

Something to Sing About Luke 1:39-56

After Gabriel leaves, Mary is suddenly alone, and the house is once again quiet and dark. It's as though nothing ever happened. But something did happen, and Mary knows it. So now, the action immediately picks up.

40 – *and...*

41 – *and...and...*

42 – *and...*

43 – *and...*

45 – *and...*

The "and's are designed to illustrate how fast things are happening but also to separate the weight of each statement from the next.

(That's called a polysyndeton = a rhetorical and literary technique in which a conjunction appears over and over again to join different thoughts in one sentence." I may as well be reading Mark: Mark uses εὐθὺς (immediately) 41 times. The rest of the New Testament only uses εὐθὺς a total of 10 times (Matthew (5); Luke (1); John (3); Acts (1)). This means that for all the uses of εὐθὺς (immediately) in the New Testament (51), 80% of them occur in Mark's gospel).

Even the words, 'with haste' are intended to illustrate action. Just like the shepherds who come out of the hill country into Bethlehem moved "with haste" (2:16), Mary quickly leaves Nazareth for the hill country surrounding Jerusalem.

V 39 – "*went with haste*" = one Greek word = *poreuesthai/hurried*. Luke uses it 88 times in Luke-Acts. We've waited 4,000 years for Jesus. Now, just like Elizabeth and Mary's pregnancies, everything starts to quickly happen.

First: The Counsel Mary Sought. 39

Note: Under Jewish law, Mary should be stoned for a pregnancy outside of marriage. The house of a priest, Zechariah, was the last place Mary should have gone if she felt she had anything to hide.

But only one other woman on the planet at that time knew how Mary was feeling. This is a meeting of the two most unique women on earth at that time.

"Two women touched by God: a senior citizen and a teenager. Old barren Elizabeth was six months pregnant, staying at home to rest while she waited for the birth of John. The young virgin Mary had only just conceived. Was it really true? Would she really give birth to the Son of God? To confirm the promise, the angel told her about Elizabeth. So Mary took the hint and went to see her old cousin – a dangerous journey through almost a hundred miles of rugged wasteland." – Philip Ryken

Second: The Confirmation She Received. 40-45

- a) There was a greeting - 40
- b) There was a sign – 41a – (See Genesis 25:22f) – John is the first to recognize Jesus. It won't be the last time (John 1:29).

Elizabeth was six months pregnant, so she had felt John move before, but this was something very different. As Gabriel had told Zechariah, John was filled with the Holy Spirit, "even from his mother's womb" (1:15).

*Framed in light,
Mary sings through the doorway.
Elizabeth's six month joy
jumps, a palpable greeting,
a hidden first encounter
between son and Son.
- Luci Shaw*

- c) There was a filling – 41b – Mary may be the first Christian in Luke's gospel. Elizabeth is the second person to be filled with the Spirit – John first, from conception (1:15).

1 - I counted the mention of the Holy Spirit 13 times in Luke. Of course, he's going to write another letter to Theophilus that's all about the Holy Spirit's work, not in John or Jesus, but in the Apostles. (An interesting study would be the Holy Spirit in Luke)

2 - Luke 6:23 - *Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*

*Good news.
Great joy.*

We've met Elizabeth before but, until now, she's not spoken.

d) There was a blessing – 42 – Mary is blessed “among,” not above other women.

Except for the baby leaping in her womb, and the Holy Spirit filling her, Elizabeth had no (human) knowledge that Mary was expecting a child. She is the first to see what no human being has ever seen before.

What is that blessing? She is carrying the promised and long-awaited “seed” of Genesis 3:15.

Luke 11:27 - a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” That’s true indeed.

Luke 11:28 - But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

When Eve confessed, *“I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD,”* (Gen 4:1), she may have thought it was the promised seed. Wouldn't that have been fantastic? But it was not to be.

e) There was a revelation – 43

This is the first time Luke uses the word, “Lord.”

- It occurs 83 times in Luke and I counted 82 of them as referring to Jesus.
- It occurs 23 times in the birth narrative referring to the God of Israel

Luke is once again linking his story with the OT – the title is from Psalm 110:1 where the Messiah is called, “my lord,” to remind Theophilus that Christianity isn't something new but has a historical and proven basis in OT and world history.

This also means that Elizabeth is the first to glimpse that Jesus is not only the Son of God, as Gabriel said, but God himself.

Remember the first time it is used in the Bible? Throughout the creation account, God is called Elohim but once people are made, the Bible refers to him as “Lord God” / Jehovah Elohim (Gen 2:4).

1 – Elohim = Creator name of God

2 – Jehovah = Covenantal name of God

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, the translators used the same word Elizabeth uses – *kurios*.

What is God saying through Elizabeth? "...the LORD God [who] made the earth and the heavens" (Gen 2:4) is in Mary's womb.

Remember when Peter confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God?" Jesus responded saying, "And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt 16:17)

Elizabeth may be the OT's second-to-last last prophetess (Anna in 2:36f is the last). (I say, OT because Jesus hasn't been born yet).

f) There was a recognition – 44

John recognized Jesus.

Not yet born, already John prophesies, and while still in the enclosure of his mother's womb, confesses the coming Christ...
- Maximus of Turin

About 30 years later, John would say, "This joy of mine is now complete" (John 3:29).

g) There was an acknowledgement – 45

And as Elizabeth's voice quieted, Mary's voice raised.

Third: The Confession She Made 46-55

This section is known as the Magnificat. It's Mary's song and it is one of four songs in Luke's birth narrative.

- Mary's *Magnificat*, "My soul magnifies the Lord..."
- Zechariah's *Benedictus*, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel..."
- the angels' *Gloria*, "Glory to God in the highest..."
- Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis*, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace..."

Here, Luke stops the narration in a Selah-like moment so that we can rest and think on what's happening. What is happening? This is the fulfilment of a 4,000-year-old prophecy. We think time moves slowly. We think God moves slowly in our own lifetimes. At least 4,000 years has passed since Gen 3:15.

2 Peter 3:4 - They [scoffers] will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.

It's no wonder many people in Israel think it's all a fairy tale, but it isn't.

1 Peter 1:10 - Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating

Where is that sign? Well, for Mary, she sees it as a sign of an OT fulfilment and draws on an OT mother's song (Hannah) to celebrate –

1 Samuel 2:1-2 - My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD...I rejoice in your salvation... There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. (The whole prayer/song is worth reading)

And it's not just that Mary's song is like songs in the OT. She quotes the OT 23 times in her song: Genesis, Deuteronomy, 1 & 2 Samuel, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. It's as though Mary tried to put the whole OT in her song.

So, Luke takes time to record Mary's psalm of praise as though Mary is singing for all the people who died waiting over 4,000 years.

Mary's hymn is divided into two sections: first about what God has done for her and then what God has done for Israel and the generations to come.

a) There was a personal note. 46-47

1 – *My soul magnifies the Lord*

ILL – A microscope makes small things look bigger than they truly are. A telescope makes small things look as large as they really are. This is what it means to 'magnify' God.

2 – *My spirit rejoices in God my Savior* (Mary is a sinner in need of saving)

3 – *He has looked on the humble estate of his servant*

The house of David had fallen from the throne in Jerusalem to a dirt-floored home in Nazareth. In this, just as barren Zechariah and Elizabeth symbolize Israel, so Mary, here, symbolizes the low estate of Israel.

We know that Mary understands this because she changes her pronouns from the first-person at the beginning of the hymn, “My soul...my Savior...” to (50) “his mercy is for those who fear him...He has helped his servant Israel” (54).

It isn't just Mary...her song foreshadows Jesus healing the sick, exorcising demons, restoring discredited sinners, friending pariahs, preaching good news to the poor, and even resurrecting the dead.

Salvation is very personal, but it is not just for us. And it's also very cosmic. God is changing us and everything.

Romans 8:18-21 - *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

4 – *Generations will call me blessed.*

b) There was a practical note 50-53

1 – God is mighty

2 – His name is holy

3 – His mercy is tender for those who fear him

4 – He has shown strength with his arm from generation to generation

5 – He has scattered the proud in their hearts

“The proud look down on others because they do not look up to God.”

6 – He has brought down the mighty from their thrones

"Mighty" here probably refers to the self-sufficient, those who don't think they need God.

Note: Interestingly, Luke uses same verb "brought down" to refer to Joseph of Arimathea taking Jesus down from the cross (23:53). There, the truly mighty, was brought down from Heaven to earth, to save us.

- 7 – He has exalted those of humble estate
- 8 – He has filled the hungry with good things
- 9 – He has sent the rich away empty

Between vs 51 & 55, there are six verbs, all in the past tense, celebrating what God has done for Israel in the past.

APP: But we have to remember that when Luke is writing this, both the Exodus and Jesus's life, death and resurrection have already occurred. In other words, Mary's joy defies her circumstances. But her song remembers God's goodness and Luke's gospel reminds us that God is faithful in the worst circumstances.

We need to also see that Mary's song alerts us to God's awareness of unkindness and injustice. It should serve as a warning to all of us that God is aware of how we see and treat other people and that his justice will eventually be rendered.

c) There was a prophetic note. 54-55

1 – He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

And Mary ends her song the same way she began it, with a reference to God's mercy (50) and takes the story all the way back to Israel's beginning with Abraham.

"Mary finds her way to faith because she reads the sings of the past aright."
- Mark Coleridge

God's past faithfulness is a light in present darkness.

Mary interprets God's grace to her as a representative of God's grace to Israel from Abraham on. Just as she is lowly and humble, so Israel has been humbled and is lowly. But, just as in Egypt, this does not mean that God is not aware. In spite of Israel's circumstances, God was keeping the divine covenant God made with Abraham.

Fourth: The Time She Stayed. 56

If she went there when Elizabeth was six months pregnant, we have to ask if she stayed until John the Baptist was born. But we don't know but since she stayed for three months, it is likely that she did.

Speaking of John, it's not looking good for us guys so far in Luke. Think about all the men mentioned so far.

- 1 – Herod's a bad guy.
- 2 – Zechariah's a mute guy.
- 3 – Joseph's an unnecessary guy.

Thank God Luke is about to introduce John the Baptist, a real, man's man.

Think about Mary's return. She's now on the precipice of her 2nd trimester. She probably can't hide her pregnancy. She's got to tell Joseph. Did Zechariah give her some kind of written priestly endorsement when she returned to Nazareth? What we do know is that

- John the Baptist is going to be born,
- Zechariah will get his voice back and join Elizabeth and Mary's song, and
- Caesar Augustus promised to build the coliseum in Rome without taxing Roman citizens, so he desperately needs desperately needs money to finish the job and that is going to send Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.

But just like the births of John and Jesus, even that, as all things are, is right according to God's plan.

Conclusion:

Unlike Israel, Mary sings the right song at the wrong time...or the good song at a bad time. She's able to magnify and rejoice in God even though her future is uncertain.

Last week I mentioned that Elizabeth's song spoke of God turning the world upside down. After church, a member reminded me that the correct way to say that is that God is turning the world right-side-up. It's true. The work of making all things new began with the promise of Gen 3:15.

God is making everything right again, and he will not stop until it is done. The pregnancies of these two women proves it. God will not do just the unlikely. He will do the impossible.

Community Groups

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 – Why did Mary go see Elizabeth?
- 3 – Apart from the travel, why was it dangerous to Mary to go to Elizabeth's house?
- 4 – What does John leaping for joy in Elizabeth tell us about Gabriel's prophecy, about life in the womb, etc.
- 5 – Why do you think John leapt for joy?
- 6 – What is significant about Elizabeth's use of "Lord" in verse 43?
- 7 – According to Elizabeth, Mary is blessed because she believed. What are the blessings of belief that you have experienced?
- 8 – What are all the reasons Mary so happy to hear Elizabeth's words?
- 9 – Walk through Mary's song and recount all the things God has/is doing according to Mary?
- 10 – Are these things significant for you or modern believers? If so, how so?
- 11 – Why does Mary reference Abraham?
- 12 – Is there anything significant about Mary staying 3 months?

Daily Devotion

Mon, Jan 29th. Read Lk 1:39-40 & 2 Tim 2:1-2. As soon as Gabriel left, Mary started toward Elizabeth's house. Supernatural pregnancies gave the women a unique bond. Paul did not intend for Timothy to be the last disciple. He was to entrust the gospel to other faithful people, just like Mary and Elizabeth shared their stories with Luke who shared with Timothy. Who are you discipling? With whom are you sharing what God has taught you. There are certainly Christians in your world who need encouragement, direction, etc. Invite someone to lunch, over to the house, to take part in an activity, all with a view to investing in them.

Tues, Jan 30th. Read Lk 1:41-45 & Ro 8:9-11. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb, Elizabeth, when Mary greeted her. Paul reminds us that it is the Spirit who convicts us of sin, lives in us and conforms us to the likeness of Jesus. Are you daily aware of the Holy Spirit? When was the last time you confessed your need for the Holy Spirit and asked Him to live Christ's life in you. Perhaps a new awareness of and dependence on the Holy Spirit would revolutionize your walk with Jesus. Don't go another day without depending on the Holy Spirit for your sanctification.

Wed, Jan 31st. Read Lk 1:46-49. Mary's song begins on a very personal note. List what God did for her. If someone asked you to list God's blessings, what would make your top ten? Perhaps today is the day to write that list. Remembering what God has done will generate faith in present or future crisis moments. You can refer to your "Top Ten," like Mary remembered all the ways God blessed her through Gabriel's message.

Thur, Feb 1st. Read Lk 1:50-55 & 2 Cor 1:3-4. Mary's song was not only personal but corporate. She also remembered what God had done, was doing, and going to do with Israel. God's past faithfulness increased her present faith. What God has done for you is intended to bless others. So, when did you last tell someone about God's blessings, his intervention, his care of you? Someone in your world needs to hear about God's faithfulness. Like Mary, you can be God's conduit of blessing to the world. Find a way to share God's blessings with others today,

Fri, Feb 2nd. Read Lk 1:56 & Jn 5:1-17. Waiting is relative, but any waiting is difficult to endure. Mary waited 3 months, Elizabeth waited 9 months, the man at Bethsaida waited 38 years, but Israel had been waiting around 4,000 years. The Bible is clear though. While we're waiting, God is working, always working. And these Bible stories are intended to help you wait. What are you waiting for? As you read these stories, ask the Holy Spirit to grant you patience and hope in waiting. Pay attention to the other stories of waiting that you hear. God is speaking to you through them. And tell your story too. You never know who's listening.