

College football season has begun once again... and I get to watch Fresno State play more often than I did when we were season ticket holders down there. ... For some reason (up here) they are on T.V. nearly every week (a fact that annoys my oldest daughter... who wishes she could watch more Oregon State Beaver games.) ... But every game that we watch... we turn the sound down on the television... and tune-in (by internet) to the local Fresno radio station that broadcasts it. (Pat Hill and Paul Loeffler usually give us better insight about our team.)

But the internet and the television are never in sync with each other... unless we put one on hold and wait for the other to catch-up. It sounds simple ... but it isn't always such an easy-fix. And when we do get them in sync... after a commercial break... one (or the other) sometimes delays several seconds... and they are out-of-sync once again. The television may show the team still in their huddle and Paul Loeffler is shouting over the radio: "*Heiner gets it out to Remigio. The pass is caught on the 50 yard line... he sheds one tackle... makes another one miss... is headed for the sideline. He's at the 30... the 20... past the 10... and dances into the end zone!!!*"

I am jumping for joy... even though I look at our TV and they are still in their huddle. ... On television – no pass has even been thrown yet. But (you see) I trusted the announcer's voice. (It never occurred to me that he would lie.) I knew that his words proceeded what I would eventually see actually happen. ... I celebrated when Paul Loeffler spoke – not when I saw what took place.

Because of the broken world that we live in... I must shamefully admit... that I don't always trust the Word of God as confidently. There is so much

that God tells us will happen – before it happens. He has given us many promises... that we should be able to believe with as much certainty. He's never let us down... and He never will. But do we ever believe it as strong as we might believe the voice of an un-synced football announcer?

Today... we pick up where we left off three weeks ago in Luke. ... We will find (not **ONE**) but *two* women who **did** have such faith. ... Mary and her cousin Elizabeth are forerunners of what a true believer (who trusts **and responds** to God's Word) needs to look like.

Here is what we are about to see in today's verses: *Blessing comes to those who rely on God's promises.* ... [P A U S E] ...And just so that we can appreciate this lesson *completely*... let me take the time to remind you of what is in the background of this narrative.

The last time we were together... we saw how the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary... and told her that she would bear the Messiah – *even though she was a virgin.* ... But this was her response... and it was immediate:

Luke 1:38 (ESV)

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.

Mary chose to set aside her own dreams of a **normal** life to accept the **complications of obedience.** ... Yes... she was experiencing God's blessings... but let's face it... Mary accepted an extremely **difficult** assignment. (She had to trust God in the dark!)

(You know)... often there are *complications* that come with *obedience.* ... God's test is... whether or not we will obey Him anyway! Will we **still** trust God in the dark?

Mary passed! ... She never once said: *“This is impossible! I don’t believe what I’m hearing.”* Nor did she object: *“There’s no way I’m going to stand before the people of Nazareth and listen to them call my son illegitimate. I refuse to spend the rest of my life defending my honor!”*

The rest of Nazareth didn’t receive an angelic visit (like she did.) ... so Mary would have to endure the sting of false accusations along with the privilege of bringing God’s redemptive plan to the world. ... She would be the bearer of the most wonderful secret in the history of humankind... yet suffer the consequences of being misunderstood. ... In Matthew 1:18-19... we read how **Joseph** (her future husband) responded. He didn’t believe her and was wanting to put her away... But Gabriel came to him... and Joseph relented.

But what about Mary’s mother and father...? What about everyone in the little town where she was from? ... Did Gabriel appear to everyone else...? **No!** Imagine the loneliness Mary must have felt as she tried to explain the wonderful news of her unique place in history. ... Imagine the reaction of those who knew her: *“Pregnant - yet still a virgin? Just stop and tell us the truth!”*

But in our passage today we see that Mary chose to believe God – in the dark!

We begin (today) with verse 39. ... Mary made an immediate decision to visit her aged cousin Elizabeth... who Gabriel had also told would have a miraculous birth. But **Elizabeth’s pregnancy** was because she was beyond the child-bearing years. Now she was carrying John the Baptist (the prophet who would prepare the way for the Messiah.)

Mary left quickly. ... And I cannot keep from wondering... What did this young girl (probably on 14 years old)... tell her mom and dad? *“I’m going to visit Elizabeth. ... “Yes, I know she lives **85 miles away**.... And it will take me 3 exhausting days to walk there.” “Yes... dad... I am well aware that she lives in the hill country and the steep paths are difficult to climb...” “No mom... I’m not worried about being a woman and traveling alone... even passing places where there will be robbers and thieves... and sordid characters...”* One of them would surely ask: *“If you are indeed pregnant... Mary... you might experience morning sickness!”*

If these were MY parents...? (or perhaps yours...?)... Mary would **NOT** be taking this trip! ... But God must have intervened. ... Mary DID go... and she went **RIGHT AWAY**.

There was a strong human joy in the meeting of these two expectant mothers—one in the flower of youth... the other’s bloom long gone. These two were to become “soul-sisters” in the divine plot to save mankind. ... They would share their hearts as few humans ever have. ... And I want you to notice how “Joy” is the major theme of these verses.

Luke 1:39

Mary heads toward the hill country with exuberance!. This word “**haste**” is from the Greek word $\sigma\pi\omicron\upsilon\delta\eta$ (**spoo-day**) which not only indicates her speed... but her exuberant attitude. ... It means “earnestness in striving after anything... to mean business... diligence... or fervor.” ... It is the same word that is used in the following familiar verses.

* *Romans 12:11—Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;*

* 2 Peter 1:5—*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;*

Mary was exuberantly **determined** to see Elisabeth. She couldn't wait to share what had happened to her. You can just imagine Elizabeth's response, "*Tell me all about it. What happened? Then what did Gabriel say? And what did you say?*"

(You know)... we **need** other human beings to share the watershed moments of our lives. ... To be a Christian is to believe in a God who is the God of the impossible... and to belong to a family of brothers and sisters who are *there*... when you need them most. ... If you belong to *this* family of faith... you have fellow believers to go to... who will listen to you when great joy or sorrow overwhelm you. ... [P A U S E] ...

We have only gotten to ONE verse of today's passage... but there is such a GREAT lesson for us to see in it! ... Are you exuberant and determined to share with other people what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you or what you have learned from His Word? ... When it comes to the matter of serving Christ and telling others about the Lord... how is your fervency? Are you willing to face inconvenience or hardship to serve God? ... When it comes to serving God... do you have a sense of hurriedness or urgency? ... Mary is teaching us these things in this trip to the hill country.

We live in a day of "convenient Christianity." ... Most Christians today fail to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ because they are **repulsed** by any spiritual responsibilities that would require *sacrifice... strain... stress... suffering... steadiness... saintly living... steadfastness... and standing alone* for God. ... I am convinced that our days on earth are VERY short! ... Get on your horse and head to the hill country with

haste. ... With the time we have left... do what the Lord leads you to do... whether it is in the area of witnessing... working... giving... teaching... encouraging... praying... or... forgiving someone.

... [P A U S E] ...

Luke 1:40-42

Only a mother can relate to the sensation described here because more than a prenatal kick or turn - it was a **leap** (!) ...(an upward vault.) The word translated “leaped” here is used to describe skipping or leaping, as of sheep in the field.

When shepherds take their flocks to new, green pastures, upon entering the pasture, the lambs are known to sometimes skip, leap, and jump up and down for joy. This is the meaning of the word *σκιρταο* (**skeer-tah'-o**) which is translated “leap.”

I personally believe that Baby John... when he was in the womb of his mother... heard Mary's voice and leaped for joy when he heard it. ... It is a fact that a baby can hear sounds in the womb. A study in Ireland... using ultrasound observation and measured pulses of sound revealed that babies with normal hearing start moving in reaction to sound around 16 weeks. ...
... Let me say right here that a baby in the womb of its mother is a real person. ... They are human beings with a soul ... not a blob of tissue.

Baby John was about nine inches long and weighed about one and a half pound at this time in his mother's womb. ... He looked like a perfect miniature newborn. ... His skin was translucent. ... He had fingerprints and toe prints. ... Sometimes he opened his eyes for brief periods and gazed

into the liquid darkness of the womb. When he heard Mary's voice... he responded with the *human emotion* of joy.

John was a very special baby. In fact... the Bible tells us that not only was his **mother** filled with the Spirit of God... but as a baby still in his mother's womb... he would be filled with God's Spirit too. (Remember what Gabriel told Zacharias?

Luke 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

He was a prophet and his leap for joy was his **first declaration** that would reach its summit 30 years later when he would point to Jesus and cry aloud: "*Behold, the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world!*"

Baby John was rejoicing... and so was his mother.

Before we move on... let me point out something we are about to see.

What a mature person Elizabeth must have been! She was not at all jealous of her much younger relative. ... (As great as Elizabeth's own developing child was to be... the child whom Mary was carrying was far greater.) ... Elizabeth had also had a visit from the angel Gabriel and she herself was bearing a miraculous child. ... But she acknowledged that the child Mary was carrying was even **greater**... and she rejoiced. (God knew exactly what Mary needed.)

How blessed we are to have people in our lives who can be like that! Does God ever use you like He used Elizabeth...? ... When you receive a great honor... but someone else receives one even greater... can you have joy LEAP up inside of you for them? ... We need to be encouragers!

(LISTEN!) So many people in the church think that they have the gift of DIScouragement! If a new believer walks up to you and says: “*Man! I just discovered the most fantastic verse of Scripture. It’s John 3:16...*” And then they quote it... please rejoice with them – even though you are LONG familiar with it. Don’t throw a wet blanket on them by declaring something like: “*Yeah... I learned that verse a long time ago...*” No. Instead be an encourager! Rather say something like: “*Wow... you’re right! That is a great verse! Do you know any others?!*”

Luke 1:42

Because Mary believed the Word of God... she experienced the power of God.

“Blessed” means more than “Happy.” ... “Happy” often indicates how a person feels. ... “Blessed” what he is. ... A person is blessed when God’s favor rests upon him (when the Lord delights in him.) ... Elizabeth also said: “*And blessed is the fruit of your womb.*” Not only Mary... but also her Son is the object of the Father’s delight. ... (And yes...throughout Christ’s earthly ministry... the Father took special delight in His Son.)

Luke 1:43

“*Mother of my Lord*” ... Is a term of messianic respect. ... Elizabeth marvels that Messiah visits her... and that her relative bears this significant child. ... She does not take the visit of her Lord as an everyday... insignificant matter. ... Elizabeth counts it an honor to be such a part of God’s eternal plan. Her question, “*How has this come upon me?*” expresses her humility. How is she worthy to share in this visit and in these events?

Luke 1:44

“As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” ... The sense here is that **before** Elizabeth herself could return the greeting... the child in her womb leapt. (How interesting!) ... John (the little prophet) responded before Elizabeth did!

Luke 1:45

To catch the sense here... we must understand that Zechariah (who was deaf and mute... because he had disbelieved Gabriel)... was (no doubt) standing in amazed silence at Elizabeth’s side. ... It would be normal for him to be at the greeting of their house-guest. Elizabeth’s piercing beatitude played against Zechariah’s **failure** to believe: “ ‘*Blessed is she who has believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord!*’ ” The Holy Spirit celebrated Mary’s *faith* as she believed and submitted to God’s will and so become the mother of the Messiah.

Here we have come to the theme of our whole passage. ... God’s promise... conveyed by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:31–35... is what Mary believes will occur... and... is the ground for her being blessed. ... She believes God’s promise that she will bear the messianic child. (As I said earlier)... Mary (and Elizabeth) are the forerunners of the true believer who trusts and RESPONDS to God’s Word. **Blessing comes to those who rely on God’s promises!** ... [P A U S E] ...

Mary is the example of one with faith. ... Elizabeth pictures the joy that believers should have. ... Together they show that trust and joy are a vital part of a walk with God. ... Their shared joy pictures how the believing community (the church) should respond... whenever we come together. ...

God's promises should never make us passive!

If we truly believe God's promises to us... we would show a lot more joy (wouldn't we?) We would come together much more like Mary and Elizabeth.

When we look at the attitude and sentiments of Mary and Elisabeth... we should be challenged by their enthusiasm and joy. They were not ashamed of God's blessings and promises - and neither should we be embarrassed! ... As a Christian... you have nothing to be embarrassed about... or to feel ashamed. ... If you are ashamed of the Lord... then the Lord has a problem with you.

Mark 8:38 (ESV)

³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The faith of Mary to believe God and trust the Lord to fulfill His promises challenged and inspired Elisabeth. ... Let me ask, "*Do you live by faith? Do you trust God at His Word and proclaim your faith in Him? Are people challenged to trust the Lord by faith because of the faith that you have in Him?*" ... Let me encourage you to be a man or woman of faith... and trust God for great things. ... Live by faith **and brag on the Lord** for what He has done for you! ... Prove God over and over again by your faith in Him. ... Tell others of the answers to your prayers. ... [P A U S E] ...

Elizabeth's blessing produces a reaction from Mary. She bursts into praise... offering a hymn of thanksgiving. ... The hymn (which people for centuries have called "The Magnificat") gives thanks for God's gracious dealings with her... and actions that reflect how He has (and will continue)

to treat humanity through all generations... and God's covenant faithfulness to His people (Israel.) ... Mary celebrates the fact that the Christ child has come to deliver the people of God... reverse injustice... and produce salvation.

Just before we read them (again)... there is something that I would like to point out... in order that we might understand them better. ... **These are the most revolutionary words ever spoken.** What we are about to look at is not (simply) some Bible fluff that quickly gets read at Christmastime on our way to the BIG part of the story. No. This is very profound! Don't miss being blessed by it!

William Temple (Archbishop of Canterbury) warned his missionaries to India never to read the Magnificat in public. ... Christians were already suspect in that country... and they were cautioned against reading verses so inflammatory.

Inflammatory(?) YES! - According to the Magnificat... Jesus... (the ultimate revolutionary) ... completely reverses all human values. ... What Mary was prophesying about her unborn Son... is terrifying to the establishment... whoever and wherever they are. ... They cannot hear these words gladly. ... (LISTEN!) These words boldly declare that Jesus has come to instigate the kind of revolution... that turns every social norm upside down! ... (And it is exactly what we need.)

What brought all this to her mind at this point? ... Well... as she travelled for three days to see Elizabeth... it would not be beyond reason to think that she would be thinking about how her situation fit into the context of God's dealing with Israel and the world... and to think about other

miraculous births in the Old Testament Scriptures. If so... her mind would take her to the miraculous birth of the prophet Samuel. ... Did you know that so much of Mary's Magnificat are direct quotes from Hannah... when she praised God for Samuel's miracle birth...? (We don't have time for me to show you all of the same expressions... or how Mary quotes so much of the Psalms.) But Mary shows that she knew Scripture quite well! She understood what her baby was all about. She was quoting what the Scripture already wrote about Him. She simply condenses scattered passages from Scripture about how Jesus will invert the established systems of the world. The low and humiliated will be exalted.

Mary's song mainly celebrates God's goodness... faithfulness... and power. She shows the futility of trusting in self... of trusting in political power... or of trusting in riches. ... Mary's trust was in God... and it was rewarded.

Luke 1:46-49

"All generations will call me blessed" ... Is Mary boasting? "Wow! Aren't I special? ... I have a prominent spot in history!" ... What happened to Mary's humility? ... No! ... Mary recognizes that God has given her a special place - by having her bear the Messiah. ... She explains that all generations will (also) perceive her fortune in receiving this special role. She is an example of one graced by God... an example of faith.

She is leading up to showing us (from Scripture)... that God has used the humble - rather than the powerful to perform His mighty deeds. ... In the Old Testament... it was the oppressed and powerless Israelites... who became the people of God! Now it is a young and unknown daughter of

Israel... chosen to bear the Messiah. ... So Mary references her lowly social status and background.

Her joy is centered on God's being "*mindful of*" His humble servant and exalting her above anything she could ever even dream about. ... God has looked beyond the beautiful and powerful people at the top of the chain... and chosen **her** out of those at the bottom to be His exalted vessel of deliverance. ... Israel was the lowliest of the nations... and Mary was the lowliest among Israel's daughters. The parallels are exact. ... God elevates the least favored... to the highest place... in order to demonstrate His mercy and glory... and He has done so - once more.

What God promised and what seemed impossible was possible for God, as He delivered on His commitment of the "great things" His power does. God creatively exercises His power to deliver His people. The exercise of God's power demonstrates His authority as an exalted... Holy Ruler.

When God calls... God will enable. ... The enabling of Mary was a tremendous miracle. ... Be encouraged that God will enable you to do what He has called **you** to do. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now we are ready for the radical inversion part... that Jesus was prophesied to bring... (the great *revolutionary reversal* of the social order.)

Luke 1:50-53

Mary has put it all together from Hanna's prayer and the Psalms. Messiah will **right** these terrible wrongs. The weak will dethrone the mighty... the humble will scatter the proud... the nobodies will be exalted... the hungry

will be filled... and the rich will end up poor! The grace of God works contrary to the thoughts and ways of this world system.

Jesus is about to return... Folks! Any time (and I think it is REAL SOON) He is coming back to Earth. ... And when He does... all the injustice of the ruling classes against God's people... will be reversed... as the humble are lifted up by God. ... The rulers' oppression and lack of compassion will be dealt with by God (Who desires that people treat their neighbor with compassion.)

The rulers deny God and oppress His people. Mary (probably) has in mind the Romans and those like them... who were using their secular power to keep God's people at bay. ... Those who think they have authority do not have ultimate authority. ... This is something we must remember in times like these (we are living in the world of the end.)

Evil and deception is rampant. (Here – in once was the good 'ol USA) I do not trust fair elections (as I used to) and my confidence in our nation's top law agencies... education system... big business... news media... and social media - is greatly diminished in my view. ... But I don't have to panic and neither do you! ... God will judge all the arrogant... who despise Him. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Luke 1:54-55

The nation of Israel had fallen on hard times. ... Things were bleak (very dark!) ... Who could believe God's promises... with the circumstances that they faced? ... (Think about it!) Their nation had been invaded repeatedly... and now... cruel Herod sat on David's throne. ... For **400 years** ... God had been silent.

But Mary and Elizabeth chose to believe – in the dark. They believed that now God was about to speak and act - as never before! ... The divine covenant that God had signed with Abraham was unconditional... (never to be revoked despite his descendant's constant apostasies.)

Two women (an old one and a young one) blended their voices... and Zacharias sat there dumb! ... (Oh how painful it must have been!) Probably never in all of the nine long months did his speechless condition afflict him more.

Luke 1:56

Think of the mutual encouragement and fellowship that was theirs. Both were miraculously expecting. Elizabeth was well past the nausea that likely lay ahead for Mary. They became sisters in experience as well as in soul. Both their unborn babies had been announced by the same angel, Gabriel. Both their unborn sons had mutually fulfilling prophecies made regarding them.

If we were to speculate on what they talked about during those three months... I bet we would be pretty accurate. I'm sure they covered everything — angels and babies and God and Israel and the world. ... They speculated over what the Scriptures meant. ... They prayed together. ... They shared life. ... Encouragement flowed between them.

But as we close today... I would like to bring us back to the central idea that we began with – TRUSTING GOD'S PROMISES IN THE DARK.

You may be in your own very dark place right now... and God seems so silent. Where is He...? Does He care...? ... You may feel somewhat

justified for your *faltering belief* in His promises. Injustice has been committed against you.

Ponder for a moment Mary and Elizabeth's faith. Consider what dark circumstances *they* faced. ... There really **IS** more hope than you think! What they believed and acted upon is still very much true. ... God's apparent silence might simply be His faith-building test for you. He brings every servant of His (that He uses) through multiple tests... so they will experience His deliverance... and once delivered... have a stronger trust in Him.

(LISTEN!) Jesus is about to return. We can't be sitting around licking our wounds. We need to get up and start rejoicing. *He will* right every wrong! Take your eyes off of man and the hurt you have experienced... and put them on the One Who is about to reverse all injustice. ... Can I pray for you to do this...?