nature in order to accomplish His salvation.

And yet, for many people Christmas time is a time of sadness and loneliness. I think of widows and widowers without their spouse. I think of parents without their children or children without their parents. I think of those who have loved ones serving overseas or doing time in prison. I think of those who can't afford presents or even a Christmas meal for their children. I think of those who get depressed by the season or by the alcohol or by the cost. I think of those in broken homes. Everyone else looks so happy and joyful while they themselves feel so miserable.

I If there is a place of Joy

As you know, Mary & Elizabeth were pregnant at the same time. Elizabeth was old and past the age of child-bearing and Mary was a young virgin lady. Yet, don't forget what they all had in common: they were cousins, they were both on their first pregnancy, they both became pregnant through a mighty act of God, God sent the angel Gabriel to announce both conceptions and births, and they both were given a child who played a key role in God's plan of salvation.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he told her about the pregnancy of Elizabeth (Lk 1:37). When Mary heard this, she "hurried" off to see Elizabeth. This was no small undertaking. Remember, Mary was in Nazareth of Galilee; Elizabeth was in the hill country of Judea. **This was a 4 or 5 day journey of over 80 miles, on foot.** For a young lady. Newly pregnant. By herself. She faced the cold of night, the heat of day, the threat of robbers. And, at the end of her pregnancy she would be making the same journey with Joseph because Bethlehem was also in the hill country of Judea.

The hill country of Judea occupies a prominent place in the history of salvation. It is here where circumcision was first instituted. It is here where Abraham first possessed the land. It is here where David received his crown. It is here where laid the remains of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. So, we know something important to God's plan for our salvation is about to happen and it did with the birth of Christ.

Why was it that Mary "hurried" to see Elizabeth? To confirm for herself what the angel had told her namely, "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" (Lk 1:36). This way Mary sees for herself as the angel put it that "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). **She sees that a barren woman is able to bear children. Which means, of course, that a virgin woman like herself is also able to bear children.**

Mary also "hurried" off to give Elizabeth some badly needed woman-to-woman support. The two ladies compared notes and thoughts on their miraculous pregnancies. But, then, neither one had anyone else to talk to. Scripture tells us that Elizabeth "became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion" (Lk 1:24). As for Mary, she had no one to talk to because she was pregnant outside of marriage. These two godly ladies rejoiced together, wept together, laughed together, prayed together, and encouraged one another (Lk 1:56).

Mary arrived when Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy (Lk 1:36). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home (Lk 1:56). **Telling us what? Telling us Mary stayed until Elizabeth gave birth. Helping. Encouraging. Praying. Rejoicing (Lk 1:58).**

II The Joy of baby John the Baptizer, in the womb

What happened when Mary first showed up and greeted Elizabeth? Luke tells us that (Lk 1:41) When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb ...According to Elizabeth, (Lk 1:44) As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Baby John "leaped." Baby John "leaped for joy." The word for "leap" describes sheep or goats or other frisky animals skipping or leaping in a field. It expresses their excitement and happiness.

Pregnant mothers get so excited when they first feel the baby moving within them. But what Elizabeth felt was far more than just baby changing positions. Baby John must have kicked out and he must have kicked hard. It

was a joyful kick, an exuberant kick, a boisterous kick.

It is important we recognize why John the Baptizer leaped for joy. It starts with the Spirit. **The angel told Zechariah that John the Baptizer would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb** (Lk 1:15). Filled with the Holy Spirit, John the Baptizer was leaping and kicking with joy because he knew he was in the presence of the Messiah, the Savior, God's only begotten Son, He Who sits on the throne of David and rules forever (Lk 1:31-33). Baby John leaped for joy because of Jesus.

III The Joy of aged Elizabeth

This brings us to Elizabeth's reaction to the good news of Christmas. Three times Elizabeth uses the word "blessed." First, she says to Mary, "blessed is the child you will bear" (Lk 1:42). Why is Mary's child blessed? Elizabeth identifies the child as "my Lord." Meaning what? Meaning, to use the words of the angel, that Elizabeth recognizes the child to be Jesus the Savior, the Son of the Most High, a descendent of David, someone Who will reign over the house of Jacob forever (Lk 1:32-33). Or, to put it another way, Elizabeth pronounces the child to be "blessed" because He is the Messiah.

Second, Elizabeth also announces Mary to be "blessed." Mary is "blessed ... among women" (Lk 1:42). Note that Elizabeth did not say that Mary was blessed above women but among women, and certainly this is true. But, as I said last week, we do not want to minimize Mary's place in the plan of God.

So, in what way was Mary blessed? Elizabeth recognized that Mary has been blessed to be the God-bearer, to give birth to the Messiah, to be the vessel used by God so that the second person of the triune Godhead would take on human flesh. Elizabeth recognized that Mary has been blessed by God to nurse and care for and teach the Messiah! Elizabeth recognized that Mary has been blessed by God to be the mother of the Lord.

What God did for Elizabeth and Zechariah was an amazing, wondrous thing: He opened Elizabeth's womb and allowed them to have a child in their old age. However, **Elizabeth recognized that what God did for Mary was far greater than what He did for her.**

Elizabeth uses the word "blessed" one more time. This time she looks at Mary's faith rather than Mary's baby. She says, (Lk 1:45) Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

What is it that Mary believed? The word which Mary accepted and believed out of faith was Gabriel's declaration about the conception by the Spirit and the virgin birth. Imagine, without any physical participation by a man Mary was going to conceive and give birth. Mary believed God would accomplish this. Mary believed the Creator Spirit was going to do this amazing work in her life. Mary also believed, as the angel said, that the baby inside of her is the Messiah. What amazing faith! Mary has a faith in the power and work of God that even godly Zechariah does not have.

We aren't told if Elizabeth had the faith her husband did not. We aren't told if she responded in faith, like Mary, to the revelation of Gabriel. Yet, she saw the difference between her husband and her cousin. She saw her husband shut off in his own little world unable to talk or to hear. She saw and heard her cousin talk about God and His wondrous and almighty ways. Elizabeth saw Mary's faith so she pronounced Mary to be blessed.

"Blessed is she who has believed." **Elizabeth recognized that faith is the key to being blessed and happy in the season of Advent and Christmas.**

Now, Elizabeth pronounces all of this "in a loud voice" (Lk 1:42).

Throughout the Bible, to cry with a loud voice is a mark of divine inspiration. This is Luke's way of acknowledging that the words of Elizabeth are inspired by the Spirit of God. Telling us what? Telling us that it has been revealed to Elizabeth, by the Spirit of God, that Jesus is the blessed Messiah and that Mary is blessed as the faithful mother of the Lord.

Elizabeth, as Scripture tells us, "was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:41).

Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit whose fruit includes joy. So, we are not surprised to find out that to cry with a loud voice is also a mark of joyful praise. In other words, there is no envy on Elizabeth's part. No jealousy. No pouting because Jesus and Mary have a greater status than does baby John and Elizabeth. Rather, there is only praise and joy.

IV The Joy of the blessed Mary

Mary's response to the good news of Christmas involves more than belief. In our passage we see her response also includes joy. And Mary said: (Lk 1:46-47) My soul glorifies the Lord (47) and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior ...

A joyful Mary breaks out into song. Mary's great desire in her song is to magnify the Lord, not herself. So, again and again she points to what God

has done.

First, Mary recognizes what God has done for **her**: He has been "mindful of the humble state of his servant" (Lk 1:48); He "has done great things for me" (Lk 1:49).

Second, Mary recognizes what God has done for **all believers**: "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50); "He has performed mighty deeds with his arm" (Lk 1:51); He "has lifted up the humble" (Lk 1:52); "He has filled the hungry with good things" (Lk 1:53).

Third, Mary recognizes what God has done for **Israel**: He has been "merciful" (Lk 1:54); He has "remembered" His promises to Abraham and his descendants (Lk 1:54).

What is Mary's reaction to the good news of Christmas? Mary sings of the great and glorious works of God. Mary, like baby John and Elizabeth, is filled with joy.

Joy

So, what is joy? What does it mean to rejoice? What happens when someone is joyful?

Baby John rejoices and he leaps for joy. Elizabeth rejoices and she speaks in a loud voice. Mary rejoices and she breaks out in song.

Joy is an emotion that requires expression. Joy is not something you keep to yourself. Joy is not something to hoard and ladle out in little measures. Joy is a whole-hearted response to something. That is why we sing out this advent season.

When we look through the Gospels, we see that joy always has to do with Jesus. Paul tells us that our joy is in the Lord (Phil 4:4). We see that there is joy at the conception and birth of Jesus. Joy, because God is at work. Joy, because God is advancing His plan for our salvation. Joy, because the Messiah has come or is coming. Joy, because God is being faithful to His covenant promises. Joy, because ours is salvation from sin and Satan and hell's punishment.

Joy is in the Lord and comes from the Lord. Take Jesus out of the equation, and the joy is gone as well. In other words, as long as you have Jesus, you have the joy. Those who have met and know Jesus have every

reason for joy. Those who know or who have met the Savior are filled with joy. For believers everywhere, Christmas time is joy's time. I invite you to come to Jesus because then yours is joy.

Conclusion

What occupies your heart in this Christmas season? If your mind is filled with thoughts of presents and parties and decorations and Santas, then joy is missing. If your heart is filled with thoughts of problems and worries and income and health and illness, then joy is missing. But, if your mind and heart are filled with the Lord Jesus, then like Mary, Elizabeth and baby John you respond with joy.

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