

Rejoice in God

Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

Hello, my name is Elizabeth. I am of the Tribe of Levi and I am married to a wonderful name named Zachariah. He is a priest in the service of the temple in Jerusalem. We live in a suburb of Jerusalem called Ein Karem, which means “spring of the vineyard.” As I said my husband is a priest and was close to the time when he could not do active service in the temple, so we were greatly honored when he was chosen to be the one to burn incents on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. I know he had an encounter with an angel of God that day because he has not been able to speak a word since that day. Before that time I was a women disgraced because I was barren. Although we had prayed for children all our marriage and have a very loving relationship, God did not allow me to become pregnant. But since my husband’s deep encounter with God, I am now pregnant! My disgrace is removed and I anticipate with joy the arrival of our child!

Now let me tell you about a wonderful visit that I had. My kinswoman, Mary of Nazareth, came for a visit and stayed three months. When I first heard her greeting the child in my womb jumped for joy. These of you who have been pregnant before know what I mean. The more the child develops the more active he or she becomes. But this was different. The baby actually jumps for joy at the sound of her voice. I’m not exaggerating, the baby really did! Then I knew, not only was I pregnant in my old age, but Mary carried the Messiah, the Anointed One, the one promised by God through the prophets. Somehow I knew that she had also had an encounter with an angel and had received this great news. So I embraced her and said:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child 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 by the Lord."

What I understood at that moment was the special role that Mary has as the mother of the Savior. Mary was surprised and delighted because she had told no one of her heavenly visitor or her blessed condition. We both concluded that only the spirit of God could have revealed this to me!

I'm not sure why Mary came. Maybe she needed confirmation and encouragement to continue believing God. She told me later that she had accepted the word of Gabriel and responded with an unequivocal "yes" to being chosen by God for this unique task. But maybe Mary came to offer me confirmation and encouragement. She later told me that the angel Gabriel has told her that I was also with child. Do you think that God has a special task for my child also? Anyway I was so glad for her company! Mary is such a sweetheart, "came so she could offer her congratulations concerning the gift which she had learned that I had received. She, an attentive young woman, committed herself to ministry to me, a woman of advanced age." (Bede)

The Mary sang a beautiful song of praise to God to celebrate the greatness and covenant faithfulness of God. God is sovereign in the world and displays God's greatness by displacing the proud and the powerful, sending the rich away empty handed (vv. 51-53).

God is great, and God is good. God's demonstration of power is not merely a show of force, but is to remind Israel that they belong to God and can count on their God to help them. As we sat around for those months we

had some deep talks about how God's power and greatness display God's goodness. We concluded: "The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but His goodness encourages us not to be afraid of Him. To fear and not be afraid—that is the paradox of faith." (A. W. Tozer) Mary said her fear of God is unafraid, and in her song she sang of both sides of God's goodness in action, the grace *and* the mercy of God. Mary bears witness to the grace—the unmerited favor—of God, who has done great things for her and looks with favor upon the lowly and fills the hungry with good things. God's mercy (Heb. *hesed*; Gk. *eleos*) is found in forgiveness and long-suffering patience with the weakness and corruption of humanity.

Mary is so very humble. I'm sure that why God has chosen her for this great work of giving birth and raising God's son. I think all of us should use her as an example of humility and obedience. After all, God has claimed us as his eternal possession, and we rejoice in God's goodness.

Mary sang a song of celebration of God's goodness by recalling God's covenant faithfulness to Israel (v. 55): "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). The best hope of the Christian in every age finds its voice in Mary's song, and it has rested securely on this: God is good, and God keeps promises. (Robert Redman)

I, like Mary in her song, rejoice in God, my Savior. Let me tell you why I praise God:

- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because I see God working in a deeply personal way that is changing my world and according to Mary is also going to change the whole world!
- I rejoice in God my Savior because of the work of the Holy Spirit and how it was made known as the baby in my womb responded to Mary's greeting.

- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because the Lord allowed me, a "preacher's wife," to proclaim what God was doing in the world! Prompted by the Holy Spirit, I was able to say what Mary's special role would be.
- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because I was able to encourage and strengthen Mary. I believe Mary recognized her own vocation in my description of her, and she was empowered to share the bold words of her song of praise. What began as a simple visit to the home of a sidelined priest in the "hill country" issued forth in a pronouncement of global political and economic import. We are going to see what God will do!
- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because God gave Mary and me two things we each lacked: community and connection. God removed our isolation and helped us to understand ourselves more fully as part of something larger than our individual destinies. Together we are known more fully, and began to see more clearly (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12), than we did as individuals.
- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because of hope and understanding that starts out slowly and quietly. We anticipate its growth and full manifestation, but we do not yet experience it.
- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because the development of hope within community takes time. We await an opportunity to connect more deeply with the people around them. Time has given us an opportunity to connect our small story with the larger stories of God.
- I rejoice in God, my Savior, because we had the opportunity to learn from sitting quietly with our brothers and sisters as the world pushes us relentlessly toward a louder, larger, and ever more expensive celebrations, that don't reflect, how God really interacts with us.

- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because although I am marginalized, I am an expectant mother in the Near East, and I have time to listen and wait, and be visited by the Holy Spirit.
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because although I don't know the destiny of my son, I do know that Mary's son will be the long awaited Messiah.
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because God has given us confirmation of hope, the fulfillment of a promise.
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because Mary's song of praise is a response to what God has done, both for her personally in granting her the admiration of all future generations and for God's more encompassing salvation (vv. 50-55).
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because Mary's song of praise relates Mary's present joy and overflowing praise (vv. 46-47) to God's capacity to act, God's holiness, and God's mercy (vv. 49-51).
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because God hears the voices of the marginalized and relatively powerless, not for power to dominate others, but where the well-off are exhorted to deal with their wealth in a way that brings them into a positive relation with the poor in order to partake in the same promised salvation. (Stephen A. Cooper
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because the coming of the Messiah who will redeem Israel is anticipated and proclaimed, not by archangels or high priests or emperors or even ordained preachers; rather, two marginalized, pregnant women—one young, poor, and unwed, the other far beyond the age to conceive—meet in the hill country of Judea to celebrate our miraculous pregnancies.

- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because my baby leaps in the womb. Blessings are shared. Astonishment is expressed. Songs are sung. We are two pregnant women. The mighty are brought down. Two marginalized, pregnant women carry the future and proclaim the Messiah.
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because Mary's song gives voice to the incarnation that she and I embody. She is young, unwed, pregnant—a thoroughly marginal person in our culture—proclaims praises to God. Young, pregnant Mary, I believe, gives voice to a song for the ages, a song that invites us beyond our realistic expectations and our numb imaginations. Mary, amazed at what has happened, said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant" (vv. 47-48a). God can change the world as we know it; turn it upside-down: "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (vv. 51b-53).
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, because today we declare the politically, socially, and religious changes that Mary's child will bring to all of us. (Charles L. Campbell)
- I rejoice in God, our Savior, I have found acceptance for who I am and not from what I am expected to be. My prayer is that you will experience true acceptance in worship today, and find yourselves asking my question: "And why has this happened to me?" (1:43). I pray that my story prepares you for the grand, history-changing birth that is yet to come. (Michael S. Bennett)