

## The Advent of Joy – Luke 1:39-56

**Main Idea:** The nearest approach people can make on earth to the joy of heaven is the joy of sharing Christ with others.

### **I. The Fullness of Shared Joy | Luke 1:39-45**

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas this year, we meditate on the biblical significance of the incarnation of God the Son. Every year at TCC, during the Christmas holidays, it is our goal to take Christ out of the cradle of culture (commercialism, sentimentalism, and syncretism) and return to the truth of Scripture. To confuse Christmas with anything other than the celebrating the incarnation of our Savior and anticipating His return is to combine biblical truth with false beliefs (syncretism). Religious syncretism was a constant threat to God's people both in the OT and NT. In the OT, the Israelites have often tried to combine the worship of God with the worship of Baal (1 Kings 16:31-33), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:1-18), and Assyrian gods (2 Kings 17:24-41; Hosea 7:8-11). In all instances, God condemned Israel's actions. In the early church period, many Christians tried to syncretize Christianity with early forms of Docetism (the belief that Jesus was not physically incarnate but only appeared to be human). As we begin our Advent Series at TCC, we want to elevate the literal incarnation of Christ as God's intervention in human history to fully reveal Himself to mankind, fulfilling His redemptive plan of bringing salvation to the world.

Luke's infancy narrative of Jesus underscores God's faithfulness and providence to His people throughout history. Almost every character in Luke's infancy narrative is a devout Jew who conscientiously knows and lives by the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Luke wants his audience to see the continuity that exists between both OT and NT, and to recognize that the incarnation of Christ, His life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the pivotal moment in God's ongoing work of redemption. **With its emphasis on fulfillment, the Lucan infancy narrative acts like a bridge that unites the OT and the NT into one continuous story.** The infancy narrative is filled with allusions and references to OT passages. In fact, there are more evocations of OT passages in Luke 1-2 that can be discussed in detail in a study like this. Overall, **Luke's allusions to OT passages frequently shows the consistency in which God acted in Israel's history and His manner of accomplishing salvation for His people through the sending of Christ into the world.**

In the text that precedes Luke 1:39-56, we read about two distinct annunciations God gave through the Angel Gabriel to two families that were related to one another. After four hundred years of silence (no prophecy given), God (through the Angel Gabriel) spoke to a priest named Zacharias, revealing to him that he and his wife (Elizabeth) would have a son who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Luke 1:5-25). The same Angel Gabriel gave the second annunciation but now to Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph from King David's lineage (Luke 1:26-38). The two annunciations correspond to one purpose: the reality of the incarnation of God the Son who would come to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). In Luke 1:39-56, the two streams flow together, and their relationship becomes explicit: **the hearts of both Mary and Elizabeth were cheered, and their minds lifted up the moment they realized that the grace of God had reached them.** It is almost impossible to read the account of this encounter and miss the joy of the moment. After a four-day journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea (70-80 miles), the text says that Mary "entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And then Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (v.40-42). Here, we learn that not only does the presence of God bring joy to the world, but also that the joy it brings must be shared. **The nearest approach people can make on earth to the joy of heaven is the joy of sharing Christ with others.** How precious it must have been for Mary and Elizabeth to embrace, shared their good news, and celebrate what God has done!

The moment described by Luke, however, did not merely involve Mary and Elizabeth but also the babies they both bore in their wombs. **John the Baptist was the greatest and final prophet of the OT and, consequently, the Old Covenant—the one called to announce the coming of the Messiah. Jesus was the Christ, the fulfillment and Lord of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).** So, when Mary entered Elizabeth's house, both covenants converged. As a result of the Old Covenant facing the New

Covenant, there was a spontaneous outburst of exultant joy. As a result, Elizabeth exclaimed, “Why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord” (v.43-45). Mary’s faith, as great as it was, would very likely have faltered had it not been for the fellowship of Elizabeth.

**To Ponder:**

1. What is the difference between happiness and joy? Biblically, what does it mean to be joyful?
2. What are examples of commercialism, sentimentalism, and religious syncretism involving the birth of Christ often highlighted during the holidays? How can you point people to the right understanding and meaning of Jesus’ birth?

## **II. The Root of Joyful Worship | Luke 1:46-56**

Elizabeth and John were not the only ones who rejoiced in the coming of Christ. Mary also rejoiced by breaking into a song filled by OT references. **Biblically, joy is not a feeling but a response to God’s grace, goodness, provision, and power (Neh.8:10; Ps.16:11; John 16:24; Rom.15:13; Gal.5:22). What we say to the Lord reveal how we much we love Him.** Mary did not compose the Magnificat from scratch but reminded herself of the truth of God’s Word. Mary’s song of praise brings the flavor of many OT passages (1 Sam.2:1; Ps.34:1-3). **Looking at Mary’s song, it becomes evident that true worship requires substance more than form. Genuine worship must be fed by Scripture (not opinions or feelings).** Mary’s intimate knowledge of the OT should cause us to ask ourselves how well we know Scripture as we worship God. Uninformed worship is not worship at all. We live in a time in which Bible illiteracy is at an all-time high. **Scriptural knowledge is a requirement for true worship. Bible knowledge is not exclusive for pastors or Bible teachers but for every believer because, without knowing God, it is impossible to give Him the glory He deserves.** Children learn to speak by repeating what they hear from their parents. We can apply the same principle to God’s children: we learn to speak words of praise and worship by repeating God’s own Word back to Him. The true is that **God does not expect anything other than His Word to be exalted, sang, proclaimed, and lived.**

As Mary uttered her OT-infused words of praise, she was overcome with a sense of her unworthiness and God’s grace, “His mercy goes from generation to generation, He has shown strength and scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty” (v.50-53). Mary was able recognize all of that because of her knowledge of the OT. From this we learn that **the best way to train ourselves and our children to glorify God is by studying and singing God’s Word.** When we know Scripture, it becomes the song of our hearts, and we are able to join Mary in saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (v.46-47). As Mary ends the song, she does so by showing how much she knew God and His redemptive plan. Mary knew that God’s saving grace did not fall indiscriminately upon all but on those who belong to Him, “He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring” (v.54-55). These words show clearly that she remembered the promise made to Abraham, “In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen.22:18). In the OT, the defeat of Israel was the defeat of God’s cause; the victory of Israel was the victory of God’s cause. Now here comes the One who does what Israel had failed to do (obey and live by God’s law). Now here comes the One in whom the OT promises find fulfillment and completion. **Mary praised God as the Savior, not of her country or ethnicity from temporal ruin (like in the OT), but of her own soul from eternal death.** Like Abraham, Mary was able to look by faith at the Son of God as the redeemer of God’s people from their sin (Gal.3:8-9). **More than an OT survey, the Magnificat is a Hymn of the incarnation of God the Son. Like Mary, let us be glad and rejoice in the author of our salvation.**

**To Ponder:**

1. What can cause worship to become shallow and meaningless?
2. How can we train ourselves and our children to glorify God in our worship?
3. What have you been doing to grow in your knowledge of God’s Word?