

“Call Me Blessed!”

Thomas Robinson, November 28, 2010

Luke 1:35-55

³⁵ And the angel (Gabriel) answered (Mary), “The *Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the *power of the Most High* will overshadow you; therefore the *child to be born* will be called *holy* – the *Son of God*.³⁶ And behold, your relative *Elizabeth* in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.³⁷ *For nothing will be impossible with God.*”

³⁸ And Mary said, “Behold, *I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*” And the angel departed from her.

³⁹ In those days *Mary* arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted *Elizabeth*.

⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And *Elizabeth* was filled with the Holy Spirit,⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*⁴³ And why is this granted to me that *the mother of my Lord* should come to me?⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby 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 *from the Lord.*”

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“*My soul magnifies the Lord,*

⁴⁷ and *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant *Israel,*
in *remembrance of his mercy,*⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,
to *Abraham* and to *his offspring (seed) forever.*”

Acts 1:14

¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and *Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with his brothers.

Acts 2:16-17

¹⁶ “But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:¹⁷ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....’”

The Gospel Before the Gospel

Luke is introducing us to the greatest event in history – the greatest event imaginable – the creator of the universe becoming one of his own creations, to live and die for them. The great event unfolds in utter obscurity, but among people with hearts to accept it. Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph – unknowns; but people with minds/hearts open to God, living with expectation in His great story/promises, open to God's "New Thing."

The Gospel has many strands, reflecting the complications of human life. One that Luke especially wants us to see is the elevation of women. Within a society that was filled with structures that disempowered women, God shows that he had made women with strength, intelligence, and spirit, and He empowers them from the beginning to the end. The emphasis on women is one sign of God's distinctive way of doing things, turning the values of the world on their head. But the world's values returned, subordinating women.

Gabriel had greeted Mary as one "graced" by God. In her God's Holy Spirit and power break into the world in a new, unimagined way – conception, birth, incarnation, the impossible. Wonderful. But God breaks all the acceptable situations for women – unmarried virgin. Mary doesn't fully understand, but she knows who she is, the servant of the Lord.

Elizabeth the Prophet

Gabriel points Mary to the one person who could understand her situation – Elizabeth. She is a pregnant, elderly woman! To give birth to the last of the prophets – John. But she also becomes a prophet, filled with the Holy Spirit, anticipating Pentecost.

Elizabeth makes the neighborhood ring with her loud exclamation. Everything topsy-turvy. She was the venerable, happy mother, but she shouts about this girl – "blessed among women," "the mother of my Lord." She believed what was promised "from the Lord." In those two uses of "Lord," Elizabeth captures the wonder and mystery of the event. The Lord announced it to Mary by Gabriel. The Lord was now "the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth, the prophet, becomes the first theologian of God's nature as Trinity.

As these two women, old and young, experience the reality of the impossible in their bodies, their minds and hearts are opened to see God in a new way as He breaks into the world.

Mary the Servant, Believer, Disciple, Singer

Mary begins to sing. She knew she was God's servant. She believed the incredible word spoken to her and opened her life to the power of God's promises. But there is a sense of awareness of the great price of society's shame that she must bear. Who'll believe her?

Now with Elizabeth, the fog clears. The story of God that she has known shines brightly.

This is the promise to Abraham and his seed for the world. This is the climax of the great story of Israel – God's mercy to a lowly, powerless people, deliverance from slavery against all odds. This is the story through generations, again and again on the lips of the prophets: the arm of the Lord revealed in the lowliest servant (Is 53:1). Human pride, power, wealth bring no security; they do not last. God's eternal power and life, God's own self, breaks into his world, not in Caesar's household, but in a girl in Nazareth.

Mary sings of God's greatness from her soul and spirit. She may have much to suffer, but all will "call me blessed" ultimately, because she is a part of the "great things" God is doing.