

'tis the Season

AN ADVENT SERIES

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STUDY



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'tis the Season: vGroup Study

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LUKE 1:39–56

If you could meet any person in the world who would it be? This is an icebreaker question that people use all the time in small talk. Almost everyone has someone who they would love to have an opportunity to meet. Whether it is a politician, a movie star, or a musician, people can easily get incredibly excited to see these people who they've read about, watched, and listened to. And their reactions show it. Even at concerts, the minute the star walks onto the stage, there are people screaming and crying with excitement even at the sight of them.

Even when Mary was pregnant with Jesus before he was born, many people had similar reactions. And Jesus wasn't a movie star or a celebrity. He was the Son of God, the fulfillment of the promises made to the Israelites. In Luke 1, we see some of the first reactions of people to Jesus.

- Have you ever met a celebrity or one of your heroes? What was your reaction?
- How do you think that you would react if you met Jesus in the flesh?
- How would Mary's pregnancy have been significant for the people of the time?

Last week, we saw God reveal to Elizabeth and Mary that they each would bear a son. Both were surprised at this news, since Elizabeth was advanced in years and Mary was a virgin. Nevertheless, both conceived and trusted God.

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Luke 1:39–45

- What happened when Mary greeted Elizabeth? What could this mean?

- What is Elizabeth's reaction to Mary coming to her?

As we see in this passage, the baby John the Baptist leapt in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's greeting. Already, there was joy because of the incarnate Son of God. Elizabeth reacts in a similar manner, humbly acknowledging the blessing of being near to Mary and the baby Jesus in her womb. Being filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth further encouraged Mary for her belief that God would fulfill what he had spoken to her.

⁴⁶And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

*⁴⁹for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

*⁵⁰And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

*⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

*⁵²he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;*

*⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

*⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."*

⁵⁶And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Luke 1:46–56

- What does Mary's song of praise to the Lord teach us about her?

- What does she say about the Lord?

Mary's song rejoices in God's faithfulness, mercy, goodness, and power. Her trust has been in the Lord and it continues to be. She recognizes God as her Savior and sees her need for him.

⁵⁷Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ⁶¹And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." ⁶²And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. ⁶⁴And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

Luke 1:57-66

- Why did Elizabeth insist that the child's name be John?
- When the people inquired of Zechariah what he wanted the baby to be called, what was his response?
- How is this response different than Zechariah's initial response to the news of the baby?
- What happened to Zechariah as a result?
- What was the first thing out of his mouth?

As we read last week in Luke 1, God commanded that the baby would be called John. Even though Elizabeth's neighbors and relatives pushed for her to name her son after Zechariah, she refused, insisting that his name be John. Then when the people ask Zechariah, he has the same response. Here we see a contrast from Zechariah's lack of

faith that we saw earlier in the chapter. He says definitively, "His name is John," showing his trust in God. His speech is restored, and he blesses God.

⁶⁷And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

*⁶⁸"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people
⁶⁹and has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹that we should be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us;
⁷²to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant,
⁷³the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
⁷⁴that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.
⁷⁶And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

⁸⁰And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Luke 1:67–80

- Who is this prophesy about?
- What do we learn about Jesus from these verses?

It is no small thing that Zechariah prophesies in this moment. The prophets of God had been silent for hundreds of years, and here, Zechariah is filled with the Spirit and offers a word from the Lord. God raised up a "horn of salvation" for the people as he had promised before. His Son, Jesus, would have his way prepared by John the Baptist, and God would bring knowledge of salvation to the people and forgive their sins.

Despite the doubts of some, God came through on his promises to Mary and to Elizabeth. Their sons were born, and people rejoiced. Jesus is worth the reaction that was

given to him in this passage. Finally, God had sent the world a Savior, fulfilling his promise to the people and proving his faithfulness. Mary, Elizabeth, and Zechariah gave God the praise he was due for the miracles he performed and blessed him for bringing salvation and forgiveness to men through a tiny baby.

- Do you believe that God is faithful to fulfill his promises? Why or why not?
- How can you cultivate a heart that responds with reverence and joy to Jesus?
- Even if you've doubted God in the past, how can you trust him moving forward?