

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 December 2017

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles to Luke chapter 1. This morning we are continuing our four-part Christmas series.

! And this morning is the second in the series. and you'd remember those of you who were here last week that we considered the angel's announcement to Mary that she was going to give birth to the Savior.

And we considered why the virgin birth is necessary. Well, this morning we pick up at verse 39 in Luke chapter 1.

And we will conclude at verse 56. This morning we are considering Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Luke chapter 1.

We're getting in verse 39. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah.

[1 : 08] And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.

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.

And 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.

[2 : 17] 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.

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. Let's pray together. Father, we pause this morning to look to you to ask for your help.

[3 : 33] Lord, we come to a familiar passage of Scripture and it is so easy for us to approach it in a familiar way. And Lord, we ask this morning that you would grant to us a freshness of eyes and heart as we engage this passage this morning.

And we pray that you would speak to us concerning the divine intent that is contained in this passage.

We ask that you would do this for us in Jesus' name. Amen. Those of you who keep up with popular news probably are aware that Rihanna, I know some of you are probably laughing because of my reference to Rihanna.

I just came across a news story about Rihanna and how she hails from Barbados and the government in Barbados decided to honor her by naming the street where she was born after her. And this was a Daily Mail article. And what struck me as I read the article was that the author seemed more concerned with describing what Rihanna wore.

[4 : 56] The yellow, bold, canary dress that was a shirt that slipped off of her shoulders and the stiletto heels that she wore and the little, tiny, complimentary purse that she wore with that.

And you read the article, you wonder, is this about the renaming of this street? Although there was reference to that, but largely it was about just accenting this woman and what she wore and how she looked.

In this account this morning that we are reading about Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Luke does not do that. Luke does not distract us with the unimportant.

Luke doesn't tell us what Mary wore. He doesn't tell us what Elizabeth wore. He doesn't tell us the hairstyles that they had. Luke does none of that. Instead, what Luke does is Luke helps us to see. Remember, Luke is a historian, but Luke is helping us to see that he is more than just recording history. What he's doing in this account is he's also teaching theology.

[6 : 15] And Luke is teaching the theology about Jesus Christ so that, as he pointed out earlier in verse 4 to Theophilus so that Theophilus would have certainty about the things that he was taught.

That was the point of Luke's account in the Gospel of Luke. And what Luke did for Theophilus, really, he has done for us. What Luke has done for Theophilus, he has done for every person who would seek to know who this man, Jesus Christ, who he is and what he did.

Remember, Luke is going to end his Gospel and he's going to end with the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus. And he wants Theophilus to know who Jesus was.

He wants Theophilus to know that the one who was crucified was not just an ordinary person. The one who was resurrected was not just an ordinary person. So Luke is careful to help us to see who Jesus Christ is so that we can have certainty in what we believe.

I think if we consider the fact that Luke felt Theophilus needed certainty, Luke would have been writing roughly about 30 or so years after Jesus Christ walked the face of the earth.

[7 : 52] And if Theophilus needed certainty, then we who are removed some 2,000 years from that time, we also need certainty. And this Gospel of Luke and in particular this account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth helps to give us certainty about what we believe about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In this encounter that we have, we have this encounter of two women, two pregnant women, a young virgin named Mary and her old cousin named Elizabeth. Mary was a few days pregnant with Jesus and Elizabeth, six months pregnant with John.

And what Luke does in this account is Luke highlights Mary's pregnancy and he highlights Mary's song to help us to see that in Mary's pregnancy, there's Christ's deity and in Mary's song is God's mercy.

That's what Luke does as he gives this account of the visit between Mary and Elizabeth. He wants us to see the deity of Christ.

He wants us to see the mercy of God. And so in our remaining time this morning, I want us to consider from this passage these two theological truths that we see in this account.

[9 : 27] First, Christ's deity and second, God's mercy. So first, Christ's deity. Notice in verse 1, sorry, verse 39, notice in verse 39 that there's now again another change of location.

This time we have changed from a town in Galilee to a town in Judah. And a few verses earlier, Gabriel announced to Mary that through the power of the Holy Spirit she was going to conceive and she was going to bear a child who would be the Son of God and she was to call him Jesus.

And the angel also told Mary that her cousin, Elizabeth, who was advanced in years and known to be barren, had conceived a child and was six months pregnant.

And no doubt it was this information that caused Mary to make that long journey. We're told it was about 80 to 100 miles.

Would have taken Mary about three to four days to travel there. And remember, Mary's only around 13 or so years old at this point. And no doubt it was that information, your cousin Elizabeth, who could not have children, who was now advanced in years.

[10 : 48] She is six months pregnant. And so Elizabeth receives this visit from Mary. And Mary enters the house of Elizabeth and she greets her.

And we're told in verse 41 that six months old John the Baptist leaps in Elizabeth's womb. Now some would say, well, there's nothing extraordinary about that.

Babies in the womb around that age, they tend to move about. But it's pretty clear that that's not what is happening here.

Luke helps us to see that John's leaping was not merely a baby moving around in the womb. Instead, he helps us to see that it was the Holy Spirit who supernaturally revealed both to John and to Elizabeth that Mary was pregnant with the Messiah.

And you'd remember when the angel went to Zechariah, he said to Zechariah that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. From in the, not from birth, but from the time he was in the womb.

[12:02] Elizabeth then blesses Mary. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaims in a loud cry and she blesses Mary and she blesses the child in Mary's womb.

And she marvels that the mother of her Lord would come to visit her. And this is what she said explaining how John leaped in her womb when Mary's greeting came into her air.

And so I think a legitimate question for us to consider this morning as we look at this account is why were John and Elizabeth stirred by Mary's voice?

Was it just the excitement in her voice or was Mary in some way special? What was it that caused both John and Elizabeth to react to the voice of Mary?

It was not the sound in Mary's voice. Instead, it was the child in Mary's womb. It was the child in Mary's womb even though Jesus would have only been a few days old at that time.

[13:24] And it's important for us to see that Luke wants us to recognize the deity of Christ in Mary's pregnancy. Luke wants us to see that this encounter with Elizabeth and John is serving as a dramatic confirmation that all that Gabriel said to Mary had begun to take place.

And so we see in verse 45, when Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, she says to Mary, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her of the Lord. Elizabeth could only have been speaking based on what the Holy Spirit revealed to her because at this point in the account, Mary had said nothing to her. Mary just entered the house and greeted her.

And Elizabeth is able to say to her, blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. Remember, Luke is a historian.

Luke is being careful in his account that he gives this orderly account of how things would have happened. And no doubt he would have interviewed Mary and Elizabeth and found out about these particular things.

[14:45] Now, when I talk about Christ's deity, or when Christ's deity is referred to in general, it means that he is God in the flesh. But Jesus Christ is God in human flesh.

And what we see in this passage is that if you look at verse 28, for example, in verse 28, when Gabriel first came to Mary, he said to her, greetings, O favored one, the Lord, is with you.

That's earlier in verse 28. And then in verse 32, Gabriel says to Mary, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David.

And then here in verse 43, Elizabeth refers to Jesus as Lord when she refers to Mary as the mother father of my Lord.

And then finally in verse 45, Mary refers to that which was spoken to her from the Lord.

[16:01] And here she's referring to God the father using the same title that was just given to Jesus as Lord. God. So the point that not just what I'm trying to make, but that Luke is making by giving us this account of what was spoken both to Mary and by Elizabeth is he's helping us to see that Jesus Christ is divine, that Jesus Christ is God, that the same title attributed to God the father is the same title attributed to God the son.

And the only way that Mary, sorry, the only way that Elizabeth knew this, Elizabeth had to have had this revealed to her by the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth had to have had the Holy Spirit to reveal to her that Jesus Christ is God to attribute to him the same title Lord that she also attributed to God the father.

And the reason this is important this morning is that it is no different for us. The only way that we can come to a true conviction and believe that Jesus Christ is God, that he is God incarnate, that he is God in the flesh, is that it has to be revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Essentially, it's the same words that Jesus spoke to Peter when Peter said, you're the Christ, the son of the living God, when Jesus said to Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. And I want you to think about that this morning.

If you know within your heart of hearts that you believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, that he is the second person of the Godhead, then you have had that revealed to you by the Holy Spirit.

[18:10] You know that no other way. You know that no other way. You only know it because the Holy Spirit revealed it to you, because divine revelation is needed.

No amount of human brilliance, no amount of human ability will bring us to the conviction that Jesus Christ is God apart from the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the one who revealed this truth to John and also to Elizabeth.

And I think as we consider this this morning, this is a precious truth. It's a precious, precious truth. And we can easily ignore how we have come to know it.

We've only come to know it by divine revelation. Jesus walked the face of the earth and many people he encountered did not believe that he was God.

Jesus died and rose again and there are many people who still did not believe that he was God.

And there are people who believe today that maybe if they lived in that time and they were around Jesus they would have believed.

[19:34] Not necessarily so. The gift of faith is exactly that. It is a gift and it comes from the Holy Spirit.

And when we talk about believing, this is not just some mental ascent. The belief that scripture teaches is a belief that transforms our lives.

It is a belief that makes a difference in our lives. To say that I believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh and that doesn't touch and transform my life and I continue to live in sin and in disobedience to the Lord is to evidence that I don't truly believe that.

When we truly believe that Jesus Christ is God, that he is savior, we repent, we turn from sin, we turn to him and we surrender our lives and we live for him.

Now as he highlights Christ's deity in Mary's pregnancy, it's important for us to see that Luke is not making a theological point in a vacuum.

[20:51] Again, Luke is helping us to see who this one is. This one who is going to die, this one who is going to resurrect, this one who is going to reconcile sinners to God.

That is Luke's goal. Luke is not randomly writing and doesn't know where he wants to end up. Luke knows where he wants to end up. So he wants us to see that this one who will die is God himself. God the Son. the second person of the Godhead. He was God in human flesh. So that's Luke's first theological point that he helps us to see in Mary's pregnancy, Christ's deity.

Let's now consider the second theological truth that is highlighted in this passage, and it is God's mercy. mercy. We see God's mercy highlighted in Mary's song in verses 46 through 55.

Although Mary believed the word from the time it was spoken to her by the angel, she's now experiencing that word. She's experiencing the fulfillment of the word that was spoken to her.

[22:03] She sees with her own eyes. Her old cousin Elizabeth is visibly pregnant. And she witnesses Elizabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit, and her pregnant cousin tells her that the six-month-old child in her womb leaped for joy at the sound of her greeting.

And then Elizabeth blesses Mary and addresses the child as Lord, and Mary's just overcome by all of this.

And she's just overcome. What the angel has spoken to her is meeting its fulfillment. And Mary breaks out into singing. She sings this song that we commonly refer to as the Magnificat.

And Magnificat, the word Magnificat, is the first word of the Latin translation of the first line of Mary's song when she says, my soul magnifies the Lord.

And when we consider Mary's song, we can see that the structure of it is the structure of a typical psalm in the Psalms. Mary's song is the first song that in scripture of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

[23:24] It's the first song that rejoices in God coming down to earth and taking on human flesh to redeem sinners. sinners. And so what we have is this approximately 13-year-old virgin who unlike Zachariah believed God.

And God's word has begun to be performed in her as confirmed by her cousin Elizabeth. And she's just simply overwhelmed with joy. As she considers God's redemptive work in her life personally and also God's redemptive work for his people generally.

And so she sings. Now we're not told if Zachariah was there but there's good probability that he was there because he was not able to speak and he may have been in seclusion but would have been in the general house.

And if he was there, Mary's song of faith would have reminded him of his unbelief. Here's Mary who believed that the angel said would come to pass and she is now singing and Zachariah who did not

believe is dumb, unable to speak.

What is very clear for Mary's song is that Mary had taken God's word into her heart. It's very clear for Mary's song that she would have committed scripture to heart because almost every line of her song references God's word.

[25 : 02] There's a reference to the psalm. She begins by singing from the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel chapter 2 after the Lord blessed Hannah with a child after many years of waiting.

And what is clear is that even though Mary as young as she was, was singing a song that was personal to her, Mary was also singing a song on behalf of God's people, a song that spoke about God's promised redemption to his people.

That was recorded in scripture. And so Mary's song sings of God's mercy. For she sings of God's mercy to her personally.

You see this in verses 46 through 49. Mary rejoices in what God has done for her. Look at what she says in verses 46 and 47.

My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. Mary identifies God as her Savior and in so doing she acknowledges that she is a sinner and in need of a Savior.

[26 : 19] And she's overwhelmed that the God of the universe has looked upon her, a poor young virgin from a town of no reputation. And he's blessed with the privilege of bearing the Savior of the world.

In verses 48 and 49, Mary humbly acknowledges that all generations will call her blessed. Not because she was born without sin, as is taught in Roman Catholicism, but simply because the mighty one has done great things for me, she said.

And holy is his name. Not my name. Holy is his name. We see Mary's own testimony of God's gracious dealings with her.

She praises God and in so doing, she sets an example to point others to praise God as well and not her. But yet, there are countless numbers in Roman Catholicism who worship Mary and pray to Mary.

And Mary's song about God's gracious dealings with her tells an entirely different story. She says, I rejoice in God, my Savior, because he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

[27 : 46] So she points us to magnify God and not herself. As we consider how the Lord zeroed in on this little girl in this obscure town, as we consider his mercy to Mary personally, we should be encouraged and be reminded of God's mercy to us as well, that in the same way that God was able to look at her lowly condition and her obscure circumstances, someone who would seem to be insignificant, the God of the universe, knows where we are as well.

None of us is lost to his view. None of us is lost to his awareness. God sees us and knows us and he still looks on the humble, he still looks on the helpless, and he does mighty things for them.

And this should encourage all of us. I know we live in a country where it is often said, and I encounter this regularly as we try to help people find work and they would often say, well, you know, it's who you know.

If you don't know someone in this town, you can't find a job. And for many people, that is what they've been shaped to believe. Mary tells us a different story. Mary tells us that God extends personal care to his people.

And so we need not be concerned about who doesn't see us. We need not be concerned about what we consider to be less than desirable circumstances. The God of the universe is able to see us.

[29 : 30] He's able to do great things for us as he did for Mary. But after singing about God's mercy to her personally, Mary in verses 46 through 49, she goes on and she sings about God's mercy to his people generally.

And she does that in verses 50 through 55. Notice what she says beginning in verse 50. 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.

Mary is recounting God's mercy towards his people in terms of his redemptive acts throughout history. She says in verse 50, his mercy is from generation to generation.

[30 : 54] Never ceases. Never ceases. God's mercy is as real in our generation as it has been in every generation past.

His mercy is real for us just as it was in Mary's generation when Jesus Christ was born. That same mercy God is faithful to show mercy from generation to generation.

You know, when we consider the world and we consider the depravity that we see, and we see the fallenness of the world in which we live, and we see the great extent to which people will go to sin and to harm others, we could easily lose hope and we could easily despair.

But Scripture says his mercy endures. From generation to generation, God's mercy is real in the midst of all the atrocities, in the midst of all the calamities, in the midst of all that is going on today, God's mercy is from generation to generation.

And it's a false idea that the God of the Old Testament was this angry God, God, and the God of the New Testament because of Jesus, is now a little happier and a little nicer.

[32 : 31] And there are people who have this character of God the Father that he is angry in the Old Testament and then he has been somehow appeased in the New Testament.

The witness of Scripture is different. No, he is merciful. His mercy is from generation to generation. His mercy never ceases.

Look at verses 51 through 53. While God extends mercy to the humble, he exercises might against the proud.

He brings down the mighty from their high horse, but he exalts the humble and he fills those who in humility recognize their emptiness. But he sends away empty those who can't see their emptiness because in their own eyes, they are rich.

And I encourage us to hear this this morning. I feel convicted to pause to say to us, let this sink in. Because I believe that you, as I, I'm aware that sometimes we can be consciously arrogant, we can be consciously proud.

[33 : 55] His might is against us when we are. And the God of the universe is the last person we want against us.

It's better to have the U.S. army and all of its military might against us than the God of the universe. God resists the proud.

He gives grace to the humble. And this is Mary's song. She's singing about this God, how he brings down the mighty and he exalts the humble.

gospel. But this is not just speaking about something in a vacuum.

This is, this is helping us to see, this is redemptive language. This is helping us to see how God worked and showed his mercy in the life of the nation of Israel.

[35 : 00] Notice she says, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring. And no doubt Mary is referencing historical events. She's referencing how God scattered the proud and brought down the mighty like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar and how he raised up the humble like Joseph and David and Daniel and Esther.

there. There's also a sense that Mary is singing about what the incarnation means. That the incarnation means a divine breaking into human history, a readjustment of life generally, that God through the Messiah is extending mercy to the humble and he's exercising might against the proud. God. And this is a reminder to us this morning that really there are only two ways to live. Basically two ways to live as those who have received God's mercy and will have God's mercy extended to them or as those who will have God's mercy exercised against them.

The humble who recognize their need will experience his mercy towards them, the proud would experience his might against them.

I want to ask us this morning, which are you more evident of? Are you more evident of God's mercy being extended to you because you recognize your emptiness, because you recognize your neediness?

[36 : 44] or are you more aware of resistance that God is extending might against you instead?

even in this moment, God is extending mercy. Even in this moment, he's extending mercy by calling you to humble yourself, to see your emptiness, to see your neediness, to see your brokenness, if you haven't already.

it doesn't take us long to see that although Mary rejoiced because God has done great things for her, the magnificat is about God.

It's not about Mary. And I think this is instructive for us, we who have experienced God's mercy and the forgiveness of our sins.

we need to magnify God for his mightiest deed accomplished for us on Calvary's cross. Mary's song was about what God did in her womb.

[38 : 04] And that should provoke our song of what God has done in our hearts. That he's taken our hearts of stone and turned them into hearts of flesh. He's taken our hearts that would be slow to forgive and enabled us in view of his mercy to be able to forgive.

And our song this morning should be about him. There's some of you here this morning, no doubt, are just like Zachariah, unable to sing a song like Mary.

you're mute. Even having the account of the Savior's birth recounted to you, you're mute.

It doesn't result in a breaking forth of rejoicing and singing because the Savior has not only been born into the world, he's been born into your heart.

But you too can have a song. You too can have a song as Mary had a song because God's mercy is from generation to generation.

[39 : 29] God's mercy is being extended to you this morning if you would humble yourself and you would acknowledge your need for mercy. And then these words of Mary's song can become your song as well.

And even more so because the Savior who Mary sang about has now lived and died for sinners and resurrected.

And so even more so because of what Christ has done, we can rejoice and we can sing a song to God.

And if you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you have not trusted Jesus Christ. My prayer for you is that you would receive of God's mercy today, that you would turn from sin, that you would repent, that you would trust in the Savior, you trust in the Lord, and then be able to sing your own song of salvation that glorifies God.

God's mercy to God. But in the final verse of our text this morning in verse 56 it says, and Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

[41 : 14] And we see that Luke brilliantly sets up the next scene, which is the birth of John the Baptist, which we will pick up next week, for Lord willing.

Let's pray.