

Mary visits Elizabeth
Luke 1:39-56

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

And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (English Standard Version – ESV)

Background:

- The journey from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea may have taken three to five days, depending on the exact location of Elizabeth’s home. In view of bandits on the roads, she likely traveled by caravan; otherwise, her family may not have allowed her to go.
- Like dancing, leaping was an expression of praise to God (e.g. 2 Samuel 6:14-15; Psalm 150:4), and Jews recognized that the fetus was able to sense and respond to stimuli. John’s movement in the womb is the result of his prenatal sensitivity to the prophetic Spirit.
- Mary’s song resembles the praise song of Samuel’s mother, Hannah, in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, where Hannah celebrated when the Lord opened her barren womb.
- The Old Testament spoke of those who obeyed God, especially the prophets, as God’s servants. It also emphasized God’s exalting the humble and revealing the importance ancient culture placed on one’s honor and name enduring after one’s death.
- The language of vindication through judgment appears often in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, with the “arm” of God saving his people and scattering his and their enemies.
- The principle of God exalting the humble and casting down the proud was common in the Old Testament (e.g. Proverbs 3:34; Isaiah 2:11-12, 17; Ecclesiastes 10:14). “Filling the hungry” comes from Psalm 107:9, where God helps those in distress, because he is merciful.

- God had promised to be faithful to his people Israel forever, because of the eternal covenant he had made by oath with their ancestor Abraham (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

- Although ancient texts sometimes speak of pregnancy lasting ten months, it was known that it normally lasted nine. The three months mentioned here plus the six of verse 26 suggest that Mary was present long enough to see John's birth.

Questions:

- + In what ways are Mary and Elizabeth different from one another? How are they alike?
- + What do you think Mary hoped to get from her unplanned and hasty visit to Elizabeth?
- + After Mary's greeting, Elizabeth said, "the baby in my womb leaped for joy." What is joy? For Elizabeth, what was the source of her joy? For you, what is the source of your joy?
- + What kind of bond do you think formed between Mary and Elizabeth as a result of this visit? What is the tightest bond you have ever experienced with anyone, and what made it so strong?
- + Of all that Mary says after Elizabeth's statement, what do you find most significant, and why?
- + During Mary's 3-month stay with Elizabeth, how do you think both women helped each other? How might God want to use you to help someone in some way this week?