

Luke 1:39-56

NIV Harmony 33-34; Compassionate 24-26

Introduction

1. When was the last time you were bursting with joy?
 - a. What happened to fill you with joy?
 - b. What did you do and say in response to this joyous event?
2. Warren Wiersbe writes, "'Joy' is the major theme of this section as you see three persons rejoicing in the Lord. . . . (1) The joy of Elizabeth (vv. 39-45) . . . (2) The joy of the unborn son, John (vv. 41, 44) . . . (3) The joy of Mary (vv. 46-56)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 24).
3. Mary had received good news about her miraculous pregnancy as well as that of her aging cousin Elizabeth. Mary went to visit Elizabeth to share the joy of the good news that they had received.
4. **Read Luke 1:39-56.**

A. Mary Visits Elizabeth (39-40)

1. "At that time Mary got ready and hurried down to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth" (39-40).
 - a. "At that time . . ." – These events occurred immediately after Mary's visitation by the angel Gabriel (cf., Lk 1:26-38).
 - b. Mary had received the unexpected news of the pregnancy of her older cousin Elizabeth as part of Gabriel's announcement of her own impending miraculous pregnancy (cf., Lk 1:36).
2. Perhaps, Mary wanted to confirm as soon as possible that what the angel said about Elizabeth was true, since that would also confirm the angel's words to her about her circumstances. However, there was no doubt in her heart about the angel's words. There was only faith, trust, and obedience.
3. For me, Mary's journey to see Elizabeth is somewhat like the journey of the wise men who would come later to see Jesus at His birth (cf., Mt 2:1-12). Both Mary and the wise men believed and wanted to confirm and rejoice over what had been revealed to them by God.

B. Elizabeth and John Rejoice (41-45)

1. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb . . ." (41a)
 - a. We don't know when Mary was overshadowed by the Most High and conceived Jesus, but it must have been by this point.
 - b. John the Baptist, still in the womb, "leaped" (Gk., *eskirtesen*) when he became aware of the presence of Jesus.
 - 1) Baby John rejoiced over the arrival of the one greater than he who would come after him (cf., Lk 3:15-18).
 - 2) Wierbe notes, "Even before his birth, John rejoiced in Jesus Christ, just as he did during his earthly ministry (John 3:29-30). As John the Baptist, he would have the great privilege of introducing the Messiah to the Jewish nation" (Wiersbe, 24).
2. ". . . and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." (41b)
 - a. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit on believers in Acts 2 after Jesus' resurrection, the presence of the Holy Spirit in a person was only a temporary event.
 - b. Robert Stein writes, "What was promised to Zechariah (1:15) was now fulfilled. John and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit even before John's birth. Thus they were the first persons to realize that Mary's child is the Messiah" (Robert Stein, *Luke* in NAC, 89).
 - c. Elizabeth became a prophet filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking words from God. (42-45)
 - 1) She pronounced a blessing upon both Mary and her child, Jesus. "Blessed (Gk., *Eulogemene*) are you among women, and blessed (Gk., *eulogemenos*) is the child you will bear!" (42).
 - 2) She did not question why Mary had come to visit but acknowledged her presence as an expression of God's "favor" (Gk., *pothen*) "that the mother of my Lord (Gk., *kurios*; Hb. *Yahweh*) should come to me?" (43)
 - 3) She declared, "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy (Gk., *en agalliasei*)" (44)

- 4) She continued to prophesy, “Blessed (Gk., *makaria*) is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” (45)
3. Mary believed what Gabriel had said, and she was blessed by her faith.
 - a. Wiersbe says, “The thing that Elizabeth emphasized was Mary’s *faith*: ‘Blessed is she that believed’ (Luke 1:45)” (Wiersbe, 24).
 - b. Everyone in Jesus’ day had the potential to be blessed by believing the good news that God fulfilled His promises not only to Mary but to the world in sending Jesus, the Messiah.
 - c. Everyone in our day also shares in this potential blessing as we continue to receive and believe the good news that God has fulfilled His promises and is with us in Jesus.

C. Mary Rejoices (46-56)

1. G. Campbell Morgan insightfully shares, “Luke is the only one who has recorded for us the outburst of poetry and music in connection with the Incarnation. Matthew does not tell us anything about songs; Mark does not tell us anything about songs; John does not tell us anything about songs; but Luke, the Greek, the artist, himself a poet as well as a scientific man, when he was investigating, and getting these stories, obtained copies of these songs. That is another instance of how the overruling of the Spirit of God allows nothing to be lost. Luke is the instrument, and the right instrument, to give us those early poems and songs. From him we have gained the Beatitude of Elisabeth, the Magnificat of Mary, the Benedictus of Zacharias, and the Nunc Dimittis of Simeon; the Evangel sung by the angel of the Lord over the plains, and the Gloria of the angelic host. Those who love the modes of music will surely linger over these chapters. Luke the artist, has gathered and collected, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, the stories which reveal the fact that when Jesus came into the world, poetry expressed itself, and music was reborn” (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 27).
2. The beautiful poem of joy and praise to God in Lk 1:46-56 is known as the Magnificat.
 - a. The title Magnificat comes from Mary’s opening line, “My soul glorifies the Lord” since in the Latin Vulgate text the word “glorifies” is *magnificat*.
 - b. This beautiful pericope is a poem of joy and praise to God written in Hebrew poetic style.
 - c. Mary rejoiced in God’s unfolding, miraculous plan of salvation that He was bringing forth through the birth of Jesus.
 - d. Wiersbe summarizes, “Mary’s song contains quotations from and references to the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the Psalms and the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Mary hid God’s word in her heart and turned it into a song” (Wiersbe, 24-25).
3. The Magnificat of Mary is a Hebrew poem or psalm.
 - a. In the typeset of your Bible, it is laid out as a poem and resembles what you see in the Psalms.
 - b. The psalms sprang from the hearts of God’s people as they spoke to Him about the troubles and the joys of their lives.
 - c. This is a poem, a song of joy from Mary to God for the grace He has shown to her, her people, and all of humanity in sending Jesus.
 - d. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme on sound, like English poetry, but on thought.
 - e. The first line is synonymous Hebrew parallelism
 - 1) “My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
 - 2) Mary says the same thing twice using different words.
 - 3) The words “my soul” (Gk., *psuche* – mind) and “my spirit” (Gk., *pneuma* – life/personality) stand in parallel in the first and second lines as to “Lord” (Gk., *kurion*) and “God my Savior” (*to theo to soteri mou*).
 - 4) There are four other types of Hebrew parallelism (e.g., antithetical, synthetic, emblematic, chiasmic).
4. There are at least four stanzas or strophes in this poem.
 - a. Charles Erdman writes, that in “The first stanza, or strophe, v. 46-48 . . . Mary praises or magnifies the Lord and rejoices in him as her Saviour. This salvation is not only for her people, but particularly for herself; it is not only political but also spiritual. It is to be wrought out by the gift God is granting to Mary” (Erdman, *Gospel of Luke*, 26).

- b. Erdman continues, “The second stanza, v. 49-50, centers the thought upon the character of God as revealed in his gracious gift. His power, his holiness, his mercy are praised” (Erdman, 27).
- 1) Note her praise of God’s “holy” (Gk., *agion* - v. 49) nature, His “mercy” (Gk., *eleos* - v. 50), His “mighty deeds” (Gk., *kratos* - v. 51) and his faithfulness as he “lifted up” (Gk., *upsosen* – v. 52) the humble, “filled” (Gk., *enepleesen* – v. 53) the hungry, and “helped” (Gk., *antelabeto* – v. 54) His servant Israel.
 - 2) Morgan summarizes, “Mary thus set forth all the glories of the God of her fathers; His holiness, His mercy, His might, and His faithfulness. By that inward sign, by that sense of the new-born life within her, she knew the holiness of God, she knew the mercy of God, she knew the might of God, and she knew the faithfulness of God” (Morgan, 29).
- c. Erdman writes, “In the third stanza, vs. 51-53, . . . past tenses are used to describe future events; the results of the coming of the Messiah are stated as though already achieved” (Erdmans, 27).
- 1) Stein adds, that the verb in v. 51 is “. . . best understood as a futuristic aorist or the equivalent of the prophetic perfect in Hebrew. It describes the future work of God’s Son with the certainty of a past event. Mary saw as already accomplished what God would do through her son. . . . Whereas the first strophe of the Magnificat refers to the great things the Mighty one had done to Mary, the second strophe is a prophetic forward look at the results of the ministry of Mary’s child for believing Israel (Luke 1:54)” (Stein, 93-94).
 - 2) Stein further comments, “In 1:52-53 we find an example of chiasmic parallelism. Whereas each verse alone is an example of antithetical parallelism, together they are an example of chiasmic parallelism—A (rulers) B (humble) b (hungry) a (rich).” (Stein, 93)
 - a) Note how this chiasmus places the rich rulers on the outside while the humble hungry are the center of attention.
 - b) Wiersbe notes, “Mary named three specific groups to whom God had been merciful: the helpless (Luke 1:51), the humble (Luke 1:52), and the hungry (Luke 1:53)” (Wiersbe, 25).
 - c) Stein observes, “He has filled the hungry with good things” (53) – “. . . foreshadows such future teaching of Jesus as Luke 6:21; 11:5-13; and 16:19-31 and such events as the feeding of the five thousand (9:10-17) and the breaking of bread at the Lord’s Supper (22:14-20; 24:13-35; Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11)” (Stein, 93).
- d. Erdman concludes, “The last strophe, vs. 54, 55, emphasizes the faithfulness of God to his ancient promises which Mary sees fulfilled in the birth of her Son. . . . Only in Christ Jesus can be realized all the promises to Israel, all the hopes of the ages” (Erdman, 27).
- e. In final analysis of this psalm, remember that it is a hymn of joy to God springing naturally from a young, Jewish girl’s heart in a style of praise and with words that would have come naturally to her. It is an authentic poem of praise and joy to God from Mary’s heart.
5. Stein points out five great theological emphases in this passage: 1) the theme of reversal as the humble are exalted and the arrogant are made low; “Luke saw in Jesus’ coming a great reversal of the world’s value system . . . the humble poor and outcasts become first . . . whereas the proud and arrogant become last”; 2) fulfillment of prophecy and divine promises; 3) “. . . [T]he Christological understanding of Mary’s offspring. . . . Jesus received homage from John the Baptist in 1:41,44 and from Elizabeth’s prophetic utterance (1:42). . . . Mary’s blessedness came from the child she bore (1:43)”; 4) “Mary’s role as an ideal believer who believed God’s promises (1:45)” and 5) “. . . [T]he Holy Spirit’s active role once again in Israel’s history (1:41)” (Stein, 94-95).
6. After giving this praise to God, “Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home” (56).
- a. John the Baptist was about to be born.
 - b. Mary, now about three months pregnant, went home.

c. Wiersbe surmises, “By then, it was clear that she was pregnant, and no doubt the tongues began to wag. After all, she had been away from home for three months, and why, people were likely asking, had she left in such a hurry? It was then that God gave the good news to Joseph and instructed him what to do (Matt. 1:18-25)” (Wiersbe, 26).

1) In our next lesson, we will study the birth of John the Baptist and the joy of his father Zechariah over John’s birth (cf., Lk 1:57-80).

2) In the next lesson after that one, we will examine God’s preparation of Joseph for Mary’s return to Nazareth as he experiences his own angelic encounter (cf., Mt 1:18-25).

D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Have you received and believed the good news that Jesus your Savior has come?
 - a. Are you rejoicing at this good news every day?
 - b. How are you rejoicing?
2. What is your response to God’s presence with you today?
 - a. Will you have faith to listen and respond to God today in the midst of your life story?
 - b. He may not speak to you by an angel today, but He still speaks His love and truth to your heart by His Word and through his Spirit.
 - c. Will you listen, believe, and follow God with obedient, joyful faith just as Mary did?
3. As the Christmas season nears once again, consider how you will invite Jesus into your heart and life with renewed joy each day.