

Mary's Song, My Song Luke 1:39-56

Let's begin this morning with the reading of our text in **Luke 1:39-56**.

It would be a fair assessment on my part to go out on a limb and venture to say that when you entered the building this morning you either gave or received a greeting of some kind. It's generally considered an act of courtesy, a way of acknowledging the presence of someone else that you meet either in a formal or informal setting.

Depending on who you are greeting determines the kind of greeting given. It may be a hug, a handshake or even a kiss. Guys might do the little fist bump or clasp hands and give a little shoulder hug. When we go home to see my Dad or when we get together with my siblings, it's hugs all around. When I greet my wife at the end of the day after not seeing her for the day, it's a kiss. In church here there might be warm handshakes or hugs or even just a hello.

Our culture has acceptable ways in which we greet people. After the expression of a hug or handshake there is the exchange of some pleasantries. It begins with a hello or hi or hey followed by:

How are you?

What's new?

What have you been up to?

How about the weather?

How's work?

How are the kids?

How are you managing with the aches and pains?

What happened to the Lions or Tigers or Wings?

Then we get on with other things or we part company.

It is acceptable in our culture to be brief in greeting others. But that isn't the case in other cultures. There are certain customs that are observed. It was that way in Biblical days, in the days of our text.

Two relatives meet and we see their response in greeting one another.

Mary's arrival is welcomed

Mary's answer is wonderful

I. MARY'S ARRIVAL WAS WELCOMED – v. 39-45

We have come to understand a salutation as a greeting of some kind by word or gesture. In some cultures it also includes some words of good will. In the setting of our text, it was customary to give not only a word of good will, but also honor to the other person and often a blessing of some type.

When Joseph saw his brother Benjamin for the first time since his captivity his greeting was **“God be gracious to you, my son.” (Genesis 43:29)**

In the fields of Boaz when he greeted the harvesters he said **“The Lord be with you!”** and their response was **“The Lord bless you!” (Ruth 2:4-5)** According to **Psalms 129:8** a typical greeting was **“The blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.”**

Because a blessing of some kind was often part of the greeting, the word bless was given a secondary meaning of salute, what we now call a salutation. The blessing also included some words of general well-being and honor or reverence. These greetings were generally charged with emotion and affection. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* describes ancient greetings in this way **“Often these salutations were very elaborate, involving much time in prostrations, embracings, etc.”**

Jesus once accused the Pharisees of expecting to be greeted first in the market (**Mark 12:38**) because the greeting was directed to the one to be honored. The greeting was an important social event and we see the elements of well-being, honor and even reverence in the greeting that takes place in our text. Mary had received word from God through the angelic messenger, Gabriel, that she had found

favor with God and would be the mother of the Messiah. Our text begins by noting **“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.”**

You will remember from last week if you were here that Palestine was divided into three regions. There was Samaria. There was Galilee where Mary lived in the town of Nazareth. There was Judea. That is where Mary traveled. I believe that when it says Mary hurried there, she went right away and didn’t linger in her home town. I think she hurried there for a couple of reasons.

I believe she hurried there to verify the words of the angel, not because she doubted him and needed further proof to convince her of what he said, but because this would show her just as the angel said that **“nothing is impossible with God.”**

I also believe she hurried there because she needed someone to tell her story to, and if anyone would understand the miracle that had taken place, it would be someone who had also experienced a miracle.

I don’t know if she told her parents yet.

I don’t believe she had told Joseph yet.

I do believe that she needed to get away to think about a lot of things. How would she tell Joseph? What would happen once word got out? Would anyone believe her story?

I believe she needed to talk this over with someone who was very godly and would understand her predicament, but the last place she should have gone was the first place she went.

The law as clear according to **Deuteronomy 22:24**. A woman who became pregnant by another man other than her husband was to be stoned to death. The judgment would come from the priest and the place she went was the home of a priest. Mary had not known before the announcement by the angel

that her relative was expecting and the pregnancy was a miracle. From a logical point of view it was the last place she should have gone, but because of the miraculous nature in which both pregnancies occurred it was the best place to go. I think she would have a sympathetic, caring and compassionate ear from both Elizabeth and Zechariah and so she hurried to their home.

Notice that as Mary is welcomed, the Holy Spirit indwells.

A. The Holy Spirit Indwells – v. 41

We don’t have time to discuss the difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit during the Old Testament and the New Testament. Since the Holy Spirit will not be given to all believers until some 33 years later on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit’s ministry was much different. You will recall that in **verse 15** the child Elizabeth carried would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth. Suffice it to say that in the Old Testament when a person was given a special task to perform by God, the Holy Spirit came upon them to enable them to perform that task.

For example when the Tabernacle was built, Bezalel was indwelt by the Spirit to ensure that each piece was crafted to the specifications given by God.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts...’” (Exodus 30:1-3)

When Elizabeth heard the greeting from Mary, the child got excited, did a little summersault, kicked a bit and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. It wasn’t indigestion. It could be that the Holy Spirit indwelt her because she had a special task from the Lord to give birth to and raise a child who would announce the coming of the Messiah. But I rather suspect that the Holy Spirit indwelt her for another

reason. The Holy Spirit not only indwells, I also see that the Holy Spirit inspires.

B. The Holy Spirit Inspires – v. 42-44

I believe that it was by the Holy Spirit that Elizabeth was able to confirm and affirm that the child Mary had growing in her was the Lord even before Mary had a chance to tell her the news.

There are a number of old wives tales about how you can determine the gender of an unborn child without the aid of ultrasound.

If you carry the baby high, it's a boy; and if you carry it low it's a girl.

If you have dry hands and cold feet, it's a boy; and if you break out in skin blemishes, it's a girl.

My aunt believed that if you tie your wedding band to a string, hang it over the belly and if it goes around in circles, it's a boy; and if it goes back and forth, then it's a girl.

Then there's the heart rate theory.

If the mother craves sweets it will be a girl; and if she craves something salty, it's a boy.

They didn't have medical equipment but somehow the Holy Spirit communicated with her spirit that Mary was carrying the Messiah. **Why do I say that?** I think it's because of what she says in the next verses and notice that it was with excitement. Mary's pregnancy wasn't just good news, it was great news!

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

Remember the salutation is a greeting of blessing. Here Elizabeth spontaneously gives honor and reverence to Mary and to the Lord. Remember that when we first began this series I mentioned that Luke is writing to a Gentile audience. They would not necessarily understand or appreciate the term Messiah, but they would understand the word Lord. It is the Old Testament equivalent Yahweh. So it

was the indwelling Holy Spirit who confirmed in Elizabeth's spirit that Mary had also experienced a miraculous birth and affirmed that it was the Lord, the long awaited Messiah.

Mary was indeed the most honored among all women to be chosen for this task. Please note that she was not honored above women, somehow to become a religious icon that we worship and pray to who has as much ability to forgive sin and grant salvation as Jesus Himself. It does not mean that she is to be placed on some pedestal, but it does mean that she deserves our honor for the special task given to her. She is blessed among women.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with a blessing because she was carrying the Lord.

Elizabeth greeted Mary with a blessing because she had faith to believe what God told her through the angel. She emphasized the special faith of Mary.

“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”

It is by faith that we are saved.

(Ephesians 2:8-9; Galatians 3:26)

It is by faith that we live the Christian life.

(Galatians 2:20)

It is faith that is the fundamental and foundational element of the Christian life.

(Hebrews 11:1, 6; II Corinthians 5:7)

Faith results in our joy.

I Peter 1:8-9 “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Inexpressible conveys the idea that our joy is beyond the ability to communicate in words what is in our heart, our joy is beyond our expression. That joy is **“full of glory”** means it is the highest praise we can offer. Our heart is bursting so much with praise and adoration that all we can do is blurt out

The Doxology.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise Him, all creatures here below.

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

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And then we put the final stamp on the whole matter as it were by ending with AMEN! So be it.

Or how about the words of Haydn in his hymn Praise the Lord! Ye Heavens, Adore Him (82).

Worship, honor, glory, blessing,
Lord, we offer unto Thee.
Young and old, Thy praise expressing,
In glad homage bend the knee.
All the saints in heav'n adore Thee;
We would bow before Thy throne.
As Thine angels serve before Thee,
So on earth Thy will be done.

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And if that weren't enough, there is the hymn Praise to the Lord, the Almighty. I would like us to sing that hymn. It's #210.

What I don't want any of us to miss in this greeting between these two women is the song of their heart, the worship that transcends to God for His blessings both for the here and now and for generations to come. Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, our natural response to life's events and circumstances should be to worship the Lord.

This is the joy that Mary expresses in her song of praise, what has been called the Magnificat.

Elizabeth welcomed Mary's arrival and expressed her joy and Mary's response is nothing less than wonderful.

Mary's arrival is welcomed.

Mary's answer is wonderful.

II. MARY'S ANSWER WAS WONDERFUL – v. 46-56

Did you catch the line in Praise the Lord! Ye Heavens Adore Him? It is the scene of Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth is the aged saint and Mary is the young woman together praising God.
Young and old, Thy praise expressing...

There are four stanzas to Mary's song of praise. You could compare this to the song of Hannah in I Samuel 2. In Mary's song we see a young woman who has a keen grasp on the Old Testament weaving excerpts and ideas from the Psalms and Hannah's prayer. We also see in her song a wonderful knowledge of the history of Israel as well as a sharp awareness of the Abrahamic covenant relating to the promises of God.

We first notice that her response was internal.

A. Her Response Was Internal

She begins with her own personal response by giving glory to God for all that has happened to her. She shows us that true worship of God begins in the heart. She states that her soul glorifies God and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior.

Jesus said in **John 4:24** that we must worship God in spirit and in truth.

A.W. Tozer writes "Deep within every human is the impulse to worship, and it is the most natural thing about us. The God who desires worship insists the worship be on His terms, and He allows no exceptions...It is impossible to worship God acceptably apart from the Holy Spirit. The operation of the Spirit of God within us enables us to worship God acceptably through that person we call Jesus Christ, who is Himself God. Therefore, worship originates with God, comes back to us and is reflected from us."

The heart longs to worship, craves to worship, reaches out to worship, but some don't know what or who it is they worship so they grasp at anything and everything to worship and find they don't fill the void so they keep searching. Eventually when the Holy Spirit peels back the curtain of our heart and exposes the object of true worship – God Himself – that is when we see God as the only One worthy of worship and we cannot rightly worship Him until we have gotten the matter of the heart properly dealt with. In its current condition darkened by sin, the heart is caged and cannot express itself worship. Only and until we have dealt with our sin can we worship God properly and then only by the enabling of the Holy Spirit within us.

That was the response of Isaiah when he was privileged to have the curtain of heaven drawn back enough for him to glimpse in and see the wonderful expression of praise being given to God by the angels. In a moment of seeing God's holiness he saw his own sinfulness. *It would be like entering the doors into a grand ball room where everyone has on his or her best bib and tucker, but you come dressed in your gardening clothes, stained and filthy from digging in the dirt. It is in that moment that you recognize that you inappropriately dressed and before anyone can notice you want to run and hide behind a curtain because you are out of place.*

In the presence of a holy God, Isaiah felt ashamed because of his sin and so out of place in the splendor of that holy scene that he does the only natural thing, he cries out. In a sense he is saying "I don't belong, help me." Only when the angel cleansed him with the hot coal could he respond in proper worship.

Mary responded from the very core of her soul in expressing glory to God. Like the angelic beings of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4, she knew the only proper response was worship and praise. But notice importantly her own admission. When she exclaimed God was her Savior it was an admission

of her sin. Like anyone and everyone who comes to God, it must first begin with our understanding that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. This was not a Savior from political oppression by Rome or from the public opinion about her being pregnant outside marriage. This was a Savior from sin.

As we come to God in worship let's examine our worship from the words of Isaiah who writes **(29:13) "The Lord says: 'These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men.'"**

Mary's worship was internal, it came from a heart that saw God and saw her need for God. She too, needed a Savior.

We also notice that her response is intense.

B. Her Response Was Intense

It was a spontaneous response to the words of Elizabeth and the full realization of the greatness of God and the great things that were to come. It was God centered, not self-centered.

She praised God for His special favor on her. She saw herself as part of the godly remnant that served God. She spoke of God as her Savior showing an intimate acquaintance with Him. She spoke of God's faithfulness, power, holiness, and mercy. She praised God for His favor on Israel. God was being merciful to Abraham and his descendants through this child. She was aware this would fulfill the promise God made to Abraham, but that it would also bless generations to come.

This is an uninhibited song of praise and worship. She saw the power of God to keep His promises.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?”

When you see the power of God displayed, is your response one of worship?

She saw through the history of Israel how the power of God exalted the humble and humbled the exalted. She had heard about Joseph, Gideon, Hannah, Ruth, David and Daniel how God had exalted them from humble positions. She knew about Ahab, Jezabel and Nebuchadnezzar and how God had humbled them because of their pride.

Matthew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

I Peter 5:5b-6 “clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.”

When you see God’s power to exalt or humble, is your response one of worship?

She saw the faithfulness of God to keep His promises by remembering the covenant made with Abraham.

Lamentations 3:22-23 “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

When you see God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises, is your response one of worship?

She saw the mercy of God extending to future generations so that all the nations of the world could be blessed.

Psalms 86:15 “But Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.”

When you see that the mercy of God extends even to our generation and will continue to any and all future generations, is your response one of worship?

She saw the provision of God who can satisfy the spiritually hungry and thirsty.

Matthew 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Psalms 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

When you see how God satisfies your spiritually hungry and thirsty soul, is your response one of worship?

How do you see God today? If you see Him through the lens of Scripture because of the insight the indwelling Holy Spirit gives, then you cannot help but spontaneously worship Him.

If however, you see Him through any other lens than you will be unable to see Him as He truly is and you will have a skewed vision of Him and you will have no desire to respond to Him in worship.

Mary shows us that worship is internal. It begins with a heart that is right with God. She shows us that worship is intense. It is uninhibited and spontaneous.

C. Her Response Was Habitual

It is a natural way of life that does not cease and is not altered because of changing circumstances. She knew that there would be wagging tongues and scornful looks. She knew there would be ridicule, but that didn’t stop her from worshipping God. Her focus was on God not on others.

D. Her Response Was In Humility

She shows us that worship must be in humility. Pride is a hindrance to worship. We have pride

when we think we're better or more deserving than someone else. She acknowledged her lowly position.

We have pride when we are unwilling to confess a sin or when we are unwilling to forgive someone else. She acknowledged that God was her Savior.

Humility on the other hand is the place where worship begins. Again, quoting Tozer who said "Worship is to feel in the heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe. Worship will humble a person as nothing else can. There must be humility in the heart before there can be worship."

Mary's humble spirit is revealed in her worship. The response of both women is joy and praise. Warren Wiersbe has written that the "fullness of the Spirit should lead to joyful praise in our lives, in which we desire to glorify God."

Ephesians 5:18-20

Paul puts it succinctly **"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

When it comes right down to it, when I see God for who He is and all He has done, then Mary's song becomes my song, an uninhibited response of worship. The next time you greet someone share some of the great things God has done. You'll both end up worshipping God.