

Elizabeth's Exclamation

Luke 1:39-45

Advent 2016 #5

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If you walk through the mall this Advent and Christmas season—I mean, this “Holiday” season, sorry for using the politically incorrect terms—you’ll hear words like, “Joy to the world, “O tidings of comfort and joy,” “Joyful, all ye nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies,” and,

Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o’er the plains
and the mountains in reply,
echoing their joyous strains.

This is a season that is supposed to be full of joy! But no one in our culture knows why! This is the Christian season of Advent. We look back to the entrance of the Son of God in human flesh into the world and we look forward to his re-entering to judge the living and the dead. And isn’t it ironic that those who forbid the use of “Christmas” substitute “Holiday.” What do you think a holiday is? It’s a holy day! It’s another Christian concept!

As we pause this third Sunday in Advent to meditate on the narratives of our Lord’s birth, we should be filled with joy. Why? The Son of God who is “God of the substance of the Father”—meaning, he is truly and fully divine—

has taken upon himself a human nature and become a man, “of the substance of his mother” and “inferior to the Father as touching manhood.”

Note briefly the background of our text in verses 39–40. **In those days**, meaning, soon after Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would bear a son, **Mary arose and went with haste**. The language used here “testifies to her intense and burning emotion.”¹ She’s just heard that she—a virgin—is going to conceive and bear not just a son, but the Lord himself! And furthermore, Gabriel has told her that her relative who is way beyond child-bearing years is also pregnant. So Mary has to respond! And she does so with joy. So she traveled **into the hill country, to a town in Judah**, which means she went to the area south of Jerusalem. This would take 4–5 days. She traveled for days and not just up a few rows of shops without any light “holiday” music in the background! And after arriving **she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth**.² She’s full of joy and that leads to even more joy!

The Joyful Action of John (vv. 41, 44)

The first and most unexpected thing in this story is *the joyful action of John*. **When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the six month old**

¹ Calvin, 1:31.

² Why? John Calvin says partly to confirm her own faith and partly to testify of the grace given to her. 1:31.

baby leaped in her womb (v. 41) and as she herself tells Mary in verse 44, **“the baby in my womb leaped for joy”** (v. 44). As Jesus would later say, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise” (Matt. 21:16; cf. Ps. 8:2[LXX]). But John can’t even speak yet! He’s *in utero* but he’s already praising the Savior! For those of us who have been in a doctor’s office with our wives hooked up to an ultrasound machine, or if you’ve ever been curious and just watched a video online, you’ve seen babies move at the sound of their fathers’ and voices.

But this is more than that! This is one of the earliest signs and testimonies to our Lord’s being the Savior. And if his mother’s words in verse 41 were led by the Holy Spirit, how much more the joyful jump of John? As an aside of application, this also reminds us that our children have a capacity for the things of God. John’s jump teaches us that the Holy Spirit is able to regenerate our children in the womb apart from the means of the Word³ It’s why we want them here, in the nursery of the Holy Spirit, even though it may feel to us as parents more like a wrestling ring!

The Joyful Words of Elizabeth (vv. 41–43, 45)

That joy inside Mary and inside Elizabeth’s womb then bursts forth in

³ See The Conclusions of Utrecht (1905), III, IV, in Herman Bavinck, *Saved By Grace*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, ed. J. Mark Beach (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 170, 172.

the joyful words of Elizabeth. Children, have you ever known what was inside a gift your mom or dad was about to open, and as they were opening it you just couldn't hold it in any longer so you yelled it out? You were so joyful in giving the gift and seeing your mom or dad open it! Well in our story Elizabeth, who is as old as a grandma, has been told by the angel Gabriel that she is going to have a son. And then her cousin, Mary, comes to her house and says she, too, is pregnant by a miracle. Elizabeth can't hold it in any longer! The one difference between her and you is that Elizabeth's words are no ordinary words; they are Holy Spirit-inspired prophetic words: **and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry** (vv. 40-41). Why does Luke tell us Elizabeth was **filled with the Holy Spirit**? That's his way of turning the neon lights on to say, "*Hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest*"⁴ these words people!" She proclaims by the power of the Holy Spirit something about Mary and something about Jesus.

Look at *the joyful words* she **exclaimed with a loud cry about Mary** in verse 42: "**Blessed are you among women.**" As I mentioned last week with the words of Gabriel to Mary, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with

⁴ From the "Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent," *Book of Common Prayer*.

you!” (1:28), those of us with Roman Catholic backgrounds might stumble at these words because they’ve been adapted into the Rosary prayers as the “Hail Mary.” We don’t need to be Roman Catholic or Orthodox to honor Mary. Our own John Calvin said, “To this day we cannot enjoy the blessing brought to us in Christ without thinking at the same time of that which God gave and adornment and honour to Mary, in willing her to be the mother of His only-begotten Son.”⁵ We have Jesus because of his mother, Mary, and we can thank the Lord—not her!—for that.

Most importantly here are *the joyful words* Elizabeth **exclaimed with a loud cry about Jesus** in verse 42: **“blessed is the fruit of your womb!”** (v. 42) And again in verse 43: **“And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”** What is she saying? She is saying by inspiration what we said by confession this morning: “We believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.”

First, by the Holy Spirit she proclaimed the true humanity of Jesus. When she uses the phrase **the fruit of your womb** (v. 42) she’s saying that Jesus is truly human. Jesus is “man of the substance of His mother” as we again confessed this morning. Let me ask you this: where did Jesus get his

⁵ Calvin, 1:31.

human nature from? He derived it from his mother, Mary. And this means that like us he has “a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.”

Everything that makes us human beings with a soul and body together in one person is what our Lord was and continues to be in his human nature.

Second, by the Holy Spirit Elizabeth proclaimed the true divinity of the son in Mary’s womb. Elizabeth is in awe and wonder that God would give her such an opportunity to be greeted by and to greet Mary, whom she calls “**the mother of my Lord**” (v. 43). Let that phrase sink in for a moment... Do you realize what Elizabeth is saying? Another of our ancient creeds calls Mary *theotokos*, “the mother of God” or “the God-bearer,” because she bore in her womb not merely a human son but *the* Son of God in human flesh.

“Happy holidays.” Move along, there’s nothing to see here. Are you kidding me? While everyone is trying to sweep reality under the rug and create a narrative of generic vacation, family time, and gifts—don’t forget to buy your fair share to keep the economy going!—the Holy Spirit has a narrative for us today. God has entered our world! He came to save because we cannot save ourselves. He still offers that salvation today. Forget the holidays; trust in the holy Son of God today! Let’s pray...