

A Study in Luke

Week Two

Luke 1:29-56

Day One

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,
27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of
David. The virgin's name was Mary.

28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The
Lord is with you."

v. 26 – Gabriel certainly was a busy angel. And speaking of angels, there are some strange doctrines out there about angels. For instance, there is nothing in the Bible about guardian angels. Angels are not cute little pudgy beings. They are not to be discussed or revered. They are simply servants:

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

Angels serve us at God’s direction. They conduct spiritual warfare on our behalf; they worship God in His presence; and they minister to our needs; and they can on occasion communicate with God’s servants. But we must be careful about declaring that we have seen or been visited by an angel.

v. 27 – Gabriel came to Mary, who was probably a young teenager at the time. She was already engaged to Joseph and was of the tribe of Judah, David’s tribe. That is all we know of her past and present. She had no other distinctive claim; she was a simple girl whose whole life was ahead of her. But the course of that life was about to change forever, and it seems that the only reason was the sovereign choice of God.

v. 28 – Mary was highly favored because of God’s choice, and the Lord was with her. But this choice was to have serious implications. She was soon to have a child that many felt was illegitimate. She had to trust that God would speak to her fiancé about the means of her pregnancy. Mary would have to give birth in a stable, live in exile in Egypt, endure the controversy of her Son’s public ministry and then see that Son die on a cross.

God chose this life for her and never apologized. He never said, “Poor girl, maybe I’ve been too hard on her.” No, the encouragement that she received, that she undoubtedly carried all her life was, “The Lord is with you.” Are you feeling sorry for yourself? Then you need to consider the life of Mary. She wasn’t looking for an angel; he came looking for her. And when he found her, the angel’s message changed her life forever.

Day Two

29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.
30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.
31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.
32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,
33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

v. 29 – Luke reported that Mary was greatly troubled. She was quite literally scared out of her wits! She was a teenager having an encounter with a celestial being. I am always a bit suspect when someone says they have seen an angel or had an encounter with the Lord and they aren't a bit unnerved by the encounter. We are finite beings dealing with an infinite, holy and awesome God. That should be a bit unnerving. *Lord, may I never take you or your presence for granted or treat it as a trivial or everyday occurrence You are awesome and I want to treat encounters with you keeping that in mind!*

v. 30 – As stated in the first study, when God says, "Fear not," it's usually too late! Has God spoken something to you that makes you fearful? If so, you are in good company. The mother of Jesus felt the same thing! But the fact that God has spoken to you, revealed something to you, or given you something to do is a sign of His favor, not His judgment. After all, the only other option is for God to ignore you and I don't think you would want that, would you?

v. 31 – The angel was specific, giving the baby's gender and name. The name "Jesus" was a common name and it still is in many part's of the world. There was nothing special that would set Jesus apart from other men, except the revelation of His divinity to those whom God graced with that knowledge. And Jesus was the perfect "missionary," becoming totally immersed in the culture and mores of the people to whom He was sent. He was like them in every way except sin. He identified with His "target audience" totally and completely.

Paul understood this principle when he wrote:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

How willing are you to become like someone in another culture in order to reach them for Jesus? That requires a sacrifice of love and a lot of hard work!

vs. 32&33 – Luke had to get this information from an interview with Mary. I doubt if there was any way she could understand what these promises meant when they were first spoken. I am sure she interpreted them to mean that she would be the mother of the Messiah, but had no idea that she was carrying a holy God in her womb. And what a statement! God was so willing to become like us that Jesus submitted to the birth process. He could have just appeared, but He came into the world like every child has ever come. What humility! God's ways are not our ways, are they? The facts surrounding Jesus' birth blow my mind; how about you?

Day Three

34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

35 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.

37 For nothing is impossible with God."

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

v. 34 – This is the same thing that Zechariah had asked, but with a different spirit. Here was a teenaged girl who has just been told that she will be pregnant. She has enough life knowledge to know how a girl gets pregnant, so she asks a simple question, not from unbelief like Zechariah, but from curiosity. In addition, Mary was a lot younger and had less experience than her cousin's husband; he was judged a bit more harshly because he was a man of God.

v. 35 – If Luke was the first gospel account, then this would be the first mention of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. The angel gave Mary an answer using a name or person that had never been mentioned before. Perhaps Mary was more confused than before she asked the question!

There is a real connotation here that the Spirit was going to "brood" over Mary, just like in Genesis at the time of creation. God's creative power was about to do something in the natural realm, the product of which would be Jesus, fully God and fully man. Thus His title, the Son of God and the Son of man.

v. 36 – And now the angel presented the clincher, so to speak. Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, was pregnant! As if Mary didn't have enough of her mind blown away, she found out that her older cousin was going to have a baby. This presents an interesting twist to this story. Elizabeth had probably cried out all her adult life for a child and now she was

going to have one. Could God have orchestrated her wait so that at just the right time her situation would encourage a young relative in that relative's walk with God? If that is true, than part of what you are going through that you may not understand is simply a matter of timing. God is waiting so that your situation will be a blessing to you after the wait and also a source of encouragement to someone else in what they are going through. Does that make sense?

v. 37 – That says it all—nothing is impossible for God. Is that your philosophy in life? Are do you say that yet act like there are things that are impossible for Him? Do you say that, but don't start the business because you don't know where the money is going to come from? Do you want to go to Latin America, but don't even make a reservation because you don't have the money? Can God provide the money when you need it, not when you want it or would like to have it?

It is easy to say that nothing is impossible for God, but hard to act out. Is this true in your life right now?

v. 38 – Mary gave the angel the quintessential answer for any servant of God—"be it unto me according to your word." That response should be ours in any and every situation. Here is a teenaged girl who just had an encounter with angel who brought her mind-boggling news, and she said, "If that's what God wants, that is fine with me." This word brought Mary great pain and hardship in her life, but she endured and has been honored throughout the ages. All because she said, "Behold the servant of the Lord."

Is that what you need to say to the Lord today about His will for you? If so, then say it now!

Day Four

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,
40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

vs. 39&40 – Mary made haste to go see the marvelous thing that the Lord had done for her cousin, Elizabeth. Perhaps she wanted to boost her own faith; or maybe she wanted to see if she could be of assistance to Elizabeth. We should always be anticipating opportunities to serve and not waiting for an invitation. Is there someone you can go serve today, someone you can bless?

v. 41 – Because the Holy Spirit was doing something “in” Mary, Elizabeth received a blessing. If we want to be useful to God, we must speak out of the abundance of what He is doing in our lives. A simple greeting from Mary brought a spiritual blessing to Elizabeth.

v. 42 – Mary did not have a chance to tell Elizabeth that she was pregnant, the Holy Spirit showed her. And Elizabeth spoke a blessing on both mother and child. These two are playing a Holy Spirit tennis match, sending Holy Spirit blessings back and forth to one another. What is the Holy Spirit showing you about other people? Can you speak to them out of what you see in the spiritual and not the natural?

v. 43 – Elizabeth referred to Mary as the “mother of my Lord,” acknowledging the special nature of Mary’s son. Elizabeth was truly speaking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Contrast this to her husband who was unable to speak at all. Zechariah had seen an angel, but Elizabeth saw no angel. She was speaking out of what the Spirit was showing her and her tongue was flowing out of Holy Spirit insight.

Mary thought she was paying a surprise visit; she didn’t realize that she was carrying a spiritual blessing and the favor of God. That could happen to you today if you step out and go to someone. God could use you in an unexpected way.

v. 44 – Even John the Baptist, before he was born, got into the act. He too was blessed by Mary’s presence. By the way, this proves that a fetus is a person and should be accorded all the rights of a person, don’t you think? If unborn John the Baptist can respond to a greeting by leaping for joy, then five-month old babies should not be aborted (nor should any that are younger or older than five months).

v. 45 – In my opinion, this verse is a summary of Mary’s life purpose. Yes, I know she gave birth to Jesus, but that was a one-time event and not a purpose. Her true purpose was to have faith for all the things that God had promised for her son’s life. Think of it: Wasn’t Mary present during many important events in Jesus’ life? Wasn’t she at the cross? In the upper room at Pentecost? Give a report to Luke for his gospel? Yes, Mary believed that the Lord would accomplish all the things He said to her; that was her greatest legacy. Mary was a woman of faith and we would do well to imitate that faith.

Day Five

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all
generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-holy is his name.

v. 46 – Mary evidenced remarkable spirituality for a young girl who was raised in Old Testament ritual. Mary had just received some startling words from her cousin and she

doesn't take time to ponder. Nor does she become impressed with her own importance. What does she do with all this? She worships, glorifying and magnifying the Lord. Since God is already great, there is no way to magnify Him except through words and songs. The word "magnify" means to enlarge or make bigger so that something can be observed. We are all to take the smallest thing that God is doing in our lives and "blow it up" for all to see and understand. It is when we magnify the Lord and His works that we all can better understand who He is and marvel at His works.

Do you need to magnify the Lord for something today? What has He done for you? Who can you tell it to? Should you write a song or a poem? Send someone a letter? Magnifying the Lord can be hard but it is necessary work.

v. 47 – Mary was immersed in God. Her joy wasn't in her circumstances but in Him. She also identified God as her Savior, an interesting concept for an Old Testament woman. I doubt if she understood that she was now giving life to the Savior of Israel and the world. Mary's song indicates to me that, while God's choice for her to bear Jesus was sovereign, there was something special about this woman. She seemed to have been consumed with the things of God, which would make her a wonderful choice to be Jesus' mother. We can only imagine that she sang songs like these to Jesus and her other children.

v. 48 – Mary did not get a "big head" over all that had transpired. She saw herself as a humble servant and portrayed her visitation as an act of God's mercy, of which she was totally undeserving. I want that attitude in me, for often I have a subtle attitude that I deserved or earned what God has done for me. But Mary had her focus set fully on the Lord and saw that any honor she was to receive was because of what God had done for her and through her.

v. 49 – Mary extolled the Lord and ascribed greatness to Him alone. I am so impressed with this Old Testament girl who had such a great perspective on God. If Mary can be like that with what she had, what should I be like with all the opportunities I have to learn about and serve God? What about you? Can you match Mary's Old Testament passion and love for God? Do you turn to worship when things are going well? Do you see God as the source of all?

Day Six

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

v. 50 – I need God's mercy. One way I can receive it is to fear Him. Another way is to give mercy myself. And for God, mercy is something he gives from generation to generation. God is true to Himself and that means mercy is freely dispensed. Is there

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anyone to whom you can dispense mercy today? Be watching for an opportunity; when you give it, you are doing what God does and enabling Him to give you mercy as well.

v. 51 – God hates all sin, but I am reasonably convinced that if there is a “hierarchy” of sins, pride is near or at the top of the list. God hates the proud. Proverbs tells us:

“He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34).

Another way to get grace is to be humble; a way to lose grace is to be proud. Mary stated that God scatters those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. Pride is a “heart thing” and God knows the heart. But there is another pride gauge that can let us know when we have crossed the line from humility to pride:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12-13).

God's word can show you when you are proud. And then you have the choice to humble yourself or God will humble or even humiliate you. When is the last time you just got down on your face and humbled yourself, telling God that you are “but dust”? That may be a good act to perform today.

v. 52 – Mary knew her biblical themes, particularly those in the psalms concerning humility:

You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty (Psalm 18:27).

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. (Psalm 25:9).

The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground (Psalm 147:6).

For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation (Psalm 149:4).

If you haven't figured it out by now, humility is the theme for today. God holds mercy in store for the humble; judgment for the proud. The choice is yours. I trust that you will choose wisely.

Day Seven

53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

v. 53 – Spiritual hunger is one sure way to receive something from the Lord. But it cannot be a hunger for spiritual things, but for the One who gives the spiritual things. Jesus said:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”
(Matthew 5:6).

If you want the things of God, He will allow you to find them. In fact, you determine in part how God will respond to you:

To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty. You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light. With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him (Psalm 18:25-30).

And

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:7-10).

Is it time to get hungry for God? That is your choice. If you feel that you aren't hungry and to act hungry would be hypocritical, I would respond that spiritual hunger is a mindset and not a feeling. It is something that you can choose to be. What will you choose to be today?

vs. 54&55 – Mary was aware of God's promises for Israel. I am impressed with the spirituality and biblical awareness of this young lady. Someone is never too young or too old to serve the Lord. There is no “baby” Holy Spirit for babies. There is only one Holy Spirit and He reveals God to those whom God chooses and to those who hunger for God's presence.

v. 56 – Mary stayed to help her cousin until the time of birth. Then she left Elizabeth alone to enjoy this joyous occasion in private. But neither Elizabeth's nor Mary's sons would have much privacy once they began to fulfill the ministries for which they were born. When God uses you, you lose your right to privacy, for God may have you testify, teach, lead or mentor. What God does in your life is not only for you, but for others. Are you sharing the good things that God is doing in your life with others? Find someone today to bless.