

Luke 1:39 to 55.           Preached on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 at 8.0 am  
by Rev John White

Theme: - Mary visits Elizabeth

We are told that Mary left home and went in haste to visit Elizabeth in a Judean town in the hill country, although she had just been told that she was pregnant. Although Mary had been told that she was pregnant it was clearly early days, and her pregnancy didn't show, otherwise an unmarried pregnant woman would not be allowed out of the house for her own safety, let alone allowed to travel. We do not know the name of the town nor how far she had to travel, but we do know that she arrived safely.

On arrival she entered the house and greeted Elizabeth, and when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child leapt in her womb." It was while John was still in the womb that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. In verse 15 just before our reading we have these words, "Even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." It was because John was filled with the Holy Spirit that he knew that Jesus had also come into the room when Mary entered, and it was when John leapt in Elizabeth's womb that she too was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And it was because Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit that she realised that Mary was carrying the Son of God in her womb, when she declared, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me."

In that society, a woman's status depended, in large measure, on her ability to bear children. In fact, in some African countries that's still the case, and a man who has no wife can also lose respect. Revd David Holt preached here some years ago and he related his trip to an African country. Initially he was revered, but he said that nobody had briefed him about the status of single men, and when he happened to say one

day that he wasn't married they stopped respecting him and he could do no more good there and he returned home.

Elizabeth told Mary that she was blessed among women because she knew that Mary was bearing a child who would grow up to be the Lord, the Son of God, and Mary would be blessed through him. And then Elizabeth says, "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my lord comes to me."

In ancient Israel age was revered, the older you were the more respect you deserved, but here Elizabeth who gives birth in her old age reveres the younger woman who may well still be in her early teens, it is of course because Elizabeth knows that Mary is carrying the Son of God in her womb. Elizabeth declares that Mary has been blessed for her faith in her belief that what the angel of the Lord said to her about her child would be fulfilled.

Both Zechariah in verse 13 and now Mary have been visited by the angel of God announcing to each the birth of a baby. Both children are miracle babies. Elizabeth is too old to have a baby, and Mary is a virgin.

From verses 46 to 55 we have Mary's song which we call the Magnificat because the first verse reads, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Mary's song starts in a very similar way to Hannah's song in 1 Samuel chapter 2, which reads "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exulted in my God." Both Mary and Hannah have a strong faith in God. Also, after our reading in verse 63 Zechariah named his son by writing it on a tablet and immediately his tongue was loosed and he spoke his song which again started in a similar way with the words, "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel." But there was a significant difference between Mary's song and Zechariah's song in that Mary's song came from belief in the word of God, whereas Zechariah's song came initially from unbelief in God's word.

In verse 48 of Mary's song, we read of the lowliness of Mary which indeed she was in two ways, first she was prepared to obey God

without question, and secondly, she came from a family which we know nothing about. Mary also realises that people will remember her for being a key person in God's plan in future generations for being the mother of God's Son. In verse 49 Mary acknowledges the mightiness and holiness of God and that it was God who had honoured her with her child who will be called the Son of God. In verse 50 Mary emphasized God's mercy, because she recognizes that God is using his power to implement his mercy, in her unborn child, and God's mercy is for all of us in all generations who repent and turn to God.

In verses 51 and 52 Mary says that it is through God's strength that he has chosen her, a lowly person, rather than someone who thinks that they deserved the honour. We need to remember Jesus' sermon on the mount where he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Which refers to those who have confidence only in God. In James chapter 4 verse 6 we read, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The kingdom of God is given, not to those who think they have earned a place in heaven, but to the poor or humble in spirit who acknowledge their sinfulness and dependence on God's mercy.

Mary then celebrates God's reversals. "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts." "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones. And lifted up the lowly." "He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." "He has helped his servant Israel."

God's choice of Mary to be the mother of the Lord, and of John to be the herald of Jesus is proof that these reversals have already begun. God's reversals are good news for the dispossessed and disenfranchised, but not to the wealthy and powerful who oppress other people. Most of us hear these reversals as good news, because we do not consider ourselves to be wealthy or powerful. However, most people in the western world enjoy a standard of living that seems impossibly rich to poorer nations. We live in homes that are palatial, not only by the standards of poorer countries, but also by the standards

of our parents and grandparents. My grandparents on my mother's side didn't have electricity, gas, or water in their house. The gap between the rich countries and the poor countries have grown much larger in the last 80 years or so.

There is now little comparison with the values we have today with those of only 80 years ago, and we may be the ones in danger of being brought down from our comfortable places, if we are not sensitive to the needs of the lowly, the hungry, the homeless, the disenfranchised, and the prisoner.

Throughout Mary's song, she describes God's activities in the past tense, for example, "has done great things for me." "He has shown strength with his arm." We can attribute her use of the past tense, in part, to the fact that she is looking back upon centuries of God's relationship with Israel. However, Mary's use of the past tense also demonstrates her confidence that God's promises are true. She is not yet the mother of the child who will be great and who will be called the Son of the most High chapter 1 verse 32, but God has promised it, and she believes the promise with her whole heart.

In Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 the author defines faith as "The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Mary is a person who possesses that kind of faith, and it is that kind of faith to which God calls us. The richest blessing will go to those who believe God's promises, those who walk in faith.

Finally verse 55 which speaks of the promise God made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants which is all of us. In Genesis chapter 12 verse 3 God tells Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you." The message this morning is about faith in God, our welfare and future life depends on our faith.

Revd John White.