

We've been going through Luke, and we've come to a passage now that is very popular at Christmastime. Of course, in the coming weeks we're going to be going to the passage that is very popular at Christmastime: Luke chapter 2. And if you ever if you've ever seen the Peanuts cartoon regarding about Christmastime, you'll remember Linus' recitation of Luke 2. But we're not in Luke 2 yet; we're in Luke chapter 1. So, go ahead and turn to Luke chapter 1 verses 39 to 56. 39 to 56. Now, this passage—we're going to be talking about praising God. And this is not just going to be about music, but we're going to be talking about praising God. And we're going to see that John, Elizabeth, and Mary praise God for certain things, and they give a certain—and Luke in his writing reveals certain information about what they're praising—not about what, about what they're praising about *[pause]* ... (grammatically, that would not pass in school. I proofread even my own speech. When you spend 11 years proofreading, it's a very bad habit and very hard habit to break).

But we're going to see what they are praising about, and we're going to see the object of their praise. So, before we read the text, let me go ahead and have a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we look at your words, as we read your Word, I ask you to open up our hearts and our minds to your Word. I also ask and genuinely just beg that the reading of your Word blesses you because it is your Word. So God, be blessed and bless us as we submit to your Word. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Beginning in verse 39 Luke writes:

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."

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.

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.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

In this passage, there're two core sections. First, the section regarding John and Elizabeth, and the second one, the Magnificat as it's known (or Mary's song). And in these two sections, we're going to see God being praised. Beginning in verses 39 to 45, we see that John and Elizabeth—yes, John and Elizabeth—praise God who sends Messiah.

Now, this praise actually begins immediately. It begins when they encounter—when both John and Elizabeth encounter—Jesus. Now, how do we know they encounter Jesus? Well, we know that Mary's pregnant already at this time. Why? What does Elizabeth say in verse 42? In verse 42 she says, “exclaimed with a loud voice ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!’” In other words there's a baby already there. Also in verse 43, she says, “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord.” “The mother of my Lord.” So, we have two indications that Mary's already pregnant.

So, Jesus has already been conceived, and so when Mary walks in the door and greets them, Elizabeth and John encounter Messiah. And what is their response? They praised God. It's interesting that twice it says here that John leapt or leaped in the womb. It says that he—let's see, I did not write down the verse on my notes, and let's see go into verse 40—“she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth, and when Elizabeth,” verse 41, “heard the greeting of Mary”—yeah, verse 41—“the baby” (this is John) “the baby leaped in her womb.” And then later in verse 44, Elizabeth tells Mary, “the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Didn't just move.

Now, I've never carried a baby, I can't carry a baby, but Olivia did. And she's told me that you can—that a mother can tell the difference between the baby just moving and the baby doing something else. Elizabeth could tell if John is simply finding a new position and stretching versus John leaping in the womb. Luke writes this down two times. It's significant. First, this tells us that John is praising God even in the womb. John, the pre-born, unborn baby, is praising God in the womb because God has sent Messiah, and he did this when he encountered Jesus for the first time. So, it's significant from that.

But there're actually two key significances beyond that. First, this actually is a callback to Genesis—to Genesis 25 verses 22 through 26. Now, some of you may go, “I have no idea what that's about.” Well, I'll go ahead and tell you. Remember the story of Jacob and Esau in the womb? This is that story. Now, in that story in Genesis, what happened is John—not John, I'm sorry—Jacob and Esau were wrestling for superiority in the womb. Talk about sibling rivalry! They were wrestling in the womb for superiority.

Who's going to be the more important one? Who's going to be born first? Who's going to get the firstborn blessing? Who's going to—they're fighting for who's gonna get what—in the womb. But that contrasts with John and Jesus.

Now, John and Jesus were cousins, not siblings, but the connection is there. Where Jacob and Esau were fighting for superiority, John and Jesus had no tension. In fact, John doesn't struggle for superiority; John praises God for Jesus. But there's also a commonality between these two. The commonality is this: just—Jacob and Esau, after they were born, Esau was the oldest one. The older brother, Esau, ended up serving the younger brother Jacob. Likewise, the older cousin, John, ended up worshiping and serving the younger cousin, Jesus. What that tells us is that the story of Jacob and Esau in the womb in Genesis 25 is foreshadowing this event with Mary, Elizabeth, and John, and that this event looks back to, recounts, Jacob and Esau. I said that to say this: the Old Testament in every aspect points to Christ. It all points to Jesus.

So, the first thing that's interesting about John leaping in the womb is that it's a callback to Genesis. Also, this is a reminder, it's a reminder to us that the pre-born, unborn baby in that womb is a person. It's not just a clump of cells; it's a person. The baby does person things. The baby is responsive to other people. The baby can be filled with the Holy Spirit. This baby is a person, and to destroy this unborn, pre-born person is to destroy a person made in the image of God.

But, what this tells us is this so far: upon encountering Jesus, Mar—not Mary—Elizabeth praises God, John praises God when they encounter Messiah. When we encounter Messiah, our response, one of our responses as believers should be praising God because we've encountered Jesus.

Something that we lose as Christians over time—and we can dismiss this as just the natural growth because when people get older they, you know, things happen. Well, you know, they settle down, they get more relaxed, that, you know, the exuberance is gone, and, you know, the energy levels drop down. Well, I will say this, the energy and the power of the Holy Spirit doesn't get weaker as we get older; we just get less interested in responding to the power of the Holy Spirit to cause us to praise the Lord. We should praise Jesus. When we encounter Jesus, we should be praising him because that's what the Holy Spirit does (and by the way, we're going to get to that in a little bit).

So—well, the little bit's here—verse 41, the second half of it. Let's take a look at the second half: "the baby leapt in the womb (in Elizabeth's womb) and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." After her filling, she exclaimed the praises. Now, we know in verse 15 that John was already filled with the Holy Spirit. So, we have Elizabeth and John filled with the Holy Spirit, and what happens? They begin praising Jesus. They begin praising God. Do we respond accordingly?

You know, there are people out there, many of whom you should not listen to, but there are people out there who will tell you if you get filled with the Holy Spirit, you're gonna start shaking and babbling all kinds of nonsense. That's not what we see in Scripture. What we see in Scripture is this: when you're filled with the Holy Spirit, you praise God. One of the signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit (not the only one but one of them): praising God. But do we praise God, or do we just go through the motions?

But the prompting of the Holy Spirit is what led John and Elizabeth to praise God. But also, by praising God for sending Messiah, Elizabeth is telling us something else: she's recognizing the greatness of the

gift. Verses 42 to 43 and verse 45: “She exclaimed with a loud cry,” verse 42, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” And then verse 45: “blessed is she who believed,” that’s referring to Mary, “that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord,” referring to Gabriel coming to Mary and saying, “You’re going to have a baby.” So, here we have Mary, I mean Elizabeth recognizing the greatness of this gift. First, she says in verse 43, “my Lord . . . the mother of my Lord.” She recognizes that the baby Mary is carrying is Messiah. She recognizes that. She knows that, and she knows who Messiah is. Messiah is salvation. No wonder she’s praising God. So, she recognizes that the gift is Messiah.

She also recognizes (verse 45) that this gift was a promise fulfilled by God. When God makes a promise, God keeps his promises—unlike us. But God keeps his word, and God said, “I’m going to give you Messiah,” talking to Mary. And what do you know? Messiah is there! So, she recognized that God fulfilled his promise.

She also recognizes that this gift is freely given. Verse 42—no, I’m sorry, verse, uh (is it 42, 43?), yes verse 42—we have, “blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” This word “blessed,” this word “blessed” is a passive verb. What that means linguistically is this: Elizabeth is indicating something is happening to her, something is being given to her. She’s not doing it herself. In other words, this gift of Messiah is freely given by God. Salvation’s a free gift. It is never earned; we can’t earn it. We can do the great—if we did nothing but good works, even those good works are like filthy rags. And yet, how many people try to earn salvation or earn God’s good graces or make a deal with God?

I’m reminded of that scene in *Forrest Gump* where Lieutenant Dan said, basically, he and God were on good terms, that they came to an agreement or something like that. It doesn’t work that way. It’s a free gift. Jesus is a free gift. We can’t earn it, but God says I give it anyway, and Elizabeth recognized that. “Blessed are you,” passive, “blessed; you have been blessed by God.” So, she recognizes the gift is free.

But she also recognizes (verse 43) her own unworthiness. Now, before I read this verse, something we—I say this probably every Sunday and probably will say it every Sunday—we’re not worthy of anything God gives us except one thing: his wrath. We are guilty of sin. We have broken God’s Law. We have violated his will. We have rebelled against him, and the only thing that we’ve ever earned and the only thing we deserve is his wrath. We’re not worthy of the gift, but yet God gives it anyway. Grace is truly amazing. But, verse 43, Elizabeth says, “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” She’s recognizing she doesn’t deserve this gift. She has earned nothing. She does not have the right or the privilege on her own to encounter and meet Messiah. And yet, God brought Messiah into her home because he chose to. Simply because God sovereignly chose to bring Messiah to her. It’s a free gift. She doesn’t deserve it, but God gave it freely. So, ultimately, what we see in this section regarding Mary—um, not Mary—regarding Elizabeth and John is that they are praising God for sending Messiah.

But in Mary’s song, we learn a little bit more about who Messiah is and why Messiah has come. Verses 46 through 56. In this, we see that Mary also exalts God, but she’s exalting God who saves through Messiah.

Verses 46 through 49—now there's three kind of sections to her song: verses 46 and 49 (the first section), Mary indicates that God kept his word by giving Messiah who saves. What does she say? Well, verse 46, "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord,' (well, this is praise, this is exaltation) "and my spirit rejoices in God,"—[clears throat] pardon me—"God my savior." She's recognizing that God is her only salvation. God is our only hope, and that Messiah has come to save. That's what Mary is telling us here.

Also, she continues, "for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." Couple things here. First, she recognizes her own position as unworthy: "the humble estate of the servant." She's not worthy, yet God sovereignly said, "I'm going to have you give birth to Messiah." She's recognizing her own inadequacies, her own failures, her own sinfulness. Do we recognize that in ourselves (our own unworthiness), and do we recognize the greatness of the gift of salvation? So, she recognizes her own unworthiness.

But also, you notice she says in the last half of this verse, in verse 48, "behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." Now, some have taken that to mean that Mary is somehow exalted above all others, and they literally exalt (and, to a point, worship) Mary. We should not do that. Mary is not exalting herself. The word "blessed" here does not mean "I'm special." It can be translated this way: happy, joyous. That's what it means. We should not exalt Mary. This passage is not about Mary. Mary's song is not about Mary. What she's saying is, "God chose me who's unworthy." Wow. Wow. She's overwhelmed by the goodness of this gift, and she's exalting God. We should exalt God, never a mere man or a mere woman. But she's exalting God.

So, God has kept his word to Mary by giving her Messiah who saves, and she says that it's about salvation, she says she's not worthy of it, but yet God did it anyway. Verses 50 to 53: God kept his word regarding saving many. What's she say: "And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation," basically through all time, "he has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he sent away empty." Here we have her saying that God is going to keep his promise by saving many people from the time of Adam and Eve to whenever Jesus comes in the Second Coming. People from all generations are going to be saved.

So, how do we know that? Well, first the word "mercy" (in verse 50), the word "mercy" refers to salvation: undeserved gifts, undeserved salvation, I'll put it that way. Also, who was it given to? In verse 50 this salvation, this mercy, is given to (in verse 50) "those who fear him." God gives his mercy to those who have faith in Jesus, who have faith. You reject Jesus? No mercy; you remain under judgment. But through faith you have the free gift of mercy given by God.

But also, she doesn't stop there. She also talks about, when it comes to saving many, there will be those who are not saved: "He has shown," verse 51, "he has shown strength with his arm, scattered the proud in the thoughts in their hearts, brought down the mighty from their thrones." In other words, those who don't trust God (those who trust themselves, those who trust their power, their positions, and their pocketbook instead of God) will be judged. Essentially, this is an indirect call to repentance. By the way that's going to be John's message later on and Jesus' message later on, but we'll get to that eventually. So, those who reject God will be judged.

But verse 53: “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.” There’s two aspects of this. First, those who are spiritually lacking or spiritually needy (that is every single sinner, every single man, woman, and child is spiritually needy) and that solution is Christ himself. God provides for the spiritually needy through Christ, but he also provides for the physically needy through Christ’s church. But do we as a church and as individuals truly care and provide for the needy or do we provide to please ourselves? But God provides for the needy.

And then verses 50 to 56, she ends her song this way: by reminding us that God kept his word to Israel for sending Messiah who saves. What’s she say: “He has helped his servant Israel.” Let’s stop there for a minute. Israel is called God’s servant. Why? Two roles. First, they’re the servant of God because it is through Israel that Messiah comes. Jesus is a Jew, came through Israel, a direct descendant of Abraham. Jesus is a Jew. So, they fulfilled that role by being the people through whom Messiah will come. But also, they serve God in a second way. What we read in the Old Testament regarding Israel and their interactions with God foreshadows Christ himself, Christ’s work, and/or the people of God as they relate to Christ. So, it’s all pointing to Jesus, and so they serve God by being a foreshadowing, a foretelling (or as it says in Hebrews), a type and shadow of that to come.

But also, she says in verse 55 that “he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring.” Here she’s going back to the Abrahamic covenant. Now, you may be going, “What was the Abrahamic covenant?” Well, I’ll kind of explain it to you briefly. This goes back to Genesis 12 and Genesis 17. There’re three aspects to it. First, the promise that God gave to Abraham was, in part, that his seed or his descendant will be Messiah. That’s in Genesis 12. That seed or that descendant to his Messiah is Jesus. Covenant fulfilled. He also told Abraham that through Abraham many people will be saved (in Genesis 12 and Genesis 17). Through Messiah—you can go back to what Mary said earlier, “from generation to generation”—people will be saved through Messiah. Covenant fulfilled. Also, that Abraham (in Genesis 17) will both be biologically and spiritually the father of many. Well, we know he biologically is the father of many, but spiritually he is, too. Every person who is a believer in Jesus Christ is a spiritual child of Abraham. Through Christ; through Jesus. Covenant fulfilled. And so, Mary is exalting God because God sent Jesus, Messiah, who saves. So, let me bring this home.

What does this mean for us? We should praise God who saves. But how do we praise God? It’s two ways to praise God. First, through our words: singing songs, exclaiming praises, telling others about the goodness and the good news of Jesus. Through our words is one way that we praise. We just got through singing praise songs, praising God (well, I pray we were praising God). But that’s not the only way we praise God.

We also praise God through our actions. Part of the way Mary praises God is by being willing to be a servant of the Lord. Elizabeth, too. Through our actions, both as a church corporately and as individuals in the church. As a church corporately, we praise God through our actions by reaching out to the community and helping them as best as we can—even if it means a little bit of a sacrifice on our part—to help fulfill their physical needs. But also, as a church, by going out there to the world and helping them know the solution to their greatest need (their spiritual need): the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is how we praise God through our actions as a church. But we also do it by taking care of those who come in and discipling those who come in, helping those who are in this church to know the gospel of Jesus

Christ; that is, to have a growing—not just a relationship, a growing relationship—with Jesus Christ, and by serving those around us even if it means sacrificing on our part as a church. That’s why Paul could write, “a living sacrifice.” It’s also in the parables of Jesus: give sacrificially.

We also praise God individually through our actions: through how we treat people at work or at school, how we treat our friends, and how we treat those we don’t like. We praise God through that. We praise God as individuals through our actions by how we serve. Do we serve selfishly (“I’m doing what I have to do because that’s what I like to do and I’m not going to do anything else”) or do we serve sacrificially, being willing to step out of our comfort zones and step out of our small little areas where we may be serving primarily and step out and do other things even if it’s not comfortable? Why? Because we do it because we love God, because we say, “God I’m going to praise you with my actions.” Do we serve sacrificially as individuals? That is how we praise God.

If I’m going to summarize all of that and apply it to the church corporately and individually, it’s three words that I’ve used many times (and you’ll hear me use them a whole lot in the future): know, show, and share. I’ve already defined knowing: that growing relationship with Jesus. But, showing the gospel is serving one another, taking time out of our lives to do what we may not want to do personally to help those we may not like. Why? Because we love God and we love Jesus. Serving is how we show the gospel. And sharing the gospel? Simply, evangelism. Do we evangelize as a church enough? Do we evangelize individually at all? That is how we praise God through our words and our actions, and that’s what we see with from Mary, from Elizabeth, and we see in part from John (but, we’ll see even more from John later).

We need to start praising God. Not just on Sunday morning during the music, but on Monday, on Tuesday, on Wednesday, on Thursday, on Friday, on Saturday. We may have to rearrange schedules. We have to we may have to decide what really matters. And I will just end with this: that which truly matters, we will make time for. Does God truly matter?

Let’s pray.