

“Expectant Mothers’ Faith”

Lesson Text: Luke 1:36–45, 56 **Background Scripture:** Luke 1:1–25, 39–45, 56–60

Devotional Reading: Philippians 4:10–19

Luke 1:36–45, 56 (NIV)

³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.” ³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. ³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Facts:** To identify the relationship between the two expectant mothers.
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain the significance of Elizabeth’s greeting.
- **Daily Application:** To suggest one way that you can move closer to having faith as one or both expectant mothers had.

INTRODUCTION

Infectious Joy

Early in our marriage, my wife was not certain whether she ever wanted children. That was something I had to work through because I was certain that I did want children to be part of our family. I ultimately decided that I hadn’t married her for her ability to have children, and I had to leave the question in God’s hands. However, she was interested in birthing as a profession, and she completed her training to become a doula (a Greek word meaning “female servant”), which is a labor and birth support worker. This means she was with women having babies a lot.

My wife’s job had her working both with new parents and parents who were having their fifth or sixth child. In both cases, she witnessed a lot of pain but also the boundless joy of the parents as their babies were born. Her reluctance about having children changed, and now we have three. She desires more, saying that she would happily have six children if she could. This has even led us into looking at adoption. All of this happened because the joy of other parents was infectious.

In this lesson, we will see how joy can be infectious, from the unborn John the Baptist to his mother Elizabeth, to even the shared joy between Elizabeth and Mary.

LESSON CONTEXT

Early church tradition unanimously identified Luke, a physician and traveling companion of Paul, as the writer of the third Gospel and the book of Acts (Colossians 4:11–14). While the evidence is slim, there is a chance that Luke was the only Gentile author in the New Testament. Some scholars put the date of writing at around A.D. 60. This most likely occurred while Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea Maritima (as recorded in Acts 23:33; 24:27), which would have freed up Luke to interview the eyewitnesses of Jesus’ earthly

ministry (Luke 1:1–3). The accuracy of the resulting research puts Luke in the company of the very best ancient Greek historians.

One of the eyewitnesses that Luke could have interviewed was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Such an interview would not be surprising, for the Gospel of Luke has more material regarding women than either of the other synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark. One example of this material unique to Luke's Gospel is Jesus' interaction with Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42. Another example is today's text. As the text opens, the birth of the person who came to be known as John the Baptist has been foretold (Luke 1:5–25), as has been the birth of Jesus (1:26–35)—both by angelic visitation.

Acceptance of the Message: Luke 1:36–38

The one speaking is the angel Gabriel, and the one being spoken to is Mary (Luke 1:26–27). Elizabeth was Mary's relative (v. 36). However, the news of the birth of Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, didn't reach Mary until this point, six months after the conception (see 1:24). That conception was miraculous, given that Elizabeth and her husband were old and had been childless to this point, given Elizabeth was *said to be unable to conceive* (compare and contrast Genesis 11:30; 25:21).

This information about Elizabeth's pregnancy would have strengthened Mary's faith. It confirmed what the angel Gabriel had just said about the child Mary would be bearing in the previous verse prior to today's lesson. Gabriel was careful to point out that Mary's Baby would be a "holy one" and would not share the sinful human nature of man (Luke 1:35). Jesus knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22), and He had no sin (1 John 3:5). His body was prepared for Him by the Spirit of God (Heb. 10:5) who "overshadowed" Mary.

In verse 37 of today's lesson, the words, "For no word from God will ever fail" are applicable to what God was doing with both Mary and Elizabeth, an allusion to Genesis 18:14: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" God would keep His promises, even if their fulfillment was impossible from a human perspective (see Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27).

1. Who is speaking to who in Luke 1:36–37?

What Do You Think?

How does Luke 1:37 encourage your trust in God's Word?

Digging Deeper

How does Jesus' interpretation of Scripture in Matthew 4:1–11 inform your response?

Both the elderly priest Zechariah and the young virgin Mary asked the question, "How?" (Luke 1:18, 34). However, Gabriel's responses to each of them differ. Zechariah asked skeptically for a sign—an inappropriate response from a person of his status. God responded with a sign, though probably not the kind Zechariah had expected (see 1:19–20). Mary's reaction, on the other hand, was one of innocent inquiry, given her subsequent humility, as seen in the verse before us. She was willing to do whatever service that God would require of her. Young Mary's faith surpassed that of an old priest! Mary's faith can be compared and contrasted with Hannah's (1 Samuel 1:10–20).

Mary's statement of belief and submission is important. The term Mary used to describe herself as *the Lord's servant* is the same Greek word noted in Luke 1:48 and Acts 2:18. In so doing, so she expressed her intended obedience to the Lord.

2. How did Mary respond to the angel's announcement from God? (Luke 1:38)

Joyous Meeting: Luke 1:39–45, 56

Almost immediately after receiving Gabriel's message, Mary prepared to visit Elizabeth some 60 or more miles south of Nazareth in Judean territory. She remained there about three months (v. 56).

Luke indicates that Mary traveled to see Elizabeth with a sense of urgency now that Mary knew she was to become a mother, and that her relative Elizabeth would give birth in three months, she wanted to see Elizabeth so they could rejoice together. The haste in which Mary did so seems to reflect her eager desire to see this wonder that the angel told her of.

3. What did Mary do after she received the message from the angel Gabriel? (Luke 1:39-40)

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to be a relative who your family can turn to during confusion, crisis, need, or celebration?

Digging Deeper

How will you improve your margin with time and money so that you can better help family members?

Upon Mary's arrival Luke made no mention either of distance or exhaustion. Instead, he focused on the interactions of those present. On entering the home, Mary began a normal exchange of greetings with Elizabeth. There were several common greetings from that period, such as, "The blessing of Yahweh be upon you," or, "Be blessed of the Lord," or, "Peace be with you" (compare Luke 24:36; John 20:19–26).

As Mary entered the house, Elizabeth heard her greeting, and the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb; and Elizabeth was suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. God then gave Elizabeth prophetic knowledge of Mary's condition and filled her lips with the fruit of praise to Almighty God!

The Holy Spirit is a key figure throughout the Scriptures written by Luke. His Gospel and the book of Acts combined feature about 60 percent of the New Testament's usages of this designation.

4. What happened as soon Elizabeth heard Mary's voice? (Luke 1:41-42)

Not only was Mary's state revealed to Elizabeth, but also the identity of the child (v. 43)!

There is nothing inherently unusual about a baby moving about in the womb, of course. But the timing of that reaction here (v. 44a) is significant in view of the relationship that later emerges between Jesus (Mary's child) and John the Baptist (Elizabeth's child). The latter was to be "filled with the Holy Spirit even before he [was] born" as empowerment "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:15–17). Even before his birth, John began to fulfill his role by signaling to his mother that the anticipated Christ, himself yet unborn, was present by leaping for "joy" (v. 44b).

The thing that Elizabeth emphasized was Mary's faith: "Blessed is she who has believed" (v. 45). We are saved "by grace ... through faith" (Eph. 2:8-9). Because Mary believed the Word of God, she experienced the power of God!

5. What else did the Holy Spirit reveal to Elizabeth? (Luke 1:43-45)

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to imitate Mary's belief?

Digging Deeper

What distractions do you need to remove in order to do so?

Mary praised God for what He did for her. This section, commonly called the Magnificat, in many ways resembles Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. It illustrates Mary's rich acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures and the closeness of her fellowship with the Lord.

6. What was Mary's response? (Luke 1:46-55, not in today's lesson)

The three months spent with Elizabeth were undoubtedly an additional blessing for Mary. Here was a safe place for this young woman to adapt to her changed situation as Elizabeth provided support. Mary also was undoubtedly a blessing to Elizabeth in return, as the older woman in the latter stage of her pregnancy probably needed the help of a younger person.

Since the six months of Luke 1:26, 36 plus the three months of the verse before us equals nine months, Mary would have left just before John's birth or just after it. Relatives were at the naming ceremony (see Luke 1:58), and these could have included Mary. But ultimately, this is speculation—the text does not say.

7. If not living in our homes, what are ways that we can be a safe space for people whom God places in our paths? (Luke 1:56)

What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can provide hospitality and support to expectant mothers?

Digging Deeper

How is James 1:27 relevant here?

CONCLUSION

When it comes to belief and faith, great faith is found with Mary. The joy experienced by John the Baptist and Elizabeth resulted from Mary's faith, at least in part. The ripple effect of this joy is also seen in passages such as Matthew 2:10 and Luke 2:10, 21-38 (contrast Matthew 2:3). That ripple effect reaches us here in the twenty-first century as we prepare this week to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the example of Mary's trusting belief. Show us how Mary's example can inform our own faith. Help us move ever more toward belief and faith! Thank You for the encouragement of Your faithful people of the past as recorded in Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Faith with obedience leads to great joy.

