

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Mary Visits Elizabeth**

*Luke 1:39-45*

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# Mary Visits Elizabeth

## Scripture

A few weeks ago I began a new series of sermons in the Gospel of Luke in a study that I am calling “To Seek and To Save the Lost.” Today I would like to study the passage in which Mary visits Elizabeth. Theologians sometimes call this meeting “The Visitation.”<sup>1</sup>

In this passage Luke gives us the first of five nativity hymns. They are: Elizabeth’s *Benedicta* (1:42-45), Mary’s *Magnificat* (1:46-55), Zechariah’s *Benedictus* (1:68-79), the angels’ *Gloria* (2:14), and Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29-32). The name for each of these nativity hymns comes from the first word in the Latin translation of the Bible. Bible scholar Graham Scroggie rightly identifies these Christmas carols as “the last of the Hebrew Psalms, and the first of Christmas hymns.”<sup>2</sup> I plan to teach them to you, and then we will learn to sing them as well in the coming weeks.

These songs appear only in Luke’s Gospel, which makes Luke the New Testament church’s first hymnologist. It has been said that “Luke included these lyrics because he understood that the gospel is and must be musical.”<sup>3</sup> Robert Coleman, one of my professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, often used to say, with great vigor, “The gospel puts joy in your heart, a spring in your step, and a song on your lips!”

So, let’s read about it in Luke 1:39-45:

**<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into**

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<sup>1</sup> This is what it is called in *Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just Jr., Ancient Commentary on Scripture, NT 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>2</sup> W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1948), 371.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Volume 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2009), 45.

**the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Luke 1:39-45)**

## **Introduction**

I did my military service in the South African Air Force. At that time there were two categories of personnel. Some served as career personnel, and the rest of us served for either one or two years.

As one who served for two years, I did basic training and then was assigned for the remainder of my time to serve as an Air Traffic Controller. I received a commission after one year, and as a two-year man I was not eligible for any further promotion.

Those who were in the military for their careers were eligible for promotion every few years. I think it was in the spring that promotions and reassignments were posted. The career guys became rather anxious in the weeks leading up to the day on which the promotions and reassignments were posted. And there were always lots of rumors flying around about promotions and reassignments.

During my second year I decided to tell the officers in the control tower that I had heard that each one had been promoted and reassigned, but to the place to which he did not want to go! Because rumors were so widespread, they did not know whether or not to believe me. And so for several weeks, I

would tease them and get them worried. Happily, however, when the posting finally came, each one got the promotion and reassignment for which he was hoping!

There are many times in our lives when we hear some news but do not know whether or not to believe it. Of course, when the confirmation finally comes, we are then able to rejoice at the news.

This is exactly how Luke began his Gospel. He set side-by-side two similar stories regarding John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. He told us about two announcements, two responses, two pregnancies, two hymns of praise, and two births that led to two great lives.

In today's narrative, Luke tells us about the visit of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to Elizabeth, the mother of John. In this visit Luke gives a wonderful glimpse into the way in which God confirmed Mary's faith.

So, today, in the account regarding the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, Luke tells us how God confirms our faith.

## **Lesson**

An analysis of the account regarding the visit of Mary to Elizabeth as set forth in Luke 1:39-45 will show us how God confirms our faith.

Let's conduct the analysis by looking at the following:

1. Personal Confirmation (1:39-40)
2. Physical Confirmation (1:41a, 44)
3. Prophetic Confirmation (1:41b-43, 45)

### **I. Personal Confirmation (1:39-40)**

First, let's begin by looking at personal confirmation.

Luke had just told Mary that she was going to conceive a baby by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:31, 35). He then gave

Mary a sign by telling her that her relative Elizabeth in her old age had also conceived a son, and that she was six months pregnant (1:36).

So, Luke said that **in those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah** (1:39), which is where Elizabeth lived. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months (1:56), probably until just after John the Baptist was born.

Travel from Nazareth **to a town in Judah** would have taken about three or four days. Some have suggested that Mary went to Elizabeth to hide her pregnancy. That is not likely as it would not have yet been evident that she was pregnant.

The exact location of the **town in Judah** where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived is not known. However, a sixth-century tradition places it about five miles from Jerusalem.

When Mary arrived, **she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth** (1:40). Our modern, western greeting is quick and simple: "Hello! How are you? It is good to see you!" That is about the extent of our greeting. However, in that culture, a greeting was "an extended social event, involving a lengthy dialogue."<sup>4</sup> Luke captures something of that extended greeting in the rest of the narrative.

The two women would have shared with each other their amazing recent experiences. What a wonderful encouragement they would have been to each other. Gabriel had visited Zechariah and Mary. He said that Elizabeth and Mary were each going to conceive in a miraculous way, Elizabeth in her old age and Mary without human intervention. They were now both pregnant, and although Mary's pregnancy was not yet evident, Elizabeth's pregnancy was clearly evident for all to see.

So, hearing Elizabeth's account and seeing her pregnant must have been a wonderful encouragement to Mary. God gave

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 68.

her a personal confirmation that his word to her is indeed true.

Now, how does this apply to us? Should we look for confirming signs in our lives that God's word is true? No. The point we should take away from this narrative is that God's word is true. By confirming it to Mary, he was confirming it to us as well. In other words, God confirms our faith when we take God at his word.

## II. Physical Confirmation (1:41a; 44)

Second, notice the physical confirmation.

Mary received a wonderful physical confirmation when she greeted Elizabeth. Luke said that **when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb** (1:41). Apparently, this was not the normal movement of a baby in his mother's womb. In fact Elizabeth said to Mary, **"For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy"** (1:44).

**The baby in Elizabeth's womb** was John. According to Gabriel, he was going to go before (1:17) and announce the arrival of the Christ (3:4-6). We know that Mary was already pregnant with Jesus because Elizabeth will say so in just a moment. This, then, was John's first testimony pointing to the arrival of the Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Pastor John MacArthur points out that this was not the first time that movement in a pregnant woman's womb had prophetic significance. Centuries earlier, during Rebekah's pregnancy, there was an incident with far-reaching implications. It is recorded in Genesis 25:21-23:

And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, "Two na-

tions are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger.”

The children were Jacob and Esau, whose descendants, Israel and the Arabs, have been in conflict for millennia.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, the joy that began in his mother’s womb would set the tone for John’s entire life and ministry. John saw himself as the friend and best man of the bridegroom, Jesus, when he said in John 3:29, “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.”

So, the baby’s leap in Elizabeth’s womb provided a wonderful physical confirmation to Mary.

### III. Prophetic Confirmation (1:41b-43, 45)

And third, let’s look at the prophetic confirmation. This is expressed in a number of different ways.

#### A. *Filling of the Holy Spirit (1:41b)*

First, notice the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Luke said that **Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit** (1:41b). In fact, Gabriel had already told Zechariah that his son John would be filled with Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb (1:15). In Bible times, being **filled with the Holy Spirit** was often connected to speaking a message from God.

For example, King David declared in 2 Samuel 23:2, “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.”

After John’s birth, Luke said that “his father Zechariah

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<sup>5</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 69.

was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67).

Luke also recorded the account of Simeon meeting Jesus. He said in Luke 2:27-32:

And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

So, the first thing to notice is that **Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.**

*B. Mary Is Blessed (1:42a)*

Second, notice that Mary is blessed.

Luke said Elizabeth **exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women”** (1:42a).

Elizabeth was so excited about what God was doing, both in her life and also in the life of Mary, that she literally shouted out the message that God gave her! What then followed is the first of five nativity hymns.

In Elizabeth’s *Benedicta* she pronounced that Mary is blessed, Jesus is blessed, Jesus is Lord, and that faith is blessed.

Elizabeth said to Mary, **“Blessed are you among women.”** One Bible commentator noted, “In our legitimate opposition to Mary-worship we should guard against falling into the opposite extreme!”<sup>6</sup> While we do not want to wrongly venerate Mary, we do need to correctly honor her. Elizabeth’s point was

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<sup>6</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 11, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 98.



that Mary was the most blessed of all women because she would bear the greatest child. Although Gabriel had told Zechariah that his own son would be great, Elizabeth humbly acknowledged that Mary's son would be greater still. Elizabeth's son would be the Christ's forerunner, but Mary's son would be the Christ himself. Elizabeth acknowledged that Mary had received the greater privilege and honor. Elizabeth was thrilled at the privilege of being the mother of the Christ's forerunner, but even more so that the Christ was coming.

Now, Elizabeth's humility is remarkable. We should note that she was not jealous at all that Mary had received the greater honor. Let us not become jealous when God gives greater privileges and gifts and blessings to others. But rather, let us in humility rejoice in God's gifts to us, and also in his gifts to others.

This reminds me of a story of a preacher who lived in London when the great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was preaching. Actually, at the time there were a number of great preachers with large congregations. This particular preacher, whose name I do not recall, was jealous because his congregation was small and many others were large and had the blessing of God. One day he realized his sin, and so instead of praying that God bless his ministry, he started praying that God would bless the ministry of the other preachers even more. Interestingly, their ministries continued to flourish, but as soon as he rejoiced in their success, he started to see fruit in his own ministry!

*C. Jesus Is Blessed (1:42b)*

Third, notice that Jesus is blessed.

Elizabeth continued her song and said, "**And blessed is the fruit of your womb!**" (1:42b).

That familiar Old Testament phrase (cf. Genesis 30:2;

Deuteronomy 7:13; Psalm 127:3; Isaiah 13:18) is used only here in the New Testament, and it refers to Jesus.

*D. Jesus Is Lord (1:43)*

Fourth, notice that Jesus is Lord.

Elizabeth then said, “**And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**” (1:43).

This is an amazing statement by Elizabeth. She referred to Jesus as “**my Lord.**” Elizabeth is therefore the first person in the New Testament to confess her faith in Jesus as Lord.

Clearly, Elizabeth recognized that she was a sinner. She knew the promise of God to send the Christ who would come and pay the penalty for sin. And now, even though she could not yet see him, she recognized that the baby in Mary’s womb was her Lord!

*E. Faith Is Blessed (1:45)*

And finally, notice that faith is blessed.

Elizabeth said, “**And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord**” (1:45).

Mary was blessed not only because of her privilege in being the mother of the Christ, but also because of her faith in believing **that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.** By using the third person pronoun, **she**, Elizabeth was indicating that God would bless everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the account regarding the visit of Mary to Elizabeth as set forth in Luke 1:39-45, we should

respond obediently to God's confirmation.

God's confirmation is given to us in the Scriptures. Every prophecy pointing to the Lord Jesus and his first coming has come true. Apologist Josh McDowell said:

The testimony of the Scriptures is that the purpose of prophecy is to let us know that God exists and that He has a plan for this world. By the foretelling of persons, places, and events hundreds of years before their occurrence, the Bible demonstrates a knowledge of the future that is too specific to be labeled a good guess. By giving examples of fulfilled prophecy, the Scriptures give a strong testimony to their own inspiration.<sup>7</sup>

God confirmed his word to Mary. She responded obediently to God's confirmation. And we should too.

Luke is giving us every opportunity to believe that Mary's son is indeed the Savior of sinners. We will learn that Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life. He then went to the cross and paid the penalty for sin. Three days later God raised Jesus back to life again.

God now calls us to respond in obedience to his word. Believe that Jesus is not only Elizabeth's Lord but that he is your Lord too. Then repent of your sin and ask him to forgive you. He will do so, and then you will also say with my seminary professor, "The gospel puts joy in my heart, a spring in my step, and a song on my lips!" Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Josh McDowell and Don Douglas Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1993), n.p.



# **Mission Statement**

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## **Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz**

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

Almighty God, thank you for the account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. We are so grateful for how you confirmed the faith of Mary. I pray that you will grant the gift of faith to anyone here today who does not yet know Jesus as his or her Lord.

And for all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go into the world trusting God and his word!