



The Overwhelming Mercy of God

Luke 1:39-56 | Mark Foreman | Dec 10, 2023

❖ Two Stories Collide: Mary's Relationship to Elizabeth (39-40)

> Mary, *"at that time got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea."*

- She hurried in two ways: she packed quickly and traveled quickly. There are two ways to go: across the Jordan and through Samaria. Either way it's a 90-mile journey taking 4 ½ days at 20mi a day.
- Traveling alone would have been dangerous. Did Joseph, relatives or friends go with her?
- We don't know the specific town, but it may have been Bethlehem.

> Remember what the angel told Mary in v. 36

- Mary must know this "relative" quite well and know she's quite a bit older than Mary ("her old age")
- We as readers have already learned about Zechariah and Elizabeth and the angel appearing to Zechariah in the temple. Zechariah is still dumb, until the birth of John.

> They probably visited often whenever Mary came to Jerusalem.

- Devout Jews in Nazareth would go in pilgrimage to Jerusalem 3x a year, stay with relatives and friends. Over the years people would find out who they're closest to.
- I suspect Mary and Elizabeth became close and shared a deep love for God, becoming deep soul mates. And John and Jesus would most likely grow up knowing each other.

> These women are both a part of something bigger than themselves.

- Gabriel, the archangel, brought an announcement to both Zechariah and Mary.
- Both announcements had to do with miracle pregnancies. Both babies were to be great servants of God, one preparing the way, the other the Son of the Most High to reign on the King David's throne.

> If we could only know the conversations of these two women for three months. I'm sure Mary served Elizabeth and she in turn honored Mary.

- Mary stays for about 3 months until the birth of John to help Elizabeth.
- Some dismiss this account as fanciful. C. S. Lewis, an expert on mythology and legend, makes it clear that the gospels don't have any of the earmarks of fantasy (Christian Reflections).
- We must grapple with stories early Christians took for fact. We live in a world where we largely don't see miracles, and because WE are the norm, all other things must be made up. This is both modern and post-modern philosophy and it ignores the information imbedded in the story.
- Both Mary and Zechariah knew it was out of their norm and challenged the angel.
- If we fail to accept the gritty truth of this we miss the impact of the heart of God. This is hugely unusual because this is a once in a universe moment.
- Our faith is not a "click your heels and make a wish," it's a substantive, nitty gritty life-changing faith in real people in real time and space. This is critical otherwise Christians live in a duality of having a fanciful faith that doesn't connect to their real life—their families, their marriages, their friendships, their jobs etc. Jesus has their souls but they have their bodies.

❖ This is the Beginning of Two Bigger Stories: Jesus and John the Baptist (41-45)

> John begins his ministry by greeting Mary who carries Jesus.

- The greeting of cousins or aunt and niece is enough but to have her baby "leap" inside is something else.
- John is to prepare the way and is already fulfilling his calling. He's the best man, there for the groom.

> Elizabeth's prophetic greeting.

- After 400 yrs of prophetic silence, the Spirit is on the move.
- Loud voice—the details are often striking in the gospels.
- *Blessed* (3x)—*makarios*: happy or richly fulfilled.
- She declares the profound role of Mary—"the mother of my Lord." And the profundity of the baby—my Lord. The future King is in her womb.
- "Blessed is she who has believed..."
- What does this say about the life of a child in the womb?

> John and Jesus Meet

- They grew up as relatives, most likely saw each other once or more a year.
- John knew the character and life of Jesus.
- At that ominous moment where Jesus steps into the waters of Baptism, it isn't just prophetic that John says, "you should baptize me," it is also based on the personally known character of Jesus.
- John's life-role was to serve Jesus.
- *Blessedness* confers on a person both the joy and the task.

❖ Mary's Magnificat (46-56)

> God's specific grace on Mary

- This gives us a sense of the heart and spirituality of Mary. Both Mary and Elizabeth were deeply spiritual.
- *Magnifies* (Gr = *Μεγαλύνει*; Lt = *magnificat*); both mean: *to enlarge, magnify, grow, boast*. To make God bigger in our soul.
- We can't actually make God bigger or more glorified than He already is. But we can declare his praise and align our hearts with who he is and give him more space in our hearts and lives.
- Notice the humility of Mary. I think this is always a sign of true spirituality. Anyone who has been in the presence of God is a smaller person.

> God's broader blessing to everyone

- Here Mary joins the long list of OT saints (particularly women) who proclaimed the goodness of God in a critical turning point in salvation history: Sarah (Gen 1:26); Deborah (Judges 5:1); Hannah (1 Sam 1:15; 2:1).
- This Magnificat of Mary has an OT Hebrew style. It's especially similar to Hannah's praise in 1 Sam 2:1-10. Both praise God for lifting up the poor and humble and bringing down the mighty and the proud.
- This is the same reversal of fortunes we find in the Beatitudes (Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn).

> Here is the content of her praise. It is the sandwich of Mercy.

- Mercy extends to people who trust in Him (50)
- Mercy brings Salvation: He is "God my Savior." He has performed miracles to his people but judgment on the proud.
- Mercy both raises up and lowers. Justice: His ultimate justice has brought down the proud.
- Mercy provides: He has provided for his lowly people and turned the self-sufficient away.
- Mercy remembers: He has not forgotten Israel being merciful to her.

❖ Thinking It Through

- Mary's world was turned upside down by this event. Has God ever redirected you or turned your expectations upside down? How?
- Mary and Elizabeth shared three months together and this was predictive of the ministry of their two sons. It was natural and supernatural. How does God work in your life both naturally and supernaturally.
- Mercy stands out in Mary's Magnificat. Her pregnancy was a sheer and complete act of God. How has the undeserved love of God been important in your story? Can you remember an instance? How do you need mercy today?