

The Visitation

Luke 1:39-45

1. Introduction.
 - a. We have seen two great narratives in the first part of chapter 1.
 - i. Two great announcements involving the births of two anticipated figures.
 1. The forerunner – John the Baptist (5-26).
 2. The Messiah – Jesus (27-38).
 - ii. These two births were both miraculous.
 1. Elizabeth was an old, barren woman.
 2. Mary was an unmarried, teenage virgin.
 - b. These are paralleled narratives.
 - i. Two women of faith.
 - ii. The same angel, Gabriel, makes a divine announcement concerning these women.
 - iii. The announcement involves the declaration of a miraculous conception, resulting in both women becoming pregnant.
 - iv. Both women are told they would become pregnant with an anticipated figure of Old Testament prophecy.
 - v. Both of these children involve the demonstration of God's faithfulness to His promise of old.
 - c. While there's much similarity in the structure of the two narratives, Luke desires to highlight differences of the two figures to show how Jesus is greater.
 - d. This passage is the meeting of the two covenants.
 - i. John represents the Old Covenant.

- ii. Jesus represents the New Covenant.
- iii. As a result, the structure of the passage shows how the Old Covenant was about to be overshadowed by the new, indeed greater, covenant.

2. The Greeting (39-40).

- a. At the announcement of the Gospel, Mary immediately arises and makes haste to discover more of what she's just been told (39).
 - i. This is a demonstration of faith.
 - 1. At the announcement of Jesus Christ, she compelled (without command) to learn more of the divine prerogative.
 - 2. This most likely took place within days of the announcement (cf., v. 36 with vss. 56-57).
 - 3. Nothing is mentioned of Mary's conception. Most likely happened sometime between vss. 38 and 39).
 - ii. This would have been rare. A young, engaged girl, would not have traveled alone—about 80-100 miles (3 to 4 days).
 - iii. Many wonder why she left in such a hurry. Most probable is because she wanted to confirm what she had been told by the angel. She goes to see this “sign” of the angel's word—her pregnant relative.
- b. Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth (40).
 - i. “Greeting” is an important theme in this passage. Mentioned three times (vss. 40, 42, 44).
 - ii. Greetings in the Near Ancient East (NAE) were far more than a simple, “Hello.”
 - 1. It involved paying homage to a person.
 - 2. C.f., Exodus 18:7.

3. The Response of the Greeting (41-45).

- a. Mary comes for confirmation of the angel’s words. She not only learns Elizabeth is pregnant, but the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaps for joy at the sound of her voice. This is a piling of confirmation (41-42).
 - i. There are many explanations for how (and why) the baby leapt. However, we must let the text stand as it is written.
 - 1. Any psychological or physiological understanding is purely speculative, and typically motivated by an anti-supernatural agenda.
 - 2. C.f., 1:15 – John would be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in the womb.
 - a. John was to identify the Messiah.
 - b. The term used for “leaping” is a term used in the LXX to communicate the presence of joy (c.f., “skipping” in Psa. 114:6).
 - ii. The presence of the Spirit in the womb should not be understood as normative.
 - 1. The Gospels and Acts are a unique time in Redemptive History. It is a hinge point, where unique realities are taking place.
 - 2. As such, God works in unique ways.
 - 3. We should not build a theology of “the Spirit in the womb” from this one instance.
 - 4. We should understand this as a prophetic fulfillment of Gabriel’s announcement in 1:15.
 - a. John was to identify the Messiah.
 - b. The primary New Covenant role of the Spirit is to point to Jesus Christ. This is the first instance of that function and the first instance of John (the forerunner) recognizing the true Christ of Israel via the Holy Spirit.
 - c. Moreover, the “filling of the Spirit,” regarding John the Baptist, is different from “Spirit-filling” as we see it in the

Epistles (e.g., Eph. 5:18ff.). This is a unique work of the Spirit, working in unique individuals, to accomplish unique tasks.¹

- b. In a reversal of cultural norms, Elizabeth blesses Mary (42).
 - i. Luke typically writes in an unadorned fashion. Yet he piles on the terms to communicate the intensity of Elizabeth's response. It's an outburst of emotion!
 - ii. Elizabeth calls Mary the most blessed of all women.
 - 1. This doesn't mean Mary was chosen for this task because she was sinless, or that she perhaps contained special grace (e.g., RCT).
 - 2. Rather, it's a common Hebrew expression conveying the blessedness of a person.
 - a. In Hebrew culture, a woman's greatest blessing was bound up with childbearing.
 - b. Children are considered a great blessing in the Old Testament.
 - i. Children were certainly a blessing in a general sense, but the degree of blessing wasn't realized until a child grew up and accomplished certain things, thereby bringing honor and blessing to the parent.
 - ii. As such, the significance of the blessing is bound up in who the child was, and what they would be or accomplish.
 - iii. In light of this, we understand why Mary was the most blessed of all women—she would bear the Messiah.
- c. Elizabeth asks a rhetorical question (43-44).

¹ For more on this, reference the sermon by Matt Henry, "*Spirit Baptism, Spirit filling, and Spirit Indwelling*," where he deals with this concept, and Luke 1:15 in particular. <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=614111736310>.

- i. Elizabeth's words communicate she understands the baby of Mary to be her Lord.
 - 1. She's able to recognize this because she is filled by the Spirit (41).
 - 2. She's also able to recognize this because she has the forerunner growing inside of her, leaping at His presence (44).
 - ii. This is a significant point in redemptive history. Many view the Old and New Covenants as being opposed to each other. Yet John (representing the Old) rejoices at the presence of the New.
 - iii. All of this speaks to the utter greatness of Jesus Christ.
- d. Elizabeth's beatitude (45).
- i. Luke has Elizabeth switching from second person (42-44) to third person (45).
 - 1. The significance of this is that Luke desires to include his readers in on this blessing.
 - 2. It's a blessing which contains the fullness of the New Covenant.
 - ii. The key to receiving this blessing is bound up in the word, "believes."
 - 1. Contrast the belief of Mary with the unbelief of Zacharias.
 - 2. Mary is the model disciple through which Luke desires his readers to see themselves.

4. Conclusion.

- a. The call of this passage is to believe.
- b. The Gospel is both simple and complex. Yet it's applied through the simple reality of belief (i.e., faith)—the one thing that pleases God.