

# Best Friends Forever

## Luke 1:39–45 (ESV)

**INTRODUCTION:** A verse by verse study through a book of the New Testament is much like taking a cruise down a long and flowing river. Each day the Captain stops at a new port of call. You disembark on an excursion and discover all of the things that this particular port has to offer. To a casual traveler these stops may seem monotonous. You see one port of call, you've seen them all. But, an experienced guide may show you those things which you will only find in that particular port. If the guide does his job well, you will return from each excursion changed, enlightened, edified.

Well, our cruise down the *River of Luke* has brought us to a few ports thus far. At our first stop, we saw that 400 year **intertestamental period**, then we journeyed to Jerusalem to observe the **Angelic visitation of Zachariah** the Priest. From there we made our way to that sacred moment that **Mary was made aware** of her calling as the earthly mother of the Messiah. Today we have the opportunity to observe a precious expression of friendship between two ladies who love God with all their heart - **Mary and Elizabeth**.

**CONTEXT:** Remember that Mary had been visited by Gabriel as he announced what was soon to happen as the Holy Spirit would come over her and the power of God would overshadow her as the Eternal Son of God would step into time and space in the form of a human embryo.

Just as a screen was lifted over King Charles as the church of England poured the anointing oil over the newly crowned Monarch. The actual account of the moment of conception occurred behind the veil of history. It is not recorded in the text, nor in any of the Gospel account. We are told it **will happen**, then we are told it **had happened**. When we pick up in verse 39 as Mary is Journeying to the hill country of Judah, she is already with child.

*Look with me in verse 39...*

**TEXT: Luke 1:39–45 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,

What would have motivated Mary to take such a perilous journey as a newly pregnant expectant mother? One would assume that the experience of an angelic visitation, the implantation of the Divine seed, together with the understanding that her child would be the long awaited Messiah... may have been a bit overwhelming for the young Mary.

Not a soul in all of human history could truly relate to what she had experienced, but if anyone could get close - it was Elizabeth. She too had been visited by Gabriel. She too had experienced a divine prophecy, She too was in the midst of an unplanned, unforeseen, absolutely miraculous pregnancy.

There is something about monumental experiences, whether good or bad, that drives people together. Think about it, Joseph could not fully relate to what Mary was going through. Her parents couldn't relate. Her local friends couldn't relate. There was only one person on the planet that could say, "I understand", that was Elizabeth. Thus, Mary arose and went to her, in haste.

I will never forget the words of the minister at our wedding ceremony. He said, "a true loving friendship has the power to double joys and to cut trials in half".

I'm sure in some ways Mary was filled with Joy. But it's very likely that in some ways she was terrified. All of this had to be sorted out in her mind. What sort of advice would Elizabeth give her young friend? Perhaps it was Elizabeth who encouraged Mary to slow down, take it all in, **Luke 2:19 (ESV)** "treasure up all these things, pondering them in her heart". Perhaps she admonished Mary to trust the leadership of Joseph, that God gave him to her for a reason.

One of the great secrets of life is developing a circle of friends who love you and love God enough to correct your thinking when it is wrong, to affirm you thinking when it is right. ***To celebrate with you when you win and to weep with you when you lose.***

I learned early in ministry that you can't share your wins or your losses with just ANYBODY... but you need to share them with SOMEBODY. Mary's somebody was Elizabeth.

- **There was a geographic gap between them** - The journey from Nazareth to Elizabeth's home in Ein Karem is roughly 100 miles. Like my grandmother used to say of her walk to school, "it was uphill both ways and through the snow".
- **There was an age gap between them** - Remember Mary was likely 14 or 15, Elizabeth was well beyond child bearing years.

*But an experience with God can bridge any gap.* Think about it - the friend you have been looking for and desperately need may not be your age, may not be your ethnicity, may not live near you. But it is possible that they have been through something very similar to you and they too are trusting God for the future.

<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."

Elizabeth now likely in her 7th month of pregnancy hears the young Mary's voice and suddenly she (Elizabeth) is filled with Holy Spirit.

**HOLY SPIRIT** - I've mention to you that Luke introduces us to a few concepts more than the other Gospel writers. Luke speaks of **angels** more than the others, Luke speaks of the **ladies** who followed Christ more than the others, and Luke weaves the work of the **Holy Spirit** all through his Gospel.

This short episode gives us a glimpse into a developing theology of the Holy Spirit. Gabriel told Zachariah that John would be **filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb**. Whatever else that means, we can know that here in this text - Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and John responded by leaping!

In that sense consider the implication of this text for you mothers. We know that the baby experiences what you experience as a mom. If you use drugs or alcohol during pregnancy your child will be born with a unnatural yearning for that substance. You handicap your child from his or her earliest days. But what if you are filled with the Holy Spirit while pregnant? Oh that child will be born with a deep hunger for something, something that nothing other than God himself can satisfy. Dear mothers feed on the Word of God! Experience the power of God! Walk in the presence of God.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Well, one of the difficulties of Theology is simply that the Bible doesn't come with a dictionary. We have to deduce meanings from context.

Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

In the Greek it literally says, "*keep on being filled with the Spirit*". That understanding together with the way the phrase is used throughout the NT leads me to believe that the filling is an experience where God takes control for a moment and allows a little bit of Heaven to spill over into your soul. Typically the Holy Spirit empowers your particular spiritual gift and empowers it in an unusual way.

**ILLUSTRATION:** My experience has been that the Holy Spirit typically fills me in two places - my **study** and the **pulpit**. There are some aspects of bible study that an Atheist can do, the nuts and bolts, working with ancient languages, drawing logical conclusions, etc. But something happens for me in the midst of all that normal work, when God seems to fill me. I see things clearly in the text. I'm able to communicate them with words. The sermon flows as if it is being written by someone else.

Then in the midst of a sermon. There are times when a new gear kicks in. The Holy Spirit takes over. I am able to speak directly into the lives of listeners as if they were the only person in the room. A peace comes over the audience and they engage with the material.

**NOTICE:** that when Elizabeth experience the filling of the Holy Spirit, she had **supernatural understanding**. She shouldn't have known that Mary was pregnant, but she did. AND she knew that she was carrying the Messiah. That was no lucky guess, that was supernatural enlightenment.

One of my prayers as we journey through Luke is that you will get very familiar with the Holy Spirit. You will identify when He is filling you. That you will plan your life so that you experience that more frequently.

### What are we to learn about the Friendship between Mary and Elizabeth?

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived once told his sons - **Proverbs 12:26** <sup>26</sup>  
The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Friendship is an integral part of the human experience.

#### THEOLOGY:

- **GOD** - The Christian view of God is that of a Trinity. God is one, existing in three persons. Perfect friendship exists in between God the Father, Son and Spirit.
- **MAN** - God created the world, IT IS NOT GOOD for this man, made in our image to be alone. That doesn't reflect who God is properly.. let's make a friend for him.
- **GOD/MAN** - The bible says God walked with Adam. Walking is a Hebrew colloquialism for friendship. God and Man were friends.
- **SIN/FALL** - When sin entered the world through Adam. It not only separated God and Man, it separated man from man... the first murder occurred... friendship became a difficult barrier to overcome.
- **JESUS** - One of the great criticisms of Jesus was that he was a friend of sinners. He did ministry with a team of men, among the 12, he was closest to 3 (Peter, James and John) then he had friends who weren't in ministry - Mary, Martha, Lazarus.
- **CHURCH** - We see in the early church a people marked by friendship, they worshipped together, they ate together, they shared all they had in common, they rejoiced together, they wept together.
- **ESCHATON** - Heaven is friendship on steroids. No barriers, no divisions, no language separation. We see the people of God, from all of time, sitting at table with Jesus enjoying him and each other. Finally, reflecting the image God created them with.

**NOW** - Right now, we the Church are to be cooperating with God in developing the sort of friendships that He had from eternity past and that we will enjoy in eternity future.

*The kind of friendship Mary and Elizabeth enjoy. Here are a few ideas that may help in that process.*

## 1. Friendships are Discovered then Built

### Proverbs 27:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> ...the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

Solomon compares friendship to sweetness. In Solomon's day to say something was sweet meant it was like finding a precious treasure. Remember, this was before the days of refined sugar. In our day you can make anything sweet, but in Solomon's day... honey had to be discovered. Friendship is like that. You can't MAKE it happen... you have to discover it.

But that's also why it is so elusive. It's like sleep - if you try to go to sleep, you can't. You have to forget about sleep to find it.

Romantic Love is different - the people ARE consumed with each other. Friends ARE NOT consumed with each other, they are consumed with something outside of their relationship.

**ILLUSTRATION: C.S. Lewis** taught that friendship is discovered when two people are admiring a work of art, gazing at it, commenting on it, then they discover they both have an affinity for something outside of themselves, and in that moment friendship is born. He said it happens at the moment when one says to himself... "What! Him too? I thought know one appreciated this piece the way I did".

### LEVELS OF FRIENDSHIPS:

**a. Affinity** - Those are friendships discovered around something like a sport or a hobby. If you are able to appreciate what I appreciate, there must be something about you that I can understand and connect with. These are good, but they tend to be fickle. There is no external pressure to forge the friendship.

**b. Anger** - Those are friendships discovered because of a common foe. Perhaps you are concerned about a particular world view and you want to work against it. Well you will connect with others who share that concern. These tend to be stronger because they involve enemies and a common enemy always pushes people together.

**c. Achievement** - These are friendship between people who have achieved a certain level of success. You have heard it said, "it is lonely at the top"? Well it is, and when you get there you would be wise to look around and befriend others who have achieved much.

**d. Adversity** - There is something about Trauma that unites people. That was part of the strength of the early church. The persecution of Rome caused the church to

build deep and lasting friendships that stood the test of time.

e. **Adoration** - The highest level of friendship are those that are built on a mutual adoration of Christ.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I remember driving through the foothills of Kentucky with a Black Belizean Pastor and a one armed retired Kentuckian named Kenneth Montgomery. At the time I was in my 20's and they were in their late 70's. But as we spoke of the Lord and our experiences with Him... we were just three brothers worshipping our Savior.

Now if you want that kind of friendship, the kind Mary and Elizabeth had... don't pursue the friend, pursue God. If you pursue God, friend will find you.

*Friendship is discovered then built...*

## 2. Friendships Develop Through Difficulties

### Proverbs 27:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.

### Proverbs 17:17 (NASB95)

<sup>17</sup> A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

There is something about difficulties that gives vivid clarity to our relationships. In that sense they can be very redemptive and helpful.

**ILLUSTRATION:** A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. The winning definition read: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."

Whatever relationship Mary and Elizabeth had prior to this experience, it went to a new level now.

Beware of suffering alone. Men especially. We have a tendency to wander off into the wilderness when life gets difficult. Resist that urge. Or at least, take a friend with you. Like a fine sword, friendship is forged in the furnace of difficulty.

*Friendship is discovered then built... Friendship is Developed through difficulties.*

## 3. Friendships Get Easier with Reps

We don't know what happened after this encounter. Were there family reunions where they all got together? Did Jesus and John play as boys? Probably.

But remember - Elizabeth was well advanced in years. By the time John began preaching, it is likely that Elizabeth and Zachariah had gone to be with the Lord. It had to be hard for Mary to say, "goodbye" to Elizabeth... at least for a while.

But Mary was no loner. As the story progresses she become for others what Mary had been for her. By the time of the Crucifixion Mary was surrounded by a tribe of faithful friends. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the wife of Zebedee (her name wasn't given), Joanna, and Mary the wife of Clopas. BTW Mary was a derivative of Miriam (Moses's Mother's Name). So it was common in Israel.

That first friendship with Elizabeth took some work. It was a long and perilous journey for a young lady. But it was worth it.

The next friendship became easier. But one thing they all had in common. Jesus Christ was the center and the focus.

### **CONCLUSION/INVITATION:**

All of the great writers and philosophers have tackled that question. Perhaps none struck a chord with our culture any more than Mark Twain. In the book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*...at the moral climax of the story... Huck Finn decided he ought to help his friend Jim to escape. He thought back on the lessons he had learned in Sunday School about folks who help the runaway slaves will die and go to "everlasting fire". This was a very difficult thing for Huck. So he sat down to write a letter to Miss Watson to tell her where Jim could be found. But he thought back over his friendship with Jim, the trips down the river, laughing, talking and singing.

*Here is the passage from the book - It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:"All right, then, I'll go to hell"- and tore it up.*

Think of it, a man decided to go to hell for his friend. Wow! But it's just a story. It's just a fable. However, it is also the central truth of Christianity. Jesus choose to suffer Hell's wrath, to loose his friendship with the Father, in order to be your friend.

No greater love has any man than this than that he lay down his life for his friend.

Is Jesus Christ your friend? He can be today.