

Luke's Gospel: Chapter 1 verses 39 to 80

Mary's Song and Zechariah's Prophecy

Mary visits Elizabeth (Luke 1 v 39 to 45)

- How do these verses demonstrate Elizabeth's faith in God?

"The baby leaped in her womb" (v 41) – when Elizabeth saw Mary, her unborn child, John the Baptist, leaped for joy. Though John wasn't born yet, he had a spiritual awareness and could respond to the Spirit of God.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (v 42) – John the Baptist had not yet been born, and Zechariah was still mute, yet Elizabeth believed God's word given to her husband when he was in the temple.

Gabriel had told Zechariah that their promised son would make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1 v 17). Elizabeth believed that the baby in Mary's womb was the Lord for whom her son would prepare the way. Elizabeth had this faith because she was filled with the Holy Spirit. She recognized that Mary's faith played an active role in receiving that promise; and she wanted to encourage Mary's faith (v 45).

Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat (Luke 1 v 46 to 56)

Mary's song of praise (often called the Magnificat, after the Latin translation of the first few words) is based on the scriptures she had heard read out in the Nazareth synagogue each Sabbath (e.g. Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2 v 1 to 10, and perhaps several other Old Testament passages, such as those listed phrase by phrase under the cross references). This means that Mary was a woman who drank deeply from God's Word. It was on her heart, and is expressed through her song.

- What does Mary's song reveal about the character of God, and about God's way of working among people? What does the song say about Mary's character? What can we learn from her example?

Mary's song celebrates God's goodness, faithfulness and power. Her song shows the futility of trusting in oneself, trusting in political power, or trusting in riches. Mary's trust has been in God, and it has been rewarded.

The birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1 v 57 to 66)

"She bore a son" (v 57) – the promise was fulfilled just as God said it would be: God always keeps his promises. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth knew the name of the child had to be John, according to Gabriel's command (Luke 1 v 13).

"His name is John" (v 63) – now Zechariah responds in total faith. Even though he had failed before, God gave Zechariah a second chance at faith. This reminds us of Jesus' parable about the fig tree (Luke 13 v 6 to 9), which shows that our God is a God of 'second chances'.

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“Immediately his mouth was opened” (v 64) – just as the angel had said, Zechariah can speak again. It is fitting that his first words were “blessing God” (v 64). His punishment for disobedience has not made him bitter: it has caused him to praise God all the more...

Zechariah’s prophecy (Luke 1 v 67 to 80)

The prophetic voice of the Lord had been silent for 400 years: it is no small thing to read that Zechariah was filled with the Spirit, and *prophesied* – and he proclaims God’s salvation through the Messiah, and his forerunner, John.

Zechariah’s prophetic song has been called the ‘Benedictus’, from its first words in the Latin translation. His beautiful prophecy is in four parts:

1. Thanks to God for the coming of the Messiah (v 68 to 70)
 2. The purpose of the Messiah’s coming (v 71 to 75)
 3. The mission of John (v 76, 77)
 4. Pictures of Christ’s coming (v 78, 79).
- How does Zechariah’s prophecy trace the successive stages in God’s plan of salvation, culminating in the coming of Christ the Messiah? How does this show the unity of the Old and New Testaments?

“[He] has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (v 69) – we can be sure this is a truly Spirit-inspired prophecy, because the focus of Zechariah’s prophecy is the unborn Jesus, not his newborn son John. Zechariah doesn’t even know Jesus yet, but he praises him, he loves Him, he is passionate about Jesus. We know so much more about Jesus than Zechariah does, so what excuse do we have for coldness of heart?

Other Cross References

Luke 1 v 17: “and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

Luke 1 v 13: But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John...”

Luke 13 v 6 to 9: ⁶Then [Jesus] told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ⁸“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”