

Luke 1:39-45

Advent 1, Nov. 27, 2022
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 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, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 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."

One of the ways we all love to get ready for Christmas is of course with Christmas songs. In my opinion, nothing gets you in the mood for Christmas quite like the old Christmas favorites. There's probably a number of songs that you like to listen to this time of year. One song that I particularly enjoy, which has gained a lot of popularity in recent years is, "Mary, Did You Know?" It's been covered by many different groups, I'm sure most of you have heard it.

The whole song is a series of questions directed toward the young mother, asking if she knew that her baby Boy "would give sight to a blind man," and "would save our sons and daughters," and "was Lord of all creation"—things like that. And the song's been criticized by some because those are all questions that the Bible reveals Mary *certainly* knew the answers to. But I still think it's a nice song.

Now, while Mary *is* in the picture this morning, we're actually going to be questioning another soon-to-be mother in the text—her aged relative Elizabeth. She is the one speaking throughout the text, crying out with a song of praise. And when we hear the truths she proclaims, there's one question which we must ask, which also will serve as our sermon theme this morning:

"Elizabeth, How Did You Know?"

- I. That Mary had been blessed?
- II. That Mary's Child was the Blessed One?
- III. That God's promises would be fulfilled?

Let's pick up with the first few verses: ***"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."*** (Luke 1:39-40) There are a number of unanswered questions revolving around this event. How quickly after the angel left did Mary leave? Why did Mary choose to go immediately to Elizabeth? How far was that journey? And it clearly doesn't matter, since the Holy Spirit didn't reveal these things to us. But He does reveal the important events that happened once Mary arrived.

Mary greeted her relative, an elderly woman named Elizabeth. She was the wife of a likewise elderly priest named Zechariah. We'll hear about him more on Wednesday morning this week, but I'm sure you remember some of the details about his life. He had been the one who had recently had his *own* encounter with an angel while he was offering up incense in the Temple in Jerusalem. (cf. Luke 1:5-17) And if you remember that bit, then you probably also remember that the angel had told him his wife Elizabeth would give birth to a son in her old age, and you also probably remember that Zechariah had a bit of doubt whether this could possibly take place. And of course, the result of that doubting—Zechariah became mute for about nine months, or until his son was born.

So that's all the individuals involved in this account, and that's where we find ourselves: at the doorway to the house as Mary greets her relatives. Then we read, ***"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."***

Two things happened there that Mary couldn't see taking place: First, the six-month-old unborn child (cf. Luke 1:25-26) in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's greeting. This was the child who had been promised by the angel and even prophesied in the Old Testament. He was the forerunner of Christ, who would prepare the way for Jesus by bringing people to repent of their sins and then pointing to Jesus the Lamb of God as the answer—this was the not-yet-born John the Baptist.

The second thing that happened was that ***“Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*** She was already a believer in the promised Savior, we're told as much earlier in the chapter (Luke 1:6), so it's not like the Holy Spirit didn't already dwell within her. The Apostle Paul says that all Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19) But this filling with the Holy Spirit was a very special opportunity that was being afforded specifically to Elizabeth. The result was that God was enabling Elizabeth to know a few things that she otherwise would not have known. And really, that's the answer to our sermon them. ***“Elizabeth, How Did You Know?”*** The Holy Spirit enlightened her.

And because of that, this happened next. ***“[Then Elizabeth] exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’”*** It's only by the miraculous revelation of God that Elizabeth would even know Mary was pregnant. Mary didn't call or text Elizabeth to let her know that she was coming or that she was having a baby. It also wasn't as if Mary had a baby bump that alerted Elizabeth. *Elizabeth's* pregnancy was certainly visible, as she was 6 months pregnant already, but Mary was only very recently pregnant, within a matter of days, so there were no visible signs pointing to the fact. On top of that, Mary had *just* entered the home. It's not that they were visiting for 20 minutes already and discovered, “Guess what I'm pregnant.” “Really? I'm pregnant too!” No, we're told that Mary simply greeted Elizabeth, she was barely able to say hello before Elizabeth interjected.

And it was a very special greeting, ***“Blessed are you among women.”*** Now, the Bible describes Elizabeth and her husband as both being righteous before God, meaning they knew and believed the promises of the coming Savior. As such, she was no doubt very familiar with the first promise made about that Savior given in the Garden of Eden. To Adam and Eve, God assured them that one of their descendants, “The Seed of the Woman,” would destroy the power of Satan and undo the damage that their sin had wrought. (cf. Genesis 3:15) She was also doubtlessly familiar with some of the other promises about the coming Messiah throughout the Old Testament, like the one made through the Prophet Isaiah, ***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”*** (Isaiah 7:14) Even still, it's not that Elizabeth just put two and two together and came to the conclusion that Mary had been highly blessed.

It was the Holy Spirit who revealed this to her. It's just as He would later do with Simeon in the temple, when he saw Mary and Joseph and their child walking through the courtyard, and he knew that this ordinary looking infant was his Savior and Lord. (Luke 2:26) Elizabeth too, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sees what cannot be seen and rightly refers to Mary as blessed—not because of who she was—but because God determined that she—a humble commoner—would give birth to God Himself, the Savior of the human race. In *that*, Mary was certainly ***“blessed among women.”***

And humble commoners that *you* are, you too are rightly described as blessed. That's what the Apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.”*** (Ephesians 1:3-4) Yes, God chose Mary for the special task to be the earthly mother of Jesus, but God chose you too. He chose you to be among very special class of people that would be called Children of God. He gave you the eyes

of faith to see that these Christmas accounts are not just nice stories, but they're the reason you can have any hope at all of eternal life. And you are truly blessed, because Jesus' promise stands true: ***"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*** (John 6:37)

Now, these words of Elizabeth, ***"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb,"*** they're very familiar around the world today in part because they are used to elevate the Virgin Mary to a place she simply does not belong. These words are included in the Catholic prayer called the "Hail, Mary." Many who speak these words imagine that Mary must be holy and that she can act as a go-between between God and man. That she'll intercept your prayers and relay them to God for you. Simply put, the Bible does not teach this. In fact, it says, ***"There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*** (1 Timothy 2:5)

It's only on the basis of Jesus' presence in this equation that Mary can rightly be called, ***"Blessed among women."*** And it's only by the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth was able to know that Mary's Child was the Blessed One. We can see from her words that she believed that this unborn Child was her Lord. She humbly said, ***"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"***

This is really an amazing profession of faith, because it stands in sharp contrast to how we tend to react to these accounts today. Martin Luther once wrote, *"When we hear that Christ has redeemed us with His blood, we are moved precisely as much as a dunce is moved when he hears that a hen has laid an egg. 'What kind of marvel is this?' Says he; 'indeed, that happens every day.' There is also no joy, comfort, thanks or wonderment when people hear of Christ's suffering. 'Oh, that is nothing new! Who does not know that? I have known it well for a long time.' And so the dear Christ with His precious blood and His immeasurable works of wonder must be considered a trifling matter."*

Can you relate to that feeling? That feeling of boredom at hearing again the familiar Christmas accounts, perhaps? Do you ever hear about the grace of God extended to you and think these are all just the same mundane words you've heard a thousand times, and it really doesn't move you any which way? If that's the case, I would invite you to reexamine who you are, and exactly why you would deserve Christ to come to you. Imagine you are Elizabeth, and there before you in your own house, is the All-Knowing God of all Creation. There is the one who created ears with the ability hear, who created eyes with the ability to see. (cf. Proverbs 20:12) And if He created ears to hear, do you think He can hear? Yes, He can hear the very thoughts of your head, the things you're grateful no one else could hear—but God could hear them. If He created eyes to see, do you think He can see? Yes, He can see you when no one else can see you, those moments you figure that no one will know about.

And yet with that all being very true, Christ still came to you? God still extends His mercy and grace to you and announces that those very sins are forgiven? This is incredible news. May we never take this for granted! That's the way Elizabeth looked at this whole situation. She was totally unworthy that at that very moment, she was the hostess of her Savior. This is the type of humility we ought to have right now, as we gather for worship, because Jesus promised, ***"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there."*** (Matthew 18:20) That means Christ has come to visit us here today, to assure us that He's our Savior from sin, and that we're not excluded from these promises. This is incredible.

It's only by the inner-working of the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth was able to acknowledge her sin and also know who her Savior was. By the Holy Spirit, she asked, ***"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*** May the Holy Spirit continue to work that same wonderment and amazement in our hearts, so that we may say, *"Why is this granted to me that the Lord would come to*

ME? That the LORD would die for me? That the Lord would be willing to forgive me?" Based on the things we've done, this is almost unbelievable. And yet God declares it, and the Holy Spirit assures it.

Let's continue with Elizabeth's Song of Praise, ***"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."***

I always kind of chuckle at the last half of what we just read, because as I picture this scene playing out, I always imagine Mary and Elizabeth joyfully greeting each other at the door, and there in the corner of the room sits poor, mute Zechariah. Unable to talk at all because he doubted what God had said. And I always imagine what Zechariah must have been thinking when Elizabeth says, ***"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken,"*** while side-eying Zechariah. I don't actually know that that's how it played out, but the idea of that always makes me laugh.

But there's really much more there than a potentially comical scene. The words in that phrase where it says, ***"There would be,"*** it's a future tense verb, and really perhaps would be better understood as, ***"Blessed is she who believed that there WILL BE fulfillment."*** Elizabeth is basically claiming to know the future here, she's guaranteeing that all that God has spoken will absolutely take place. Elizabeth had been granted the faith to know that when God makes a promise, it will absolutely be fulfilled. So many of the promises had already come to pass: God's promise that Elizabeth would conceive in her old age—and she had. The promise that Elizabeth's child would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15)—and we saw that earlier in our text as the babe leaped for joy. The promise that Mary, still a virgin, would conceive a child by God's miraculous power—and she had.

But the greatest promise would still be fulfilled, and here Elizabeth declares it's as good as done. On that star-filled night in Bethlehem, a Savior would be born into the world to save mankind. Mary believed this promise, Elizabeth believed this promise, and we believe it too.

We know that God didn't just make that promise, He fulfilled it as well. Jesus did come, did live and die for us, did pay for all our sins. As you enter the Advent season, you know that in Christ, God has solved the biggest problem in your life. For as Mary crossed that threshold with the child in her womb, you know your Savior has arrived. The sins of your past, your failures, your shortcomings, your weaknesses—all of these problems find their solution in Bethlehem's manger.

Elizabeth could see all of these things coming, and she rejoiced over it. But our song this Christmas season should be even more joyful than Elizabeth's, shouldn't it? She had the promise of redemption, we have the fulfillment. She saw dimly the outlines of what was coming, we have an exact record of the crucifixion on Calvary, of the open tomb, and Jesus' exact words explaining the joys that await us because of what He's done. He's done it all for you. How could our hearts do anything other than sing out for joy this Advent as we look forward to our Savior's return.

So ***"Elizabeth, How Did You Know?"*** She knew because the Spirit of God revealed these things. It's the same Spirit that has revealed God's plan of salvation for us, too. May God give us the same confidence that Elizabeth sang with, finding our reason for certain hope in the promises of God, knowing that He is ever faithful and ever true. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.