

§ 006

THE SONG OF ELIZABETH TO MARY UPON HER VISIT

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."¹

Luke 1:39-45

Introduction

1. Mary at once reacted to the angel's suggestion (Luke 1:36) that she should visit Elisabeth.
 - That she undertook the journey fairly soon is evident from the fact that
 - the angel in verse 36 declared that the pregnancy of Elisabeth was already in the sixth month, and
 - in verse 56 it is stated that Mary, who returned just before the birth of John (verse 57), had remained with Elisabeth for some three months.
2. The contention of some expositors that Mary's journey to Elisabeth was caused by Joseph's intention to put her away privily, or by the distrustful attitude shown towards her by the inhabitants of Nazareth, is therefore altogether without foundation.
3. According to the context of the story, Mary departed on her journey to Elisabeth within a few days after the visit of the angel, and consequently no one, not even Joseph, could so soon have conceived the idea that she was pregnant.
 - Only after her return from Elisabeth would Joseph have noticed it, and then,
 - when he was engaged in devising plans to put her away privily without bringing her before the tribunal for supposed infidelity, God sent the angel to him to inform him of the truth (Matt. 1:18-25).

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 1:39-45). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

4. So Mary went in the very first place to Elisabeth.
 - Apart from the fact that the angel had, as it were, given her the hint to go to her, it is obvious that she would have felt the urge to go to someone who had also been miraculously blessed.
 - In her own environment she would naturally not yet be able to discuss with anyone the sacred experiences that had befallen her.
 - In Elisabeth, however, she would find an _____² person.

5. After a journey of some four or five days Mary arrived at the house of Zacharias in a village in the hilly region to the south of Jerusalem.³

Commentary

1. *Mary . . . entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.* The oriental greeting was an extended affair, 'a ceremonial act whose significance lay in the content of the message.'⁴
 - But here the important thing is not the content of the greeting but the _____⁵ who made it.
 - Even before Elizabeth herself could respond to Mary's words, the child in her womb leapt with joy (σκιπτάω, 1:46; 6:23**).
 - Although it is said that an emotional experience of the mother can cause a movement of the fetus,⁶ it is more likely that a miraculous expression of the emotion of the unborn child is meant than that Elizabeth simply saw her own joy reflected in the unconscious movement of her child.^{7 8}

² **understanding**

³ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (81). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁴ Ellis, E.E. (1974). *The Gospel of Luke* (New Century Bible), London, 76.

⁵ **person**

** All the occurrences of the word in the NT are cited.

⁶ Ellis, E.E. (1974). *The Gospel of Luke* (New Century Bible), London, 76.

⁷ Although it is not clear that the narrator of Gen. 25:22 thought of conscious movements of the twins in Rebekah's womb, the rabbis so interpreted the text, and there was also a tradition that the unborn children sang a song at the Exodus. To jump for joy was of course a familiar enough idea (2 Sa. 6:16; Mal. 4:2; *et al.*). Is it coincidental that in Gen. 25:22 the thought of the elder child serving the younger is expressed?

⁸ Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke : A commentary on the Greek text*. Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (80). Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press.

2. *The baby leaped in her womb.* This occurred through the incomprehensible working of the Spirit of God in order to salute the Son of God who has been conceived in the virgin's womb by the power of that same Spirit.⁹
3. Though it is a natural phenomenon for an unborn child frequently to make movements during the sixth month of pregnancy, the movement made by him was nevertheless extraordinary.¹⁰
 - And as Godet remarks: "At the sudden leaping of this being who she knows is compassed about by special blessing, the veil is rent. The Holy Spirit, the prophetic Spirit of the old covenant, seizes her, and she salutes Mary as the mother of the Messiah" (*in loc.*).
 - Elisabeth is tremendously thrilled by the unexpected and magnificent revelation and calls out excitedly: "Blessed art thou among women!" which is another expression for "Blessed art thou above all other women!"¹¹
4. *And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* What was promised to Zechariah (Luke 1:15) was now fulfilled.
 - John and Elizabeth were filled with the Holy Spirit even before John's birth.¹²

⁹ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (82). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹⁰ Jewish tradition is familiar with the idea that unborn children may take part in events of the world and anticipate prenatally their later positions in life (Gen 25:22–23; Tg. Ket. Ps 68:27; cf. Str-B, 2:100–101). The Johannine expression of the same attitude for John the Baptist in later life is to be found in John 3:29. John witnesses to the one who comes after him. While Elizabeth responds to the greeting, the unborn John responds directly to the presence of the unborn Jesus: Elizabeth's inspired blessing in v 42 takes account of both. Because she is filled with the Spirit, her words will express the divine perspective and insight. What she says results from an inspired interpretation of the movement of the unborn child (as v 44 makes explicit). [Nolland, J. (2002). *Vol. 35A: Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*. Word Biblical Commentary (66). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.]

¹¹ Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (82). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

¹² It is worth while to note that the Holy Spirit actually filled an unborn babe (v. 15), and that the babe even responded to the Spirit's presence and gracious power. It is unwarranted, then, to assume that spiritual effects can be wrought only when the mind is already developed so as to be able to understand to some degree. Observe that the unborn child is called τὸ βρέφος, which shows that τὰ βρέφη mentioned in 18:15 were "infants" indeed and yet could and did receive a spiritual blessing from Jesus. The power of grace in the Spirit is by no means limited as men may argue and conclude.

We have no reason to think that either Elisabeth or Mary spoke while in an ecstatic condition. Luke tells us regarding the former that she was filled with the Holy Spirit (Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον without articles as in v. 15 and 35), the genitive after a verb of filling. The agent in the passive is God. As a child of God Elisabeth was already filled with the Spirit who moved her to faith and to faithfulness. But the filling of

- Thus they were the _____¹³ to realize that Mary's child is the Messiah.
- That the hymn that follows conveys a correct Christological understanding is evident from the character description of Elizabeth in 1:6 and from the fact that she was filled with the Holy Spirit as she spoke.¹⁴

5. *Blessed are you among women.* (Compare Judges 5:24; Judith 13:18). This is a Semitic way of saying "most blessed."
- "Since according to contemporary Jewish ideas a woman's greatness was measured by the greatness of the children that she bore," Fitzmyer notes, "the mother of the *Kyrios* (1:43) would naturally be said to surpass all others."¹⁵
 - (Note, however, that Jael's and Judith's blessedness was not due to their children.)
 - What God had done in Mary outshone even what God had done in Elizabeth.
 - Mary was blessed here not because of her faith, as in Luke 1:45; rather her blessedness depended entirely on her son and his greatness. A similar beatitude is repeated in 11:27.
 - This blessing is not to be interpreted as a call to praise/bless Mary but as an affirmation that Mary stood in a state of blessedness.¹⁶
6. *And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* Elizabeth's question indicates her unworthiness that the mother of the Messiah should visit her: what has *she* done to deserve this honor?¹⁷
7. The use of the title *my Lord* shows that Elizabeth recognized that Mary's child would be the Messiah (cf. Ps. 110:1; 'Lord' is used of God twenty-five times in chs. 1–2; it is an exalted title).

which Luke now speaks is extraordinary, for this time only, charismatic, enabling her to speak prophecy through a revelatory enlightenment. We know only the fact, ἐπλήσθη, historical aorist to state the fact, and the effects, in the verses that follow; it is idle to speculate, theorize, or argue. Elisabeth spoke by the Spirit's inspiration, this being one of the numerous instances of this enabling of the Spirit. Yet it would be a mistake to deduce from this instance that all cases of inspiration must have the exact form which that of Elisabeth took with her loud and exultant cry. [Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (78). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.]

¹³ **first persons**

¹⁴ Stein, R.H. (2001, c1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (89). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, J.A. *The Gospel according to Luke*. Anchor Bible. 2 vols. Garden City: Doubleday, 1979–85, 364.

¹⁶ Stein, R. H. (2001, c1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (90). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁷ Marshall, I. H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke : A commentary on the Greek text*. Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (81). Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press.

- She goes on to explain that at Mary's greeting her own baby *leaped for joy* (the word means 'exultation') in her womb.
 - It was this that enabled her to recognize Mary for what she was.
 - She concludes with a further blessing of Mary.
 - We should probably take her words to mean 'Blessed is she who believed, for there will be ...' (the Greek is ambiguous, but 'for' seems better than 'that').
 - Elizabeth is affirming that the *fulfilment* will certainly take place, not saying that Mary believed it would.
8. We should not miss the absence of all _____¹⁸ in Elizabeth's attitude to Mary.
- The older woman, who had received such a signal blessing from the Lord, might well have tried to guard her position jealously.
 - But in genuine humility she recognized the greater blessing God had given to Mary.
9. A further point of interest is that John the Baptist did not recognize Jesus as Messiah until the baptism (John 1:32f.).
- Apparently Elizabeth's recognition that he is *Lord* was inspired, but personal.
 - John had to find it out for himself.¹⁹

Conclusion

1. Notice how Luke puts the divine encounter and a very human one side by side.
 - Mary had just had the most earth-shaking experience in the world. Nothing will ever surpass it.
 - And what did she do? She immediately ran off to tell someone, in this case her cousin, Elizabeth.
 - She couldn't wait to share what had happened to her.
2. You can just imagine Elizabeth's response, "Tell me all about it. What happened? Then what did Gabriel say? And what did you say?"
 - How much we need other human beings to share the watershed moments of our lives.

¹⁸ *jealousy*

¹⁹ Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England : Inter-Varsity Press ; Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (91). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- To be a Christian is to believe in a God who is the God of the impossible and to belong to a family of brothers and sisters who are there when you need them most.
- Because you belong to this family of faith, you have someone to go to who will listen to you when great joy or sorrow overwhelm you.

3. The person with whom Mary wanted to share this overwhelming news had certain qualities.

- First of all, she was not jealous.
 - Elizabeth had also had a visit from the angel Gabriel and she herself was bearing a miraculous child.
 - But when she heard the good news, she acknowledged that the child Mary was carrying was even greater, and she rejoiced.
 - How blessed we are to have even a few friends like that.
 - When you receive a great honor, I trust you have some friends who can enjoy your success and that joy may leap inside of them, as the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb.
- Elizabeth was also able to affirm Mary's experience and encourage her.
 - She was not in the least skeptical.
 - She said, "*Blessed is she who believed ... those things which were told her from the Lord*" (v. 45).
 - When God has spoken to us we need a friend who will say, "I believe that was authentic. I believe God is speaking to you."

4. We have the power to affirm and bless each other as Elizabeth did.

- We need a few people in our lives upon whom we are free to call at any hour, even two o'clock in the morning, if we are in trouble, though they may be less than cheerful at that hour.

5. Mary stayed at Elizabeth's home for three months, until John was born.

- What else would a kinswoman and a friend do in that society but stay until the delivery day?
- I like to speculate on what they talked about during those three months.
- I'm sure they covered everything—angels and babies and God and Israel and the world.
- They shared life.²⁰

²⁰ Larson, B., & Ogilvie, L.J. (1983). *Vol. 26: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 26: Luke*. Formerly The Communicator's Commentary. The Preacher's Commentary series (36). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.