

Mary Visits Elizabeth November 19, 2017

Luke 1:39-45

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

The Bible shows scenes from one scene to another, action as it unfolds and the movement of the story line. It is like a movie or a play that goes from one scene to next. The first scene is about the angel Gabriel and Zachariah. The angel delivers big news that Zachariah's son will be the forerunner to Christ. The second scene is the angel Gabriel and Mary. The angel once again delivers big news this time it is about her son, he will be the Son of God. This is physically impossible for her since she is a virgin but nothing impossible for God who will grant her this child through divine conception. The third scene is today where Mary takes the initiative and visits her relative Elizabeth.

Today's Scripture follows two separate but parallel birth announcements. The two story lines merge together when Mary visits Elizabeth. Two scenes come together; twin scenes merge into one theme. Mary travels to Judea from Nazareth. We don't know the exact distance but it would take several days, maybe a week to travel. The Scripture shows the movement as it flows from broad to specific. Mary goes to the hill country, to village in Judea, to the house of Zechariah, and finally to Elizabeth where she greets Elizabeth who has remained secluded now for five months.

Most meetings that occur are unnoticed in the scriptures. However, this meeting is deemed important enough by the author of Luke to write about it. The meeting is accompanied by a signs that point to the greatness of both John and Jesus. The first sign is the child within Elizabeth's womb. Upon hearing Mary's voice, Elizabeth feels the child leap within the womb. The second sign is Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. The Scripture shows Elizabeth having some divine knowledge. Even though Zachariah, her husband, is unable to speak about the details that occurred to him. He has been silenced by the angel for doubting so he is unable to provide the information that he received from the angel Gabriel that his son will be the forerunner to Christ. The divine insight of Elizabeth is attributed to the Holy Spirit. The third sign is the prophecy of Elizabeth. She testifies that Mary is blessed by the fruit of her womb declaring "you are the mother of the Lord!"

Both women are tremendously honored. Elizabeth is honored - whenever a person is visited by an important person it brings great honor to the person being visited. Well, it is a much greater honor to receive the Son of God. Here Elizabeth is honored to receive the mother of the Son of God. Mary is honored - for what greater honor is there than to be the mother of the Lord. Mary is also honored because she believed the word of God.

Every mother knows the wait and the anticipation of the first movement of a child within her. Every mother knows the wonderful, marvelous glory of God's blessing in her womb. The joy of Mary and Elizabeth is the joy of all for the wonder and thankfulness of the birth of a child.

It is the joy of God's gracious work in the human experience. This is a true blessing indeed. Mary rejoices in the fact that God has looked upon her with great favor.

Joy is a recurring theme throughout the Gospel of Luke. There is the joy of announcements, the joy of births, the numerous occasions of the joy of forgiveness, healings, resurrection, and demons outcast. And there is joy in praising God. By the way, those who do not attend regular worship services miss out on the joy of praising God. There is always joy in praising God.

I don't want to get off track but I noticed something interesting in the Scripture that I have not noticed before. First of all there is significant patriarchal language. When Mary arrives at the house it is identified as the house of Zechariah. This shows the culture of extensive male dominance. The second point is that Joseph is absent even though it is a male dominant culture. Why don't we know about Joseph? It is doubtful that young Mary would have traveled the long trip alone. It is most likely that Joseph would have arranged the trip for her to travel safely, probably in a caravan of other travelers. And it is also most likely that he would have accompanied her on the trip. However, he would have to return home to work while she stayed with her for three months. Joseph is absent from Scripture because it is not about him. The Scripture reveals the significance of mothers of Jesus and John. What is important to the author of Luke is the upcoming birth narrative.

Back to the story. Have you even wondered why Mary visits Elizabeth? In the Scripture she is not told to go to Elizabeth and we are not given a reason for the trip. Does she doubt what the angel said about her future son? I don't think so, In the conversation between Gabriel and Mary the news is most definitely hard to believe. Even though she is a virgin she is told that she will have a son by the Holy Spirit and he will be called "the Son of God." Since Zachariah was silenced for doubting, if Mary doubted it would be significant enough to write about. Does she doubt what the angel said about Elizabeth? The news that her relative Elizabeth is now six months pregnant even though she is elderly and barren is also hard to believe. There is no reason to think that Mary had to confirm any of this because she accepted Gabriel's word as true. Does she need to think through her situation and seeks out the counsel of an older, trusted, confident with a shared experience? Does she have divine knowledge and knows about the relationship between their future sons. We sometimes yearn for more information. We sometimes have interesting questions. We sometimes wonder about what we learn in the Bible. However, the author of Luke is not interested in answering human questions. Luke's focus is on the greatness of Mary's child.

Mary is a servant of the Lord. She identifies herself as such. In verse 38 she says "Here am I a servant of the Lord." Apparently Mary came to serve. In verse 56 we learn that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for the next three months. Luke's focus is on Jesus. With all the things going on, all the things that could have been written, the cultural significance, the human inquiry, and the power dynamics, the author of Luke remained focus on Jesus and his significance. As we are busy in life and find it easy to get distracted, side tracked, and shocked by some news, let us also remain focused on Jesus.