

Sermon Brief

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December 26, 2021

Text: Luke 1:39-56

Title: Mary's Song

Subject: Elizabeth and Mary share in their miraculous conceptions.

Complement: Spirit-filled joy overflow.

Textual Idea: Elizabeth and Mary share in their miraculous conceptions leading to Spirit-filled joy!

Sermon Idea: Joy accompanies God's salvation!

Key Points:

1. John the Baptist joyfully leaps at the presence of Jesus.
2. Elizabeth joyfully blesses Mary at the presence of Jesus.
3. Mary joyfully praises God for His faithfulness to her and Israel.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that God is holy, merciful, powerful, and faithful to His promises to His people. He will vindicate those who trust in Him. This confidence in God results in present joy.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) share their experiences with God with others, (2) direct any praise you receive to God,, and (3) daily humble yourself before the Lord – and enjoy Him!

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to experience peace and joy through faith in Christ.

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Mary's Song

Luke 1:39-56

(Tom Schuck reads The Rival poem he wrote)

Thanks Tom. Is Jesus in control of your life, or are you? Is Jesus your Lord or your rival? Good question. At the time of Jesus' birth, there was one dominant power in control – Rome. There were no rivals for Caesar. Anyone who dared challenge Rome was in for devastation...and many in Israel did just that. The thousands of crucified freedom fighters all over the land made clear who was in charge. It was in that kind of a historical situation, that the true Lord came into the world in a most unexpected way! Let's look one more time at this truly awesome event.

Last week, we looked at when Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she was chosen to be the mother of God's Son. We saw how she dared to believe the unbelievable. **(LCD)** **Here are some pictures** drawn by Anniyah Smith reminding us about "Hail Mary, Receiver of Grace." Today, I'd like to look at what happened next in Luke 1. Turn there please, starting in verse 39. Now you'll remember that earlier in Luke 1, Gabriel had visited a priest named Zechariah in the temple in Jerusalem. He told him that his elderly, barren wife Elizabeth would bear a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Zechariah doubted what Gabriel said and was made mute. Then the scene shifted up to a tiny, nothing town in Galilee called Nazareth where an ordinary young girl, Mary, also has a surprise encounter with Gabriel. She ends up believing the even crazier news that she, a virgin, would bear the Son of God. On the heels of that news, undoubtedly stunned, confused, and excited all at the same time, she decides to go see the only one who could possibly understand what she's going through.

Verse 39, *"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth."* Take a look at **(LCD)** **this map**. Mary lived up here in Galilee in Nazareth. The text says that she hurried down to a town in Judea, down here. As this green line shows, she would have gone around Samaria as all Jews did. The trip would have taken 3-5 days and covered 80-100 miles. It's like going from Hartford to Boston on a donkey! I don't like driving there in a car, let alone a donkey; and let alone through treacherous terrain known for thieves and robbers! Yet, the world changing news is too much to keep to herself. Mary, the one known for pondering things in her heart, just can't sit still. She rushes down to Judea as fast as she can to see her relative Elizabeth. Luke here is intertwining the two previous angel stories into one. And instead of Gabriel giving us supernatural knowledge, it'll be the Holy Spirit revealing it this time.

Verse 41, *"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."* Words can't express how powerful this meeting is! Imagine the excitement! Elizabeth, who had become supernaturally pregnant as an elderly woman, had been isolating for six months, unable to process all this

revelation. Mary too had been alone in her encounter with the supernatural. **(LCD) How sweet to hug** and rejoice together in the surprising work of God!

And then something incredible happens...the baby, John the Baptist, leaps in Elizabeth's womb! JB, an unborn child, is full of the Spirit already in the womb...just as Gabriel had said he would be. And there, in that dark, isolated place, the Spirit within him causes him to leap for joy! Actually, one scholar mentioned that Jewish tradition taught that unborn children sang a song at the Exodus! What a statement of the value of life even in the womb!

And that prophetic leap is contagious because all of a sudden something happens that hadn't happened in 400 years! The voice of prophecy...and it comes from an unlikely source. Not a great, eloquent prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah, not a majestic king like David, it comes from an elderly, formerly barren woman - Elizabeth! Love that! If you want to see God at work, look in the most unlikely place and you'll probably find Him!

And what she prophesies is revelatory; verse 42, *"In a loud voice (this is no time for solemn restraint!) she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"* Where did Elizabeth get this knowledge? Zechariah is still mute. It isn't knowledge, it's revelation. The Holy Spirit reveals to Elizabeth both that Mary is pregnant and that her child is no ordinary one. She blesses Mary, she doesn't worship her, but she does acknowledge that she's been shown favor by God to be the one who will have the honor of bearing God's Son. And notice what she calls the baby, "my Lord." Going back to Tom's poem, this is royal language. It's like saying, "my King." Elizabeth doesn't focus on Mary as the "Queen of Heaven." She recognizes that she's simply God's chosen vessel to bring forth the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And she also acknowledges that Mary is walking by faith in it all.

Imagine how Mary felt hearing this prophetic word from her relative! Actually, we don't have to imagine it. It's preserved for us in a sublime song that Mary recites. It's beautiful and filled with rich images of Old Testament promises and Jewish hopes. Scholars differ on whether Mary really said this spontaneously when she met with Elizabeth or whether Luke added it years later. We don't know. Actually, in a Christmas episode of The Chosen mini-series, they dramatized it as a psalm that Mary wrote around the time all this happened and then she gives it to Luke decades later when he's writing the story of Jesus. Who knows?!

It doesn't really matter. Personally, I like the idea that the Holy Spirit filled Mary in this moment and that she is given this song supernaturally. I just watched the "Get Back" documentary on the Beatles and it was fascinating to see Paul McCartney creating the hit song "Get Back" spontaneously. If he can do it with natural talent, I don't see why Mary couldn't with supernatural inspiration! Let's take a look at it.

46 *And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord*
47 *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*
48 *for he has been mindful*
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 *for the Mighty One has done great things for me—*
holy is his name.
50 *His mercy extends to those who fear him,*
from generation to generation.
51 *He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;*
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 *He has brought down rulers from their thrones*
but has lifted up the humble.
53 *He has filled the hungry with good things*
but has sent the rich away empty.
54 *He has helped his servant Israel,*
remembering to be merciful
55 *to Abraham and his descendants forever,*
just as he promised our ancestors."

This gorgeous worship song is called the "Magnificat" because that is the word for the verb in the Latin text. The word here in the Greek, **(LCD) megalunei, means either "to enlarge, make great; or to cause to be held in high esteem."** Worship is meant to enlarge God, magnify His greatness so all can see. Elizabeth praises Mary and Mary immediately turns that spotlight onto God who she calls "Lord" and "Savior." Notice that Mary acknowledges her need for a savior. She's not sinless, you don't pray to Mary for grace. She's needs it just like us...and she finds it! The result is joy...her spirit rejoices in God! Just like in verse 44 where John leaped for joy in his mother's womb, so Mary sings for joy. Salvation brings joy!

In verse 48, she gives the reason for her joy, God has been "*mindful of the humble state of his servant.*" I've said it before but a great friend of mine once told me that God's favorite perfume is called "Humility." He loves it! She humbles herself before God, believes Him even when it seems crazy, and God loves it! And as a result, the generations of believers will call her 'blessed' – not because of anything she does, but because "*the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name!*" Amen! Our God has done great things for us! He has created us, He has sustained us, He has saved us, He has honored us – He's done great things! Reminds me of what the prophet Zephaniah said, **(LCD) "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."** Amen! Holy is his name!

She then turns from personal to corporate in verse 50. God's mercy extends to those who fear Him. Now this might strike us as odd. Joy has been the dominant theme up to now...fear? Doesn't God tell us to "fear not" and that "perfect love drives out fear?" I just finished reading a book on the fear of the Lord called "Rejoice and Tremble." I love that title. These two emotions of joy and fear go together when their founded on God. I love how the author describes what appears to be the incompatibility of these two. **(LCD) "Fear and love are two different languages preferred by two different Christian camps – perhaps two different theologies. The one camp speaks of love and grace and never of fearing God. And the other camp seems angered by this and emphasizes how afraid of God we should be...(but) the gospel both frees us from fear and gives us fear. If frees us from our crippling fears, giving us instead a most delightful, happy, and wonderful fear."** Amen to that.

It's kind of like Aslan in "The Chronicles of Narnia." Mr. Beaver tells Susan that Aslan (the ruler of Narnia) is a great lion. Susan is surprised, since she assumed Aslan was a man. She then tells Mr. Beaver, "I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." She asks Mr. Beaver if Aslan is safe, to which Mr. Beaver replies, **(LCD) "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."** That is a great picture of our God, and our response is to fear Him with joy.

And trembling is right because of what He will do when He comes. Notice the contrasts in verses 51-53 between the ones who fear and the ones who don't. In 51, He comes against the proud; in 52, He comes against the powerful; and in 53, He comes against the greedy rich. He is not safe to the proud, the powerful and the greedy. He comes to make all things right. But for those who fear Him; in 51, He performs mighty deeds; in 52, He lifts up the humble; in 53, He fills the hungry. God's goodness shines forth here to those who fear Him and revere His name.

How this would have spoken powerfully in this time of Roman occupation and oppression with sons and fathers hanging from wooden crosses and tax collectors heartlessly extorting beyond what people could pay. Our God is a God of justice, and He will bring it. The coming of Messiah reverses the order of things: the humble and powerless are lifted up, and the proud rulers are thrown down. It's an upside-down kingdom as one scholar described it, **(LCD) "The powerful and the wealthy believe the world belongs to them, and they can do whatever they like with the powerless and the poor. The sad truth is that in this evil world they can do that and more. However, God is promising that his Son will reverse these terrible injustices, but on this issue the attention does indeed go to the eschaton (the "end" of all things), for this will not occur until the second coming."**

Yet make no mistake...Jesus taught us to pray that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to pursue justice and love NOW as foretastes of what's coming. That's what lovers of Jesus do...what He did...standing up for the powerless and remembering that our life is not of this world. We belong to the Upside-Down Kingdom. Which is what we'll be studying **(LCD) this year during our 21 Days of Prayer** starting on January 3rd. I hope you join us as we start the year humbling ourselves before Him with joy and trembling!

Mary ends her song in verses 54-55 by reminding us of how God is doing all this because of the covenant He made with His people Israel through the promise to Abraham that all nations on earth would be blessed through him and his seed. Not only is God holy and merciful, He is faithful too. He keeps His promises. Finally, we read in verse 56, "*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*" Six plus three makes nine...was Mary there for John's birth? We don't know. What matters is that these two women fear God and are willing to serve Him however He sees fit. How about us?

Let me close by sharing what my first pastoral mentor told me years ago. Three principles that he lived his life by...they're three principles that summarize Mary's story here pretty well. **(LCD) One, God is sovereign; He's in total control. Two, God's timing is perfect. Three, I'm God's servant to do with as He sees fit.** Do you believe these things? Do you fear Him? Revere Him? Is He your rival or your Lord? Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, **(LCD) "Who will celebrate Christmas correctly? Whoever finally lays down all power, all honor, all reputation, all vanity, all arrogance, all individualism beside the manger."** Will we?

Let's close by worshipping him. I'd like to sing a version of Mary's song done by a monk named John-Michael Talbot. If you know it, sing it with me.