

# The Gospel of Luke

## Lesson 3

### Mary Confides in Elizabeth

Luke 1:39-41

Luke 1:39 Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah,<sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The boundaries of Judah changed many times over the years. In 1404 BC, when Joshua divided the land, the portion allotted to the tribe of Judah was small. After Solomon's death, the area absorbed the tribal allotment given to Benjamin. Upon the return from the Babylonian exile, Samaria had been formed to the north and Judah was carved out between Samaria and Idumea as seen in Map 2. Mary and Joseph live in Nazareth in the countryside of Galilee. With the departure of Gabriel, Mary travels to see Elizabeth in an unnamed "city of Judah," at least 60 miles to the south, a three-day journey.

When Mary arrives at Elizabeth's home, the baby leaps in Elizabeth's womb at the sound of Mary's voice and

Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. A baby leaping at the sound of a voice is a common event, but the important point in this passage is that Elizabeth immediately knows the importance of Mary's role in the salvation of the people of Israel and the world.

### Elizabeth's Filling with the Holy Spirit

Luke 1:42-45

Luke 1:42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed *are* you among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of your womb!"<sup>43</sup> "And how has it *happened* to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"<sup>44</sup> "For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy."<sup>45</sup> "And blessed *is* she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."



Map 1: Nazareth to the Hill Country of Judah, at least 60 miles



Map 2: Division of Israel after the Babylonian Exile Ended

Elizabeth's response to Mary's presence has become the most repeated phrases in the Catholic world. "Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Amazed that she has been approached by the mother of the Lord, Elizabeth uses the word for Lord that means the supreme authority.<sup>3</sup> Notice also that Elizabeth emphasizes the belief that the Lord will fulfil the promise that He had given previously. What had the Lord said to Mary that would cause her to believe? He had sent the angel Gabriel with the following message.

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. For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:35-38

Surely Mary believed that "nothing will be impossible with God."

## The Song of Mary

Luke 1:46

Luke 1:46 And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord,"

The literal English translation of this line from the Latin is "magnify the Lord my soul." The English word magnify comes from the Latin word magnificat. The Catholic Church still calls this song the Magnificat.

Luke 1:47 And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. <sup>48</sup> "For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. <sup>49</sup> "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. <sup>50</sup> "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. <sup>51</sup> "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart. <sup>52</sup> "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. <sup>53</sup> "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. <sup>54</sup> "He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, <sup>55</sup> As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever." <sup>56</sup> And Mary stayed with her about three months, and *then* returned to her home.

Mary had promised Gabriel that she would be the bondslave of the Lord and here she repeats that promise. Filled with prophecy, the magnificat tells of the nature, character and actions of the Lord both before His earthly incarnation and after.

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<sup>3</sup> Kyrios

- “Holy is His name.”
- “HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM.”
- “He has done mighty deeds with His arm.”
- “He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart.”
- “He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones.”
- [He] “has exalted those who were humble”.
- “HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS.”
- [He has] “sent away the rich empty-handed”.
- “He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy.”
- [He has promised these things] “to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever”.

About the time of the birth of John the Baptist, Mary returns to her home in Nazareth. The babe within her womb will arrive in six months.

## The Birth of John

Luke 1:57-66

Luke 1:57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup> Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her. <sup>59</sup> And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. <sup>60</sup> But his mother answered and said, "No indeed; but he shall be called John." <sup>61</sup> And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name." <sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished. <sup>64</sup> And at once his mouth was opened and his tongue *loosed*, and he *began* to speak in praise of God. <sup>65</sup> Fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea. <sup>66</sup> All who heard them kept them in mind, saying, "What then will this child *turn out to be*?" For the hand of the Lord was certainly with him.

The family gathers on the day of CIRCUMCISION, a term that means to cut around. A ritual established by God to be the special badge of His chosen people, circumcision had become an ordinance between God and Abraham long before the establishment of the nation of Israel. By this time in history, it symbolizes the abiding sign of Israel's consecration to God.

Genesis 17:10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

In general, all of the descendants of Abraham, including the Jews, have held to the ritual of circumcision; yet, the mandatory practice ceased in the church after Paul's instruction to the Galatians and Colossians.

**Galatians 6:15** For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

**Colossians 3:11** *a renewal* in which there is no *distinction between* Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

As Gentiles became part of the church, some Jewish Christians sought to impose circumcision on the Gentiles but the apostles resolutely resisted the pressure.

**Acts 15:1** Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

**Galatians 6:12** Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

Paul fiercely contended for the free admission of believing uncircumcised Gentiles into the church.

For the nation of Israel, circumcision became a sign and seal of the covenant of grace between God and the Jews. It sealed the promises made to Abraham, which related to the common wealth of Israel. However, Paul indicates that the promises made to Abraham included the promise of redemption in Galatians 3:14, a promise which included all believing Gentiles.

For Jews, religious and political affiliation were identical. No one could be a member of the one without also being a member of the other. Circumcision was a sign and seal of membership in both. Every circumcised male bore the physical evidence that he was one of the chosen people, a member of the Jewish commonwealth.

All Jewish names have a meaning. The people of Judah assumed that Elizabeth's baby would be named after Zacharias or one of the other family names. Zacharias means the memory or memorial of Jehovah. Elizabeth means the Sabbath of my strong God or the rest of my strong God. The names of Zacharias and Elizabeth indicate that the Lord remembered the couple and gave them rest from the disgrace of being childless. The boy would not be given a family name. His name would be John, or as it was written, Jehochanan which means the grace or mercy of Jehovah. His name represented his mission in life; he would proclaim the coming God of all the grace and mercy granted to the entire world through the coming Savior. Those who heard Zacharias' name for the child were no

different from any other adults who have ever lived; they were skeptical of the prophecy and wondered if John would fulfill the lofty promises conveyed by his father.

## The Song of Zacharias

Luke 1:67-75

**Luke 1:67** And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:  
<sup>68</sup> "Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, <sup>69</sup> And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant— <sup>70</sup> As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— <sup>71</sup> Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; <sup>72</sup> To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, <sup>74</sup> To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear, <sup>75</sup> In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Zacharias' message to the people promised that the time of the advent of the long awaited salvation had arrived. He would be not only salvation from earthly enemies, but also from all enemies. The Lord had long before promised this time with an oath found in Genesis.

**Genesis 22:16** and said, "By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."

It is not clear how well Zacharias grasped the idea of the salvation for Israel and the world. The conduct of the people who would partake in this salvation would be holy and righteous. Holiness is the eternal principle of righteousness! Righteousness is the rule of conduct of how people should relate to each other.

## John to Prepare the Way

Luke 1:76-79

**Luke 1:76** "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on BEFORE THE LORD TO PREPARE HIS WAYS; <sup>77</sup> To give to His people *the* knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup> Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high will visit us, <sup>79</sup> TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH, To guide our feet into the way of peace."

Thirty years later, Jesus will confirm John as the prophet of the Most High. At that time, Jesus will later call John "a prophet and more than a prophet." John's major task will be to prepare the Jews for the "knowledge of salvation" as the forerunner of the Lord and Savior. Like the sun which rises because of the tender mercies of the Lord, so too, the spiritual Son

will rise to cast away the darkness and shadow of death. The light of the Lord will enable those in the dark to walk in a straight path that leads to "the way of peace."

In his song, Zacharias utters a prophecy concerning the coming salvation and kingdom of the Messiah and with John the Baptist, salvation and the kingdom begin. The coming of this salvation is called the gospel and it shines on those in utter darkness to bring light and knowledge of the glory of God. It brings light to those who sit in the shadow of death, just as condemned prisoners sit in the dark dungeons. It guides the feet to bring peace. John will give proof of the coming salvation and kingdom by his strong faith, his vigorous and holy affections and his being above the fear and love of the world. Thus, he will grow until he is thirty years of age, ripened for usefulness to come forward openly as the forerunner of the Messiah.

### **John's Life until His Ministry**

Luke 1:80

**Luke 1:80** And the child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Why did John live in solitude in the desert? The desert had been the common place for the homes of the prophets throughout the Old Testament. They used the isolation of the uninhabited desert to enhance their spiritual growth and to focus on their message pertaining to God. Being in the desert caused John to remain separate from the powers of the world where he could aim his message against them outside the comfortable constraints of the townships. It also allowed him to remain isolated from the hypocritical religious leaders of his day. John's message will be different from the message for the religious leaders and John lives a different life to prove his point.