

**Luke 1: 24-38; “Elizabeth & Mary Blessed”, Sermon # 2 in the series – “The Prophecies of Christ’s Birth”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
On November 27th, 2022, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

This afternoon I want to speak to you about how blessed these two women were, as the mothers of John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus Christ. In both cases, they were given miraculous conception by God. In the case of Elizabeth, she had been barren and unable to conceive for their whole married life. And now here she was, an older woman, when God did this great thing for her. In Mary’s case, the Holy Spirit would Himself bring about her conception of the Son of God in her womb. He would totally go around the normal human means of conception between a man and a woman, a husband and his wife. Hers would be a virgin conception and birth.

Through this message I would like to show you the goodness which God showed to both these women during the time when they were waiting for their child to be born. I will show you what He did for them, and what He can also do for you, while Christ is being formed in you, in relation to your knowing God better. 1st of all – God in His goodness to Elizabeth took away her reproach. 2nd – God in His goodness wanted Mary to rejoice at the greatness of the One whom she would conceive. And 3rd – God in His goodness showed Mary how holy He is in all of His work in the womb. And 4th – God in His goodness showed Mary that nothing would be impossible for Him in regard to fulfilling all His purpose.

1st of all – God in His goodness to Elizabeth took away her reproach.

Verse 24 says – Now after those days Zacharias’ wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying “Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.” We need to see that this hiding of Elizabeth’s was a righteous and holy hiding. She was not ashamed of God’s granting this most marvelous blessing to her in her old age. And that was why she did not want to appear in public. Moreover, it was not because she was not uncertain of God’s handiwork in her womb, and was waiting to prove it herself and the later to others. She was most certain about it.

No, it appears to me that it was her great humility and thankfulness in this matter; that God would take away her reproach in the sight of men. She did not want to run around boasting of her ability to conceive. Neither did she want to hide this fact during the whole time of her pregnancy. Instead, she wanted it to be something, that when she revealed herself to other people after the 5 months of hiding, that they would be able to rejoice with her, and see that this work in her womb was all due to the mercy and goodness of God to her, and to her husband who was a priest, who really had needed a son to continue his line.

At the present, it was a reproach, or something spoken about, in a blaming sort of way, if woman was not able to conceive a child. No doubt it was especially spoken about in a blaming way if such prominent people in the service of God as Zacharias and Elizabeth were, could not bring forth a son who would continue on the work of the priesthood of God. What secret sin or bad behavior had brought this on, people might have thought. How was God displeased with them? And now her husband could not speak either, after coming out of the temple that day a few weeks before! These were all good reasons why she should hide herself.

But she was not ashamed of what God had done for her. And she was not afraid of men’s opinions of the whole matter. She was more concerned, I am sure, for the honor and glory of God in this whole matter; that if she did not speak of it for those five months, that all the speculations of people would be put to a greater silence than if she had spoken of it right away. And also, having this five months, she would have time to reverently consider this wonderful blessing to her and to

Zacharias without being intruded upon by many people coming to talk and make observations upon it. Sometimes, my brethren, it is good to simply glory in what God has done for you, what He is doing in your heart, what He has revealed to you personally, without feeling that you have to shout it out before everyone, as if it is their opinions which are the most important thing, in relation to the work of God going on in your heart. Sin is a reproach to any people, but not being able to have a child should not be made a matter of reproach, but of careful personal and private thought, and prayer in relation to what God alone can give and do. We all should be able to rejoice in what God gives.

It is also a good thing to pause and consider how you should reveal the most important things that are taking place in your heart and your life, to other people. There are things which God does and which He reveals, which need to be treasured up and pondered upon before we say a word to others about them. Some things are that sacred. This is one of them, and Elizabeth knew that it would be wise to be hidden for those 5 months. Greater glory would come to God on account of it she thought, and her reproach among people would be taken away.

2nd – God in His goodness wanted Mary to rejoice at the greatness of the One whom she would conceive. (verses 26-33)

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David.” “The virgin’s name was Mary.” “And having come in, the angel said to her, ‘Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!’” “But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.” “Then the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’” “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.” “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

This conversation which Mary had with the angel Gabriel is precious for us to meditate on. The angel we are told was sent by God directly to Mary with this most wonderful of news. And the first thing that he said was that she should rejoice because she was the highly favored one that the Lord had chosen to be the mother of Jesus. Out of all the women in the world of that day, she was the one chosen. Now, of course, she was chosen because of her lineage; it is true. She was evidently the daughter of Heli who is mentioned in the genealogy in Luke 3: 23. It appears that this genealogy in Luke differs from the one in Matthew.

Robertson, in his word pictures of the N.T. says this – “They agree in the mention of Joseph, but Matthew says that “Jacob begat Joseph” while Luke calls “Joseph the son of Heli.” “There are other differences, but this one makes one pause.” “Joseph, of course, did not have two fathers.” “If we understand Luke to be giving the real genealogy of Jesus through Mary, the matter is simple enough.” I agree with him. Mary’s lineage was very necessary to be related here, for it was the seed of the woman who would crush Satan’s head. That is the very next thing that took place in the gospel of Matthew, in chapter 4, after the genealogy was given.

But I believe that it was also true that God the Father chose Mary to be the mother of our Lord because she was a woman of faith and a woman who feared the Lord. She was a virtuous woman, and the worth of her godly character was far above rubies. When the angel told her that she should rejoice because she was a highly favored one, when he said – The Lord is with you, you are blessed among women, she was troubled at this saying. She wondered – Why would this divine visitor come and say these things to me? She did not think herself worthy of these kinds of blessings and accolades.

And so the angel had to calm her fears. He said to her – Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Ah, this is a wonderful statement indeed! In the days before the flood, it was only in relation to Noah that the Scriptures said – “And Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”. (Genesis 6, verse 8) God had studied the life of Noah, and had examined his heart, and it says in verse 9 that, “Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations.” “Noah walked with the Lord.” The same could be said here of Mary. She was a woman of integrity. She had faith in God and walked with God, and was willing to do His will at every point. She had found favor with God because she was this way, as a believer in God.

Salvation is always of grace, through faith, and not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. But from that point forward after a person first believes, there is a carefulness in some who have believed, to be more faithful than others. They fear God more than most, as Nehemiah said of his own brother in Nehemiah 7: 2 – “Then I gave the charge of Jerusalem to my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the leader of the citadel, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.” God gave the charge of giving birth to his Son to Mary, knowing that she was a person who would raise Him in the right way. She was a woman of sterling character.

This was the woman whom God was looking for. And having said these great things about how the Lord was with her, and how she had found favor with Him, he then went on to tell her of the great things that she should rejoice in, concerning the Son who was to be born to her. He would be great, and He would be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David. He would reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there would be no end.” Such tremendous words of the greatness of the One who would be her son; the One whom she would bring forth.

Now the way that we should understand this, by way of application is this: If you have come to know Christ as Your Savior, by faith, do you see how great is the One who lives in your heart, and who does His great works of grace there? Do you see that this is the wonderful nature of grace, that you, having been given it, will become a person of sterling character yourself? Jesus lived and died for you. And therefore will you, because of His greatness of His Person and the greatness of His work in your redemption, live for Him, and fear Him, and yourself become a person of integrity and faithfulness in His sight? Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God!

3rd – God in His goodness showed Mary how holy He is in all of His work in the womb.

Verse 34 – “Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” Mary knew how conception took place. She knew that she needed to have a husband in order to have a baby. Her question did not express the unbelief or fear that Zacharias did. It was simply a question of practicality. And so the angel would answer the question and give her the answer that she needed to satisfy her need to know how God would do this great thing.

The Holy Spirit Himself would come upon her and the power of God, the power of the Highest would overshadow her, working a perfectly holy work in her womb. He would form the true human body and the perfect human spirit in the womb of Mary. But it would be more than that! It would be O so much more than that! It would be that this perfect human nature would be taken into union with the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity! And God would become flesh, and dwell among us. And we would behold the glory of the begotten of the Father full of grace and truth. What an infinitely holy work this was!

And this glorious Person, we shall see some day with our own eyes, if we are trusting in Him and if we are faithful to live to His glory! By way of application again – Can you see that it is this same power of the Holy Spirit who has caused you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? Do you see that in having believed in Him that you now have Christ in you, the hope of glory? Do you think often of the fact that this is the reason that it says in 1st John 3: 9 that “whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God? Oh, what a holy work has taken place in each of you who believes! And this is why you yourselves ought to be pursuing holiness. It is so that you will one day see the Lord and be able to rejoice forevermore!

4th – God in His goodness showed Mary that nothing would be impossible for Him in regard to fulfilling all His purpose.

Verse 36 says – “Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.” “For with God nothing will be impossible.” “Then Mary said, ‘Behold the maidservant of the Lord!’” “Let it be to me according to your word.” “And the angel departed from her.” It was indeed a blessing that the angel Gabriel gave Mary this further encouragement of letting her know of her kinswoman Elizabeth’s conception of a son in her old age, and that she was six months ahead of her in gestation. And this great work was done in the womb of a woman who it was widely known, was barren.

This moved Mary to immediately give herself up to the Lord’s purpose for her. And so she exclaimed – “Behold the maidservant of the Lord!” “Let it be to me according to your word.” Here am I! Do this glorious work in me! If you have seen the greatness of the Lord’s work in His forming Christ in others of your brethren’s hearts, will you not pray that He would do a similar work in your own, so that you will readily volunteer to serve the Lord in whatever capacity that he would have you to serve Him? Truly, this is what He is looking for, from everyone whom He saves. May He hear your voice. Nothing will be impossible for Him! He is a great God. Therefore ask Him of great things, that you might glorify Him in your service to Him!