

▣ MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

Luke 1:39-56

As we continue to tell the story of Yeshua Messiah King our story focuses on two extraordinary women, Elizabeth and Mary. I was prepared to make the point that Luke's positive presentation of these two ladies stands in stark contrast to the way Jewish women were seen in first century Judaism. But in my research I have discovered this is not true. Here are some of the things I discovered about women in first century Judaism:

Within her home and family, the Jewish woman enjoyed the highest possible status. Her responsibilities were numerous, and she was accorded great honor by her husband and children.

During the period under study, there were women who possessed great knowledge in the Torah and Jewish law and who were highly praised for their scholarship.

Among recent archaeological finds are numerous papyri and other documents detailing women's active role in the commerce of that day. Since she could own property in her own right, she was free to engage in commercial pursuits. Many women attained great wealth in this manner.¹

The respect and honor shown Elizabeth and Mary by Luke is in keeping with, not in contrast to, the respect and honor enjoyed by Jewish women in first century Judaism!

In our previous story, the angel Gabriel revealed to Mary that she will conceive and give birth to a son. He also revealed that Mary's older cousin, Elizabeth, was six months pregnant...

▣ MARY TRAVELS TO ELIZABETH (LUKE 1:39-45)

LUKE 1:39-45 (ESV)

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

From her time with the angel Gabriel, Mary learned her cousin² Elizabeth was six months pregnant (1:36). Gabriel shared this to encourage Mary; if God can produce a child in a woman well beyond her childbearing years, He can produce a child in Mary's virgin womb.

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² Mary and Elizabeth are cousins, but Mary is of the Tribe of Judah and Elizabeth the Tribe of Levi. However, tribal identity is based on the father. Thus, Mary and Elizabeth were cousins through one of their mother's relationship to the other's father or through their mothers being related to each other in some way.

Part 1.	The Coming of the King → <i>Mary Visits Elizabeth</i>
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Gabriel's revelation about Elizabeth produced a sense of urgency in Mary to go and visit. This journey from Nazareth to some unknown town in the Judean Hill country was 90 to 100 miles on foot. It was no small undertaking for Mary. No wonder she stayed with Zechariah & Elizabeth for almost three months before returning home. This will be the same route she and Joseph will trek to Bethlehem.

Luke tells us that when Mary arrived and entered their home, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb. Even in the womb, the Messenger of the Messiah, John, was doing his job – he was announcing the presence of the Messiah!

Verse 41 states Elizabeth herself was *filled with the Holy Spirit*. The Spirit inspired Elizabeth's prophetic blessing of Mary.

Elizabeth's Blessing of Mary

- *Blessed are you among women*

Last week a brother made an excellent point about Mary – in our Protestant objection to the near deification of Mary in Catholicism, let's not devalue Mary. Of all women who will ever exist, God chose Mary of Nazareth to give birth to our Messiah King. That makes her very special and one-of-a-kind.

- *blessed is the fruit of your womb!*

Elizabeth knew that Mary was carrying the Messiah King.

- *And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*

In this Elizabeth expresses her humility; there is no rivalry between her and Mary or between their sons. Elizabeth is all about the prophecies and plan of God to deliver His people through the Messiah King. She knows her place and the place of her son – to prepare people to receive the Messiah King.

Elizabeth refers to Mary as *the mother of my Lord*. *Kurios*, here translated *Lord* is a term of respect used for man and God alike. This phrase has been mistranslated to refer to Mary as *the mother of God*. But Mary is not the mother of God because Mary is not the mother of Jesus' divine nature. Jesus possesses His divine nature from all eternity past. Mary is the mother of Jesus' humanity.

- *For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*

Even before he was born, John was empowered by the Holy Spirit to announce the presence of the Messiah King (1:15). Elizabeth states, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that her baby leaped *for joy*. Joy is a human emotion. John, six months old in Elizabeth's womb, was a human being experiencing human emotions.

- *And blessed is she who believed*

This might have been said with a sideways glance at Zechariah. Elizabeth praised Mary for responding in to Gabriel in faith (in contrast to Zechariah).

- *that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."*

How did Elizabeth know about Gabriel's visit? It might have come through the grapevine. It might have been revealed by the Holy Spirit. Whatever the case, Elizabeth praised Mary for believing Gabriel's message.

Mary stayed three months with Elizabeth & Zechariah and undoubtedly was a huge help to them in the practical day to day tasks around the house. There must also have been rich times around the kitchen table discussing Scripture and discussing life. Elizabeth, who was well acquainted with rejection as a barren woman, had much to teach Mary, soon to suffer the insults and rejection awaiting her pregnant before her wedding day.

While in that safe, loving home of Zechariah & Elizabeth, Mary had time to meditate and ponder and from this compose a song of praise to God. You may have heard it called *The Magnificat* from its opening line.

☐ MARY'S SONG OF PRAISE (LUKE 1:46-55)

LUKE 1:46-55 (ESV)

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Mary's song can be divided into two sections. The first section, verses 46-50, praises God for what He did for Mary. In verse 48 Mary wrote, *for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant*. She is the servant. She was of humble estate economically because she lived in poverty. She was of humble estate socially because she was from the town of Nazareth which had a poor reputation (John 1:46). In spite of all this, God had looked upon her with favor and given her the greatest privilege of womanhood – to bear the Messiah King. Though her beginning was humble all future generations will call Mary *blessed* because she was the mother of the Messiah King.

The second section of Mary's song, verses 51-55, praises God for what He has done for Israel or for what He will do for Israel. I'm not sure how to interpret Mary's use of the past tense. Seven times she uses the verb form, *he has*. Was Mary praising God for things He has done for Israel in the *past*? Or is she praising God for things He will do for Israel in the *future*? Is she so certain of their future fulfillment she writes of them as having already been accomplished? Or is it a combination of praising God for both the past and the future? I'm not sure.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Of one thing we can be sure, Mary connects the work of God to His covenants. In verses 54-55 Mary refers to the Abrahamic Covenant. As a devout Jew, Mary longed for God to fulfill His three unconditional promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenant: to give all the land promised and settle Israel in peace and prosperity; to raise up a King Who will lead the nation in righteousness; and third to bring salvation to all Jews and Gentiles alike.

Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary all longed-for God's promises to be fulfilled which He revealed to the prophets such as Ezekiel:

☐ Ezekiel 34:23-31

EZEKIEL 34:23-31 (ESV)

²³ And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken.

²⁵ "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. ²⁹ And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. ³⁰ And they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. ³¹ And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God."

The Messiah King will one day fulfill these promises.

But as Mary will learn, her son, the Messiah King must first suffer in order that He might deliver.

Mary herself will know her fill of suffering. Luke records her return to Nazareth three months pregnant and unwed.

☐ **MARY RETURNS TO NAZARETH THREE MONTHS PREGNANT (LUKE 1:56)**

LUKE 1:56 (ESV)

And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

There will be no hiding it now. Mary's sufferings will begin as she returns home obviously pregnant and obviously unmarried.

Serving God brings suffering. The world hates God. The world rejects truth and righteousness. No matter how lovingly and kindly we live out God's truth and righteousness we will be rejected and attacked. We need to accept this fact and form realistic expectations. We should not be surprised and devastated when we are attacked. Yes, it will hurt. Yes, we will feel it and will need to process those feelings; we will need each other. But we know we are in good company. Jesus said that if the world hated Him the world will hate us also. But it won't be forever. In fact, in the light of eternity, it will be but a brief moment. After the suffering comes joy. The joy of doing God's will and being used of God to transform lives.

I think Elizabeth and Mary enjoyed a very special bond. Serving the Lord side by side does that. It is one of the blessings of serving the Lord. Those men who built Nate & Megan's house on Barangonan have a special bond. Those students and adults who build houses together in TJ have a special bond. There's a bond between all the men and women serving in Children's Ministry as you together disciple our children to know God's story and follow Jesus. Cathy tells me precious stories of 5, 6, 7 year olds belting out God's story complete with hand motions – how awesome – and you're part of that team molding these precious lives for Jesus! There's a special bond between all those who serve at Memorial Services. When it's all said and done there's a look that passes between the ushers and A/V team that says, "we did it".

Finally, God highlights and celebrates the special role women play in His story. Through Luke in particular, God points out the significant role several women have in the story of Jesus. This contrasts sharply with the first century Jewish culture in which Jesus' story unfolds. Pious Jewish men publicly thanked God for not making them a woman. A woman's testimony was not accepted in a Jewish court of law. God honors women and teaches His men to do the same.

Well our story ends with Mary heading home to Nazareth and Elizabeth ready to give birth. As if there hasn't been enough drama, next week Zechariah will do something that makes the feathers fly.