

A defendant was on trial for murder in Oklahoma. There was strong evidence indicating guilt, but there was no corpse. In the defense's closing statement, the lawyer, knowing that his client would probably be convicted, resorted to a trick.

The lawyer said as he looked at his watch, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for all of you. Within one minute, the person presumed to be dead in this case will walk into this courtroom."

He then looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly as well. A minute passed, but nothing happened. Finally, the lawyer said, "Actually, I made up the previous statement, but you all looked on with anticipation. I, therefore, put it to you that there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was murdered and insist that you return a verdict of 'not guilty'."

The jury, clearly puzzled, retired to deliberate. A few hours later, the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of "guilty". "But how?" asked the lawyer. "You must have had some doubt – I saw all of you stare at the courtroom door."

Then replied the jury foreman: "Oh, we did look, but the defendant didn't."

That last piece of evidence unwittingly provided by the defendant confirmed his guilt beyond any reasonable doubt before a jury of his peers. This morning, I want to share with you the confirmation given to Mary, and given to us as well – removing any doubt regarding the goodness of God and His amazing plans for His people – and to move us in that direction, I want to get us started by reading the first four verses of **Luke 1**. Luke begins with these words:

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

I wanted to start here for an important reason. I think it may be easy for some to consider the Christmas story and those events leading up to the story as being similar to a fairy tale, like a Golden Book story that begins with "Once upon a time" – but what we see described in this passage is a thorough, careful, accurate,

and deliberate investigation conducted by a very educated and driven man named *Luke*. It would seem that Luke has been commissioned by a dignitary named **Theophilus** to do whatever he needs to do, to go wherever he needs to go to learn the real story about Jesus and His message, and so Luke is on the hunt for information and evidence – he’s leaving no stone unturned – he’s interviewing eye witnesses – separating fact from fiction, and so for all practical purposes, this gospel that Luke writes is a *God-inspired investigative report*, and so as we continue with this Christmas story – and it’s a confirmed story, with a real angel, real people, real places, and real events – I believe at some point in his investigation, Luke finds himself in a personal conversation with Mary where she unfolds to him what happened to her when it all began.

Now, if you recall from last week, Luke learned from Mary about this surprise visit she had from the angel Gabriel who came from heaven to Nazareth and delivered a birth announcement. In summary this is what Gabriel said to her:

“Mary, you are favored by God and He is with you. You’re going to be a mother. Your baby will be a boy, and you will name him Jesus. He’s the Son of God – the long-awaited Messiah that you and your people have been hoping for. He’s the King – the King of Kings who will rule forever, and also, just so you know, your Aunt Elizabeth is having a baby too, and she’s been pregnant for six months.”

This is what Luke is told in his conversation with Mary – and the conversation continues. So, if you have your Bible, let’s jump down to **verse 39** and we will pick up where we left off.

³⁹ Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

So, after receiving her amazing birth announcement – Mary drops everything and hurries off to the hill country of Judah near the vicinity of Jerusalem about 80 miles away to visit with **Elizabeth**.

Now, why was Mary in such a hurry? Well, let’s think about that for a moment. Mary has just been told something by the angel Gabriel that was unimaginable and humanly impossible – she was going to be the mother of Jesus – the Son of God – conceived by the Holy Spirit, all the while being a virgin.

Yes, Mary believed – let’s not doubt that, but this young teenage girl around the age of 14 is surely overwhelmed – the birth announcement she received was

incredible – Gabriel knew this, and so he gave Mary a sign that was also incredible – her Aunt Elizabeth – a very old woman who had been barren all of her life, was now six months pregnant.

For Mary to be able to see Elizabeth, up close and personal and very pregnant – to hear her story, would be confirmation of what she believed, and it would give her the encouragement that everything is going to happen just as God has planned. Elizabeth would be that one person who could confirm Mary’s experience.

You know, when God speaks to us, when it seems that He is doing something in our lives – maybe leading us in a particular direction, it’s good to have someone we can trust who will sit down with us and listen as we share our hearts. We need those people in our lives. On the flip side, it’s a very somber thing to be that person who is trusted to listen and who has been given the privilege to *confirm* or maybe even *challenge* what is being shared. It’s a great responsibility to speak into the lives of others, so be very careful what you say.

Well, Mary makes the long journey south, and she finds the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth. So, let’s continue beginning with **verse 41** where Luke tells us,

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”

Mary enters the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth, and as Mary greets this elderly couple – which would typically include an embrace and a conversation to catch up on what’s been happening – and there’s a lot that’s been happening – when Mary’s voice is heard, we are told that the unborn baby in the womb of Elizabeth jumps for **joy**. The baby we will come to know as *John the Baptist* – the forerunner to the Messiah, the greatest of all the prophets, in some respects, is already prophesying about Jesus in the only way he can – he expresses the emotion of joy and does summersaults in the womb of Elizabeth.

So, yes parents, you can talk to your unborn children and they can hear you. You, can tell them that you love them, that you have great plans for them, that you can’t wait to see them, and dad if the child is a daughter, you can tell her she can never

date, and if a son – no, he can't borrow the car. Just go ahead and put that out there early on.

Anyway, we are told that Elizabeth is **filled with the Holy Spirit** and she is given supernatural knowledge of Mary's condition – she needs no explanation, she already knows what happened, and as a result, she breaks out in words of praise.

Mary, blessed are you **among women** – not *above* women, but *among* women, and **blessed is the fruit of your womb**. So, from those words, we learn that Mary has already conceived – she may not have even known it up until this point, and she is called *blessed*. Mary is blessed among all other women because of who she bears. Her greatness comes because of the greatness of the child she carries.

Elizabeth continues and asks, **“And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?”** For Elizabeth, she was awe-struck just to be in the presence of the mother of her Lord. Even before His birth, Jesus was recognized as the Lord, and since we are here, I want to point something out for the sake of clarification.

Elizabeth is calling Mary the mother of her **Lord**, not the *mother of God* as some suggest. The Bible does not teach that Mary is the mother of God. God does not have a mother. Yes, Jesus is eternally God, and yet because He leaves heaven and comes in human flesh – as a physical person who enters into humanity – He has a mother, and it's to be Mary.

Now look at **verse 45** – **“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”**

This is the last mention of Elizabeth in the Bible, and it's here that Elizabeth gives her blessing to Mary because of her faith in God. Despite how incredible this was to Mary, despite how hard this will be to explain to others, despite the fact that her dreams and her plans would be dramatically changed – Mary believed. Mary is blessed because she believed God could do the unbelievable – the impossible is possible with God, and if you recall, she responded to the angel Gabriel with the words, *“May it be done to me according to your word.”*

Mary didn't ask for time to think about it. She didn't wait to “find peace about it”. She didn't ask for all the details, instead she made a deliberate decision to trust in the Lord's power and in His goodness despite the difficulties that would lie ahead for her.

Well, after hearing Elizabeth’s blessing, Mary breaks out in a song – a song of worship that will show her humble heart towards God as well as her knowledge of His Word for in her song she makes reference to over 20 Old Testament passages.

So, beginning with **verse 46**, this is the song shared with Luke:

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul exalts the Lord,

⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

**⁴⁸ “For He has had regard for the humble state of His bonds slave;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.**

A man went to church with an angel as his guide. The church was filled with people, but oddly, there was no sound. The band played, but no music could be heard; the lips of the music leader moved, but no song came forth. The pastor went through the motions of preaching, but the man heard nothing. He asked the angel, “Why?” and the angel replied, “This is the service as God sees it. When there is no heart in it, there is no sound.” Then in the back of the sanctuary, he heard a child pray, “I love you Jesus and I want to follow You.” The angel said, “Now, you are hearing the only part God hears – that which comes from the heart.”

I shared that because the worship given here by Mary. Notice she uses the words “**my soul**” and “**my spirit**” which speaks of her attitude of worship – it’s internal – it’s on the inside – it’s from her heart. That’s where true worship begins – it’s from the heart and it works its way out.

I think sometimes we come here “*to worship*” and there’s music, there’s singing, there’s praying, there’s preaching – everything is here except for our hearts. Often times, our hearts are somewhere else – but not here. As I was writing this, I was reminded of the song by Matt Redman entitled “*The Heart of Worship.*” A portion of it reads like this:

*King of endless worth
No one could express how much You deserve
Though I’m weak and poor
All I have is Yours, every single breath*

*I’ll bring You more than a song
For a song in itself is not what You have required*

*You search much deeper within
Through the way things appear
You're looking into my heart*

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship
And it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus*

In late 1990's in Watford, England, Matt Redman's church had a high caliber praise band and worship team, yet the Pastor knew that the congregation had lost its way in worship. They were not *producers* of worship – they were merely silent *consumers*. So, the Pastor asked *"When you come through the doors on a Sunday, what are you bringing as you're offering to God?"* It was an embarrassing question for many, and at that moment that the Pastor did something crazy – for a season, he stripped everything from the worship service that had become a distraction – no powerful praise band, no amplified sound system, no eye-catching multimedia productions, and no music leader.

At first, people didn't know what to do. There was just silence in the sanctuary, but eventually, people in the congregation broke out into a-cappella songs and heartfelt prayer. They began to worship God in a fresh way – from their hearts, and through that experience, Matt Redman wrote that song.

Worship comes from the heart – that's where it has to start, and just as Matt Redman wrote, it has to be about Jesus for He is worthy of our worship. He is our Lord, and He is our Savior, and if you look at **verse 47**, you will notice that Mary recognizes her own need for a **Savior**. Contrary to what some may teach, Mary was not sinless. Yes, she was a virgin who conceived by the Holy Spirit, but nowhere in the Bible does it say that she was sinless.

Mary needed a Savior just like you and me – she believed that, but what she couldn't believe is that God would actually choose her – a person of low status, a person of humble means. In her eyes and in the eyes of others, she's no one special. She's a teenage girl engaged to a poor village carpenter from an insignificant backwoods town – that's all, and yet, she is to be blessed by God to bear the Messiah.

Mary was humble, and true worship is born out of a humble heart before God whereas pride stands in the way because pride is consumed with one person – *you*. Your wants, your dreams, your plans, your expectations, your control, and your

terms – it’s all about you, and when it’s all about you – **how in the world can you worship Him?**

Worship is born out of a humble heart, and it’s directed towards God. He is the object of worship, and that’s exactly where Mary takes us next beginning with **verse 49**. Listen to what she says,

**49 “For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name.**

**50 “And His mercy is upon generation after generation
Toward those who fear Him.**

**51 “He has done mighty deeds with His arm;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.**

**52 “He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
And has exalted those who were humble.**

**53 “He has filled the hungry with good things;
And sent away the rich empty-handed.**

**54 “He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy,**

**55 As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever.”**

If you noticed, several times in this passage Mary says “**He has**” – meaning she knows this is all about God. This is His will. This is His amazing plan. This is what God is doing by His grace and His mercy for her, and not only for her, but Mary also includes what God will do by His grace and His mercy for others from generation to generation, and therefore, He is to be the object of worship.

Mary worships God for what He is doing. She worships God for what He will do in the future. And maybe more importantly, as Mary refers to Old Testament Scripture, she worships God for what He has already done in the past – and if you think about that, what God has faithfully done in the past – just as He promised – gives us the confidence and the confirmation that God will do exactly what He said He will do – **and isn’t that a reason for worship?**

As I have said to you before – there may be times when you can’t look forward to see where God is and to understand what He’s doing in your life, but you can always look back in the rearview mirror of life so to speak to see where God has been all along and to see what He has done for you. In some respects, on a broader scale, that’s what Mary has done in her song – she looked in the rearview mirror.

Now, that brings us to our last verse – **verse 56**, where Luke tells us,

And Mary stayed with her about three months, and then returned to her home.

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months until John was born, and then she returned home to the town of Nazareth, and by then, it was clear that Mary was pregnant, and no doubt her troubles began. The rest of the town did not receive a visit from the angel Gabriel – they're clueless, and so Mary would have to endure the whispers, and the gossip, and the false accusations – but as difficult as it must have been, there was a confirmation in her heart that God is good and He had an amazing plan for her.

God is good and He has a plan for you and me, and the confirmed blunt truth is this: God owes us *nothing*, and we owe Him *everything* – remember that – take it to heart, and then worship Him.

Source Material:

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