

³⁹*In those days Mary got up and hurried to the hill country, to a town of Judah.* ⁴⁰*She entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.* ⁴¹*Just as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* ⁴²*She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"* ⁴³*But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?* ⁴⁴*In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy!* ⁴⁵*Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!"*

⁴⁶*Then Mary said,*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

⁴⁷*and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,*

⁴⁸*because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant.*

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹*because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

⁵⁰*His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

⁵¹*He has shown strength with his arm.*

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵²*He has brought down rulers from their thrones.*

He has lifted up the lowly.

⁵³*He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty.*

⁵⁴*He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,*

⁵⁵*as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever.*

By now you're probably putting the finishing touches on your Christmas celebrations. As we get to the end of this season of preparation, what we're waiting for begins to come into view. We get to see Jesus today, though not yet born into the world. Instead, he resides in his mother's womb. And yet, as we see in this section, the presence of Jesus is felt by Mary, Elizabeth, and even John the Baptist in utero.

I want to look at these two ladies today because they have so much excitement. Of course, there is always excitement for a coming child, and here we have two expectant mothers. But it's the child in Mary they both rejoice in. And their responses to God's blessings show two different aspects of God: he is the God of promise and he is the God who uplifts the humble.

Let's first talk about Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah lived a pretty quiet life. The Lord had never blessed them with kids, and both of them were now too old. But when the angel Gabriel came to Zechariah, he brought a message that Zechariah couldn't believe. He and Elizabeth would have a son, a child who would grow up to serve with the same spirit and power as the prophet Elijah. Zechariah doubted this promise. He and Elizabeth couldn't have kids, especially now. So, because of his refusal to believe the promise, he would be made mute until eight days after his son's birth. Of course, everything happened as the angel had said. Elizabeth became pregnant with John, and she and Zechariah waited for their miracle child.

Six months into Elizabeth's pregnancy, her relative Mary came to visit. Mary had been told by Gabriel that Elizabeth was with child. And Mary certainly knew how incredible this news was. She knew that Elizabeth was long past the age of having children, and yet the Lord was giving to her what he had promised and using that child to carry out his plans of laying the groundwork for the Savior's appearance. As Mary entered Elizabeth's house, we hear that John leapt in his mother's womb. Gabriel earlier said that John would have a special gift of

the Holy Spirit from the womb. As soon as John leapt, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!”

Elizabeth knew the promise of the Messiah well. She knew that God had promised to send a champion into the world to redeem the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve from sin. And now she knew that that champion was growing in the womb of her relative Mary.

None of this was all that surprising to Elizabeth. She had learned of God’s great promise when it came to her own son from her husband, now mute from his own doubt. But she knew God was the God of promise even before this. She grew up hearing how God had made promises to his people Israel and always kept those promises. She knew the many times throughout history God had made a promise to an individual and kept it. And God was keeping his promise in sending the Lord of the universe in the womb of Mary. Even as Elizabeth, now old and out of the prime of life, sees young Mary, bearing a child that in every way was a surprise, she feels no bitterness or jealousy. She only has joy in her heart. She only has rejoicing on her lips. Yet again, the God of promise is keeping his promises.

I want you to think back to your younger days. Maybe you had to memorize passages for the church youth Christmas service. You probably had to memorize Luke 2, the birth of Jesus, but you probably had to memorize some passages like these from the Old Testament:

- Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself will give a sign for all of you. Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.”
- Isaiah 9:6: “For to us a child is born. To us a son is given. The authority to rule will rest on his shoulders. He will be named: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- Micah 5:2: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for me in Israel. His goings forth are from the beginning, from the days of eternity.

Why did you memorize them? Why are these the passages that come up in the lectionary, the appointed readings for each week, around Christmas every year? It’s because these passages are promises about the Savior from God to us. God does not deliver his Son onto the scene and say, “We’ll see how this goes.” He makes sure that Jesus checks every box that God sets for the Savior, that Jesus pays off every promise God has made to his people.

You can be sure of God’s promises. You can be sure of them because he does not fail to keep them. He does not make promises that he sincerely hopes to keep but fails due to forces outside of his control. He is in control of all things. When he makes a promise, he keeps it.

What joy that we know what Elizabeth and Mary know. This baby resting in Mary’s womb is God’s fulfillment of his greatest promise. This promise isn’t for freedom from slavery under a foreign nation. It’s not to make us powerful and respected on the world stage. It’s not for personal success at work, in the community, or at home. It’s the promise of forgiveness. It’s the promise of rightness with God. It’s the promise of eternity. In only a couple days, you’re going to celebrate that the God of promise kept his promise in Bethlehem, and you’ll spend the rest of your life celebrating that the fulfillment of this promise means that he’s going to keep all the others too.

Let's then turn to Mary. Unlike Elizabeth, the news of her child was not hearsay from her husband. Instead, the angel Gabriel came to Mary to report what God was working in her. Still, this child would be a miracle. No, she was not too old to have children or barren. Quite the opposite. She was young. She was unmarried. She had never been intimate with a man before. A child would be impossible.

We can see the fear in Mary's heart as she asks the angel how this can be since she is a virgin. Though she shows great confidence and joy in being tasked by God to carry the Savior into the world, she had to have imagined people would treat her with scorn. Her fiancé Joseph didn't believe her at first. He planned to call off the wedding until an angel intervened to tell him the truth. But how about everyone else? Mary's friends? Her family members? But here in Elizabeth's house, Mary finds solace and trust. Elizabeth knows who this child is as soon as Mary steps through the doorway.

Is this what Mary needed to hear at that time? Had the stigma of everybody in her life calling her a "liar" and a "cheater" weighed on her, even though she knew the truth? Mary can't keep in her emotion. She's not drained. She's not angry with the world and with God. She's joyful. She's thankful. And the song that's on Mary's heart comes out.

We don't have time to talk through all the pictures in this Song of Mary this morning, but I do want to focus on the point she is making. She shows that God is great and powerful. But God uses that power, not to draw the best and brightest to himself, but to lift up the lowly. God had certainly lifted Mary up. Why would anyone choose this young woman to bear the Savior into the world? She doesn't come from a rich and famous family. She's not some queen or noble. In fact, right now, even her loved ones think she's a promiscuous, wayward young woman. There's nothing about Mary that would make you choose her out of a lineup to be the mother of the world's Messiah. But God lifts up the lowly.

We look ahead to Jesus' birth. It's not regal. They don't slap a bunch of jewelry on the royal babe or beckon rulers from all over the land to come pay their homage. It's the lowly shepherds that kneel at his cradle. We look even further ahead to Jesus' ministry. He doesn't want to throw his lot in with the religious and political leaders. He sees their arrogance and corruption. They don't need to be exalted. They need to be humbled. But they do criticize him for the people he hangs out with. Jesus spends his time with the prostitutes, the tax collectors, and the sick. And he doesn't hang out with them to condone their sins, but to lift them out of sin and struggle by the power of his message of grace.

When I hear Mary's song, it hits home. How gracious God has been to me by lifting me from sin to forgiveness! How Gracious God has been by taking all my self-doubts, all my struggles, and everything that hurts, and lifting me out of it through that child of Mary. And it leads me to rejoice too. It leads me to marvel at the thought.

I hope as you hear this Song of Mary, it hits home for you too. You've probably made the Christmas season too busy. We all do it every year, even when we promise not to the prior year. Even our church calendar is overloaded with service opportunities for this ministry or that ministry. I would guess, if you're anything like me, you've run out of time and neglected some of your responsibilities in life. Your family hasn't gotten enough time and attention from you. You haven't been able to put in the effort at your job that you normally do. Friendships and responsibilities have been put on ice until after this next week. Maybe you feel a little guilty. Maybe you feel pretty low. But the good news is, there's a present waiting for you under the tree this week that can and will make everything ok. And what will you do when you open it? With Mary and Elizabeth, you'll rejoice. Amen.