



Miriam Visits Elizabeth

Sermon for December 12, 2021

Luke 1:39–56

Sermon Introduction

Before we look at today's scripture, we should look at the last verses from last week's sermon. God sent the angel Gabriel to bring an amazing message to an unmarried girl named Mary.

Luke 1:34–38

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God.

36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

The angel Gabriel told Mary some amazing things that are hard to believe and to accept.

God gave Mary an incredible honor and blessing.

But, God also asked her to do something very hard.

Mary knew that being unmarried, and pregnant was a big problem.

I'm sure she wondered, "What will people think, and do?"

Adultery was a serious offense.

The Old Testament said she could be killed by stoning.

But did you hear the words of faith and trust that Mary said in verse 38?

She said, "let it be to me according to your word"

"Let it be."

"Let it be to me."

Is that what I would say?

I am not sure.

Many people in the bible struggled to say "let it be" when God told them something difficult or hard to believe.

Peter said, "no, Lord" more than once.

Abraham's wife Sarah laughed at God's promise to her.

Abraham failed to trust God when he went to Egypt.

David and other kings often trusted their own resources instead of God.

I'm like them, too.

Aren't you?

I struggle to say to God what Mary said: "let it be to me according to your word."

Thabiti Anyabwile is a pastor in Washington DC.

Thabiti said this:

"Doesn't Mary sound a lot like Isaiah saying, "Here I am, send me" (Isaiah 6:8)?

Doesn't she sound a lot like Esther saying, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16)?

Doesn't Mary sound a lot like Ruth telling Naomi, "Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16)?

This also reminds us of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying, "Father, not my will, but your will be done" (Luke 22:42).

This is how faithful people respond to God's plan, even when they do not understand it."

Friends, I really admire how Mary trusted the Lord, even with incomplete information about the future.

After receiving the angel's message, she hurried to see her cousin Elizabeth.

Maybe Mary wanted to get out of her tiny hometown.

People probably wouldn't believe her explanation about how she got pregnant.

Maybe she was just excited to talk with her cousin who was also pregnant.

Let's see what happened when Mary arrived at her cousin's house.

Reading from Luke chapter 1.

Luke 1:39–45

39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town

40 where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth.

41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed.

43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?

44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.
45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Please pray with me.

Father thank you for sending your Son Jesus into the world to be our Savior.

Would you please now send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to be our teacher?

Help us receive from the Spirit whatever you want to pour into us today.

We ask in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Here is the main point, or big idea, of today's sermon.

Big Idea: My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

Look with me again at verse 41, please.

41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed."

Elizabeth was focused on Miriam, not herself.

We call her Mary in English, but Miriam is how her name was pronounced 2,000 years ago, so I will use both.

Elizabeth was pregnant, by a miracle.

She was old enough to be a grandmother, and she had never had a baby in her entire life.

Being pregnant as an old woman was biggest thing that ever happened in Elizabeth's life.

But Elizabeth only wanted to talk about Miriam.

What a generous woman Elizabeth was.

She was focused on what God was doing in Miriam's life, not her own.

Look next at Elizabeth's confession of faith in Christ in verse 43:

43 "Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?"

Elizabeth feels humbled and honored by the presence of Miriam.

This is a little strange, if you think about it.

Miriam is much younger than Elizabeth.

Miriam should give honor and respect to her older relative.

But instead Elizabeth honors Miriam, and feels blessed in her presence.

Why?

Because the Holy Spirit gives Elizabeth eyes to see that Miriam is carrying the Messiah.

Elizabeth is stunned to realize that her Lord and Savior has come to her home!

Elizabeth and Miriam lived in a world that treated women with disrespect.

Women in their world had few rights.

But we see throughout the life of Jesus that he honored and elevated women in dramatic ways.

On the morning of his resurrection, Jesus appeared first to his female disciples.

And here at the beginning of his life, the first person to verbally declare faith in Jesus Christ is a woman.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth can see that the unborn baby inside of Miriam is her Savior.

There are many things Elizabeth doesn't know about Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit plants the gift of faith in Elizabeth's heart, and she confesses that faith with her mouth.

Romans 10:9 says: "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Long before Peter identified Jesus as Lord in Matthew 16, Elizabeth declared that "Jesus is Lord!"

Elizabeth also said that Jesus is God.

Yes, she did.

In verse 45, Elizabeth told Miriam: "You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

She's talking about the message from God, delivered by Gabriel from the Lord.

The Greek word for Lord in this verse is kurios.

Now look at verse 43.

Elizabeth said: "Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?"

The word Lord there is kurios again.

It's the same word.

In verse 45, Lord refers to God who sent Gabriel.

And in verse 43, Lord refers to Jesus, the baby who is also God.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth is the first person to express faith in Jesus the Savior who is fully human and fully God.

There was another person who celebrated the arrival of Miriam and baby Jesus.

Look at what Elizabeth said in verse 44:

"When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy."

Elizabeth and her unborn child both respond with joy when Miriam and Jesus arrive.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, they recognize the child in Miriam's womb.

Elizabeth's son will grow up to be John the Baptist.

As a man, he announced to the people around Jerusalem that the Messiah had come.

John was called "the Baptist" because he baptized people and called them to repent of their sins and to receive the Messiah.

I want to read to you from John 1:29–30.

In these verses, John and Jesus are both about 30 years old.

Listen to what happened on that day when John was baptizing people and he saw Jesus.

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

30 He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

John is six months older than his cousin Jesus.

But John said here in verse 30 that Jesus "existed long before me."

Here is another text confirming that Jesus is God.

John also said in verse 30 that Jesus "is far greater than I am."

John honored his younger cousin Jesus.

Just like Elizabeth honored her younger cousin Miriam.

I think we can assume that John learned some of his other-centeredness, his Christ-centeredness, from his mother Elizabeth.

What a gift from a mother to a son.

John the Baptist devoted his entire life to declaring Jesus as Lord.

But John was a prophet even before he was born.

There are two comments I want to make about this.

First, God can give people of any age faith in Jesus.

I did not become a Christian until I was 28 years old.

Some people trust in Christ when they are older than that.

Many people trust in Christ when they are children.

Even very small children can recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of anyone who trusts in him alone.

The second comment is about abortion.
Every year in the United States 600 thousand unborn babies are killed.
Many people have made peace in their hearts about this.
They choose to believe that abortion does not end the life of a human being.
They say that an unborn child is not really a person.

But we see clearly in verse 44 that John was a human being before he was born.
John had a mind and a soul.
Abortion ends the life of a real unborn person.
An unborn child inside a woman's body is a different person.
John had different DNA than Elizabeth.
He was a separate person.
Every person has freedom to say what can be done to their own body.
But my individual freedom about my body ends where your individual freedom begins.

We can also see that John was a person because his soul was filled with the Holy Spirit,
according to Luke 1:15.
Only a person can be filled with the Holy Spirit.
The Bible never says that an animal or object is filled with the Holy Spirit.
Three months before he was born, John recognized the tiny person of Jesus inside Miriam's womb.
Baby John rejoiced when he met Jesus the Savior as a baby.

Some women do not rejoice when they become pregnant.
Some pregnancies are unexpected or unwanted.
Miriam's pregnancy was unexpected.
It was inconvenient because she wasn't married.
Thankfully Miriam was engaged to Joseph.
Joseph was a good man, a kind and gentle man.
He was willing to share the shame of this unexpected pregnancy with Miriam.
Too many men are afraid to accept responsibility for their own babies.
Too many men pressure women to get abortions.

The church of Jesus Christ needs to help these men and women in difficult circumstances.
As Christians we must be pro-life for every life, in every stage of life.
The church needs to pray about the terrible problem of abortion in our country.
And we need to do everything we can to help women and their children.
We need eyes to see the humanity of these unborn children, as John and Elizabeth saw.

Let's pray briefly about this now.

Father in heaven, we call you Father because you are the perfect model of a loving, protective, and generous Father.

Please help the mothers in this country and around the world who are in hard situations.

Please use us, your children, to help these women and children.

We know each abortion breaks your heart.

Please intervene, change our hearts, and change our communities.

We ask it in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

As I have read over Luke chapter 1 this week, I'm really amazed by Elizabeth and Miriam, aren't you?

I am impressed by the humility, faith, and trust of these women.

They will both see their sons murdered as young men.

The joy these women shared while pregnant will turn to sorrow and weeping.

But they will not despair.

They will not be hopeless.

Because the sons of Elizabeth and Miriam will be used by God to draw the lost from all nations to everlasting life in Jesus.

Let's look now at Mary's prophetic song in Luke 1:46-56.

46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.

51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.

54 He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful.

55 For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

Elizabeth and Miriam are main characters in Luke chapter 1.

But all their conversations are centered on God.

The women are not self-centered when they speak, like I often am.

Both women recognize that their individual blessing and salvation were a part of what God was doing for all his people.

Miriam's song focuses on God, his character, and his actions.

To finish today's sermon, I want to meditate together on Mary's song for a few minutes.

Maybe you will want to underline some words in the bulletin as we look at this song.

When you look at God's word slowly like this, it helps Jesus occupy a larger part of your heart and mind.

Pay attention as I read slowly the things that Mary says about God in her song.

Look first at Luke 1:46.

Mary uses the title Lord to speak to God.

In 47 she calls him God my Savior.

In 49 she says "He is Mighty and Holy."

In verse 50 she reminds us that His Mercy is for those who fear him.

And in verse 51 Mary says that God has shown Strength with his mighty arm.

Mary's song also describes how God uses that strength differently toward two types of people.

First, look at God's response to the proud, the strong, the rich.

In verses 51-53 Mary sings about the God who has scattered the proud, haughty, and arrogant people.

In verse 52, he has brought down mighty princes and rulers from their thrones.

And verse 53 says, "he sent the rich away with empty hands."

That is God's attitude toward those who don't acknowledge their sin.

God will punish people whose wealth, or position, or power fill them with arrogant pride.

Many in the world think they are exalted, important people.

They are not humble enough to recognize the exalted glory of Jesus as Lord.

That's why many of proud and powerful people remain dead in their sin and rebellion against the rightful king.

You can't worship the true God when you are busy trying to be like god yourself.

We also see in Mary's song that God uses his strength and power differently toward people who fear and honor him.

Look at how God treats the humble and the hungry.

In verse 50 she says that "He shows mercy from generation to generation, to all who fear him."

Verse 52 says that "He has exalted the humble."

And in 53: "he has filled the hungry with good things."

Mary also reminds us in verse 54 that God helps his servants and remembers to be merciful.

My friends, this is the Savior who the Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth and her son John.

If the Spirit has also given you the eyes to see Jesus as Lord and Savior, then Mary's beautiful song of praise is your song, too.

What a Christmas gift we have received, my friends.

The privilege to know and worship such a God of justice, and mercy, and power, and compassion.

Let's pray to Him together now.

God in heaven, you are the Mighty One who is holy.

You have done great things for us.

Father God, thank you for showing your mercy from generation to generation, to all who fear you.

Holy Spirit, we give you thanks for revealing Jesus to Elizabeth and to John.

Please reveal Jesus also to those who do not know him as Savior today.

And give all of us a deeper love for Jesus this Christmas season.

Jesus, we declare you to be Lord of our lives.

Help us trust and follow you and obey you, for our good and your glory.

Amen.