

FBC POWELL, 1-29-17 PM NOTES
"Learning to Worship from Elizabeth and Mary"
Luke 1:39-56
3 in Series, "The Gospel According to Luke"

"Jesus Christ left the glory and worship He had in heaven, was born of a virgin in a smelly stable, lived the only perfect life, was rejected by His own people, suffered on an old rugged cross, died as our substitute, rose from the dead, and sent His Spirit at Pentecost in order to make worshippers out of rebels."
– A. W. Tozer and others

Worship is our adoring response to God's glory and worthiness

I. Worship Is Prepared through Affirmation (vv. 39-45)

Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV) "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with **loud singing**."

2 Chronicles 5:12-14 "and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, 'He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,' then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."

Revelation 5:9-10 "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.'"

A. Affirmation from John's Joy (vv. 39-41a, 44)

B. Affirmation from Elizabeth's Blessing (vv. 41b-43, 45)

2 Samuel 23:2 "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."

Luke 1:67 "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying..."

1. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Child (v. 42)

John 3:30 "He must increase, but I must decrease."

2. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Presence (v. 43)

3. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Faith (v. 45)

II. Worship Is Poured Out in Adoration (vv. 46-56)

“Mary pillages the Scriptures to come up with the words of praise to give back to God for the marvelous thing that He has done for her. Obviously the educators of Mary’s day were not afflicted with memorization phobia, because someone along the line had encouraged Mary to memorize Scripture, and so when her hour of need came, when she needed to find the words to express her heart of joy and thankfulness to the sovereign God who was using her as a powerful and unique instrument in the efforts to bring about the accomplishments of redemption, she was able to go to the Scripture and pray and sing and thank God through those Scriptures. Her memory was stored with Scripture. She was familiar, whether it was by reading or hearing, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart, she spoke, her mouth was filled with the language of Scripture.”
- Ligon Duncan

A. Adoration for His Regard (vv. 46-48)

B. Adoration for His Mighty Work in Us (v. 49)

C. Adoration for His Mercy (v. 50)

D. Adoration for His Mighty Deeds (vv. 51-55)

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Chapter 3: Learning to Worship from Elizabeth and Mary

Luke 1:39-56

In our verse by verse study of the Gospel of Luke, we have come to an exciting but often skipped over portion of the book. While we will examine the historical facts recorded in this passage, we will also learn some practical principles concerning worship.

What we have in this passage is the first two of five songs in the first two chapters of Luke. The first song was not by angels, but by Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, the mother of John the Baptist. The first song is in Luke 1:42b-45. It is not obvious that this is a song in the English translations, but on a closer examination it is obvious that it is a song. In a sense, Elizabeth had the privilege of singing the first Christmas carol. When we get to verses 46-55, it is even more obvious that Mary, the human mother of the Lord is singing a song, a song of worship often called the *Magnificat*.

Let’s set the historical scene for this passage. The angel Gabriel was the chosen messenger of God to give the Jewish priest, Zacharias, the word that even though he and his wife Elizabeth were well beyond child-bearing years, they would have their first child – a son whom Zacharias was instructed to name John. The glorious part of the proclamation by the angel is that John would become the forerunner, the one preparing the way for the Christ, the Messiah. Zacharias doubted Gabriel’s word about a child coming to this aged couple (the KJV describes them as “well stricken in years”). As a result of his unbelief, he was rendered mute (unable to speak) until the child named John would be born. Zacharias and Elizabeth

traveled from Jerusalem back to their home in the hill country of Judea, and true to God's promise, Elizabeth became pregnant.

When the angel Gabriel came to Mary (the much, much younger cousin of Elizabeth), He proclaimed to Mary that she would conceive, even though she was a virgin, and that the child would be the promised Messiah, the one that every devout Jew looked and longed for. Luke 1:35-36: "The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.'"

In our text, we see what Mary did in Luke 1:39-40: "Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth." Don't skip lightly over this. Based on marriage customs of that time, Mary was almost certainly a teenager – possibly a younger teenager. The journey from Nazareth to where Elizabeth and Zacharias lived was about a three or four-day journey! We have a teenager who is now pregnant though she had never had sexual relations with a man, traveling three to four days to visit her older cousin Elizabeth who is old enough to be her grandmother or even her great grandmother, and Elizabeth is six months pregnant. That sounds rather strange, but these were the facts. These two women were going to each, miraculously, give birth to a child – though the miracles were of a different kind (one a virgin conception and the other a conception the normal way except for the fact that Elizabeth was long past the child bearing age). What did they do when they came together? They worshipped!

Before we get into the details of this text, I want us to think together about what this passage majors on – worship. Our ultimate purpose for existing is to glorify God and the chief way that God is glorified is through genuine worship. Allow me to share a fantastic statement about worship that I compiled from multiple sources, but mostly from Dr. A. W. Tozer.

Jesus Christ left the glory and worship He had in heaven, was born of a virgin in a smelly stable, lived the only perfect life, was rejected by His own people, suffered on an old rugged cross, died as our substitute, rose from the dead, and sent His Spirit at Pentecost in order to make worshippers out of rebels.

Let's get really basic. What is worship? When we put together the many, many things the Bible says about worship, what is a simple definition of worship? Realizing that worship will be much broader than any simple definition we could come up with, here is a simple definition: *Worship is our adoring response to God's glory and worthiness.* Let's break that definition down.

- "Our adoring response" – Worship is an expression of our adoration of and love for God. Worship is not cold emotionless ritual. Worship is not something we manufacture; worship is a response to God. The deeper we grow in our knowledge of our Triune God, the greater will be our capacity for worship. That's one of the reasons that our worship will be so amazing in heaven; God will dwell with us and we will see Jesus as He is in all His glory and we will throughout all eternity grow deeper in our knowledge of Him. Our worship will not be hindered by these bodies infested with the power of sin and this old programming called the flesh.
- "to God's glory" – God's glory is the out shining of all that He is – all of His attributes. It is His love, His mercy, wrath, grace, justice, love, compassion, holiness, faithfulness, and so much more! As we see more clearly what God is like, we stand in awe and reverence, and we worship Him.
- "and worthiness" – The English word, "worship" is a shortening of the old English word "worthship" and it means to ascribe worth. One of the common phrases used in worship in heaven is "You are worthy O Lord." Worship is when we become preoccupied with His glory, His beauty, and His worthiness.

With that introduction, let's look at the text through the lens of worship.

I. Worship Is Prepared through Affirmation (vv. 39-45)

As we saw earlier, these verses are a song of worship. In the minds of some, singing is worship, but that is not true; singing is *one channel* that worship rides on or flows through. The Lord likes singing. God Himself sings! If you are one of His, He sings over you! Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV): “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

While singing isn't the only way we worship, it is an important, and often used way, both in private and in the public gatherings. In the Scriptures, there are 575 references to music and singing. Forty-four of the sixty-six books of the Bible refer to singing or music. The Psalms were meant to be sung. What we call the book of Psalms was, in reality, the Hebrew Hymn Book. Throughout the Old Testament we find the people of God worshipping Him through singing. When David brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, one of the first things he did was to commission the Levites to write songs of worship. Listen to what was done at the dedication of the temple that was built under Solomon. 2 Chronicles 5:12-14:

and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, “He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,” then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

When we get to the New Testament we find Jesus and the disciples singing together in the upper room after He had instituted the Lord's Supper. We see Paul and Silas singing and worshipping God while in prison in Philippi. In the Epistles, we see singing as a result of Spirit filled believers coming together in worship (Ephesians 5:18-20). When we get to the book of Revelation, we see singing as one of the primary ways worship is carried out in heaven. Revelation 5:9-10: “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’” Most of the world's religions moan and groan in their chants or singing, but we have a song of joy.

Notice the worship that flows out of the affirmation of Elizabeth.

A. Affirmation from John's Joy (vv. 39-41a, 44)

This passage (along with many others) deals a fatal blow to the argument that you can believe the Bible and still believe that abortion is a viable option for some children in the mother's womb. The movement of the child in Elizabeth's womb was obviously not a normal movement. This movement or “leaping” of the baby in Elizabeth's womb is further described in Luke 1:44 as “the baby leaped in my womb for joy.” John the Baptist in his mother's womb experienced the emotion of joyous delight in the presence of Jesus. At this point in Elizabeth's pregnancy, John was about nine inches long and weighed about one and a half pounds. Luke 1:15b: says of this child in Elizabeth's womb, “...he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.” Make no mistake that this was a full-fledged human being in Elizabeth's womb.

What Mary experienced in her visit with Elizabeth was the affirmation promised to her by Gabriel in Luke 1:36: “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.” John was the last of the Old Testament prophets and in a sense, he gave his first prophesy from his mother's womb! “The Messiah is coming as promised and is in the womb of Mary.” His ministry began three months before his birth. The promises to Mary were affirmed through John's joyous response to the one in her womb.

B. Affirmation from Elizabeth's Blessing (vv. 41b-43, 45)

Not only was John filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb (1:15), Elizabeth was also filled with the Spirit. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to permanently indwell believers, that phrase "filled with the Spirit" often referred to speaking a message from God. David declared in 2 Samuel 23:2: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue." After John's birth, his father Zacharias said in Luke 1:67: "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying..."

In verse 42 we see the beginning of Elizabeth's song of blessing. Verse 42 says that she "cried out with a loud voice." This shout no doubt communicated both excitement and authority as she gave affirmation to Mary concerning the truth of the proclamation that Gabriel had given her. What begins next is the song of affirmation that Elizabeth gave to Mary.

1. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Child (v. 42)

Note Elizabeth's humility. This elderly barren woman is now six months pregnant with the one who would be the forerunner of the Messiah, the one that all Bible believing Jews had looked and longed for. Yet, she doesn't talk about herself; she is singing of the baby in Mary's womb! What were the first words of her song of praise? "Blessed are *you* among women, and blessed is *the fruit of your womb!*" It is all about Jesus! That's exactly what John the Baptist did in his "forerunner ministry." John 3:30 John said, referring to Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Not only is Elizabeth's affirmation filled with humility, it is also filled with intense emotion. Notice the phrase, "Blessed are you among women." In Jewish culture, a woman's status was to a great extent determined by her children. That is why being barren was such a devastating thing. Elizabeth's affirmation of Mary, and the truth of the child she was carrying, is that Mary was the most blessed woman or all – not because of anything she had done, but because the child she bore was God incarnate – the greatest child ever born. As amazing as Elizabeth's own child would be, the greatest was Jesus.

Let me remind you that this is worship! Notice that it is not Mary that is being worshipped; it is the Son of God who resides in Mary's womb. Yes, Mary is blessed among women – not because Mary is worthy of worship, but because she has within her the Son of God.

2. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Presence (v. 43)

We don't know the exact time that Mary became pregnant, but almost all Bible scholars believe it was just before she traveled to see her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth is so thankful that the one who was bearing the Messiah made the three – four-day journey to see her. By addressing the child in Mary's womb as "my Lord," Elizabeth was confessing the deity of Christ. Once again, we are seeing genuine worship.

3. Elizabeth Blessed Mary for Her Faith (v. 45)

Mary was a woman of great faith. She believed the angel Gabriel when he appeared to her. Zacharias was a seasoned priest and he didn't believe the angel Gabriel when he told Zacharias about the birth of John. Sometimes non-Catholics are so adamant about not treating Mary as deity, they miss the fact that while she was a sinner like us, she was an amazing woman who had a faith that believed God as much as any of the heroes of the faith throughout history.

II. Worship Is Poured Out in Adoration (vv. 46-56)

I would remind you that these verses are a song. It is often called the *Magnificat*. That comes from the opening word in the Latin translations that is translated "exalts" in our translations. Keep in mind that this offering of worship is poured out by one who is likely a teenage girl. She likely had no copies of the Scripture and had learned these theological truths from listening in the Synagogue on the Sabbath. It is obvious that her mind was saturated with the Scriptures. Remember that this passage is really about worship. Worship that is acceptable to God is saturated with Scripture. Scholars who have studied deeply this worship song sung by Mary have found reference to Psalm 103, 22, 44, 89, 98, 147, and 25. In

addition, Mary alludes to Hannah's song that she sung to the Lord when He granted her a child in 1 Samuel 2:2-10. Mary also uses phrases from the book of 2 Samuel, Isaiah, and Job.

Listen to this great quote from Dr. Ligon Duncan:

Mary pillages the Scriptures to come up with the words of praise to give back to God for the marvelous thing that He has done for her. Obviously the educators of Mary's day were not afflicted with memorization phobia, because someone along the line had encouraged Mary to memorize Scripture, and so when her hour of need came, when she needed to find the words to express her heart of joy and thankfulness to the sovereign God who was using her as a powerful and unique instrument in the efforts to bring about the accomplishments of redemption, she was able to go to the Scripture and pray and sing and thank God through those Scriptures. Her memory was stored with Scripture. She was familiar, whether it was by reading or hearing, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart, she spoke, her mouth was filled with the language of Scripture. [Ligon Duncan, Sermon from First Presbyterian Jackson MS, 12-14-2002]

Mary's worship centered on "the Lord" (verse 46) and "God my Savior" (verse 47). Learn this lesson about prayer. When prayer focuses on our problems, our *prayer* degenerates to the point that we are in reality no longer praying. We are simply worrying with our eyes closed. True prayer magnifies praise and focuses on God and His glorious promises. When our fears, our unknowns, our threats hijack our prayers, the result is discouragement and even hopelessness. When praise fills our prayers, especially praise focusing on the attributes of God, our discouragement turns to courage and our hopelessness gives way to faith filled expectation for God to do what He has said He will do. When this happens, our lives are characterized by joy instead of gloomy unbelief.

Notice the specifics of Mary's song of Worship

A. Adoration for His Regard (vv. 46-48)

The word translated "regard" in verse 48 is translated "Look with favor on the humble condition" (HCSB), "been mindful of the humble estate..." (NIV). The same Greek word is translated in James 2:3: "pay special attention to." It is also translated "looked upon." It is not the look of information; it is the look of reaching down to give aid. For example, when you see your physician and say, "Look at this knot that has come up on my head," you are not simply asking him to observe. You expect him to do something about it! Mary adores the Lord because He has looked upon her humble place in life, her lack of human merit and has chosen her for no reason she can understand to be the mother of the Savior.

I feel that way about my salvation! I am unworthy. Why would he open my blinded eyes and convict me of sin and then draw me to Himself? Our response ought to be continual adoration for His regard for us.

B. Adoration for His Mighty Work in Us (v. 49)

We should never get over the powerful salvation that is ours in Christ.

C. Adoration for His Mercy (v. 50)

D. Adoration for His Mighty Deeds (vv. 51-55)

He has scattered the proud, brought down powerful rulers that seemed untouchable, lifted up the humble, the poor and downtrodden. He has filled the hungry and sent away empty handed the prideful rich. He has given as the example of Israel to demonstrate His undeserved love and trustworthiness to always keep His word in spite of our lack of faithfulness.

Praise Him, adore Him for His mighty deeds. Hallelujah!

Conclusion

Pride creeps into our lives when we forget these things for which Mary's soul exalted the Lord. When our lives are characterized by worshipping, adoring, and living in a state of continual thankfulness for all He has done, our soul will continually exalt the Lord and our spirit will continually rejoice in God our Savior.