

THE FAITH OF MIRACLE MOMS

Luke 1:36-45

(ESV) [The angel Gabriel speaking] "'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.'"

INTRODUCTION

A boy once went with a friend to Sunday School; the first time he'd ever been to church. When he got home, his Dad asked his son what he'd learned. The boy said, "Our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead Israel's children out of Egypt. Moses used biological and chemical warfare to terrify the Egyptian King into letting Israel go. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his engineers build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. The King of Egypt had second thoughts and sent his army after Israel to force them to come back. But Moses used his walkie-talkie to radio headquarters for reinforcements. They sent bombers to blow up the bridge; drowning the Egyptians following them in their tanks. This saved the children of Israel." His Dad, understandably skeptical, asked, "Did your teacher really say that?" "No, Dad," said the boy, "But if I told you what he really said, you would never believe me." When skeptics hear about miracles, whether from Bible days or today, most of them won't believe what's reported to them. They prefer to make up their own story about what happened.

What do you believe about this story of a few years ago? Marsha Mark and her husband were told by their doctor they would never have biological children. In their disappointment, Marsha clung to the words of a friend who walked closely with the Lord: "Somehow, God is going to use your struggle with infertility for his glory." Marsha began to pray for a glimpse of that glory. "I asked everyone I knew to pray," she said. "One five-year-old prayed, 'Dear God, please send Marsha a baby. Maybe someone could give her one, or she could just find one on the street.'" Marsha's husband, Tom, a scientist, stopped praying when Marsha showed signs of menopause. Tom had seen lots of data. In his lifetime, he'd never seen prayer change scientific facts. Six months later, she gained an inner confidence God's Spirit had done something special for her. Marsha made an appointment for another pregnancy test. Her Dr. at first said, "No." It had been seven months since Marsha's last period. He told her, "Asking for another pregnancy test indicates you are not accepting things as they are." She begged for the extra test anyway. It came back positive! Marsha said, "Over the next fourteen days, I had four more pregnancy tests and three more sonograms at the hospital's request. I think this time the doctor was having trouble dealing with the facts." Her full-term pregnancy proved uneventful; there were no complications. On October 22, 1996, a healthy Amanda Joy was born. Marsha, the overjoyed Mom, joyously reports. "We call her Miracle Mandy!"

Even if we've not yet personally witnessed a miracle of the magnitude experienced by Elizabeth, Mary, or Marsha Mark, are there limits to what our God can do today? Are Gabriel's words to Mary still true, "For nothing will be impossible with God"?

I. MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Previously in **Luke 1**, the angel Gabriel has announced supernatural births to two mothers who should not have been expecting a baby (one too old; the other an unmarried virgin). Today's text continues to

prove Luke's credentials as a master historian and storyteller, who has "carefully investigated everything from the very first" concerning the life and teachings of **Jesus (Luke 1:3)** by supplying additional details found nowhere else in the New Testament writings. Before the births of John (God is gracious) and **Jesus** ("the LORD [YAHWEH] is salvation"), Luke records how the two moms are brought together. His touching domestic scene gives us dramatic evidence that as remarkable as John's miraculous conception is, this unborn, six-month-old infant and his mother both recognize the superiority of Mary's son, **Jesus**.

Two themes dominate **Luke 1**. The first stresses faith in God's promises and His word (as those given to Zechariah, Elizabeth, and Mary), regardless of natural objections we might have to such promises being fulfilled. But does this mean God promises to fulfill our prayers according to our will, not to His will? No. A 5th-grade boy who'd heard a sermon on persistent prayer was praying by himself in his room one night. As his dad passed his door, he heard the boy praying with persistent faith, "Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo." The next morning, his dad asked him what he was doing. The boy replied he'd given the wrong answer yesterday on a test for the capital of Mexico. He was praying God would make Tokyo the capital of Mexico.

Luke's second theme: God's blessings to us are grounded on *Him* bringing His promises to completion; not us. Just as blessings come to those who rely on the certainty of God's promises, God's best blessings to us may be lost by doubt of His promises or lack of obedience to His word. In 1984, Mike and his family belonged to an East Coast church. One Sunday evening, after a sermon on sacrificial giving, a special offering for a critical ministry need was taken. Mike had but a \$50 bill in his wallet, which was supposed to buy a week's worth of groceries for his wife, their five children, and himself. Yet, when the Holy Spirit surprisingly prompted him, Mike put his \$50 bill in the offering in obedient faith. At the conclusion of the service, his family went to the parking lot to go home. Within minutes, they joyfully returned inside to ask their pastor to come outside and see their miracle. Somewhat skeptical, the pastor accompanied them outside to their 20-year-old station wagon. Peering through the windows, he saw the interior of the vehicle stuffed with bags of groceries. The pastor remarked someone had given his family a huge blessing. "You don't understand, Pastor," Mike said. "Before church, I made sure all the windows were rolled up and the doors were locked. I have the only key, so it must have been the Lord!" Robert Costa, a pastor visiting this church from Detroit, Michigan, witnessed this miracle. He learned Mike had no family living in the area, and no one from the church ever claimed responsibility. Regardless of what you think may have happened, do you agree God rewarded Mike's faithful obedience to give sacrificially to this critical need?

Vss. 39-40: "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." Mary is a model believer who responds eagerly in faith to news from God of Elizabeth's experiencing a humanly "impossible" pregnancy that is not "impossible" to God. Luke does not specify the town she went to when journeying from Nazareth, a dozen miles west of the Sea of Galilee, to Elizabeth's home in "the hill country" of "Judah," which describes the land within 25 miles of Jerusalem. The distance would have been 60-80 miles, requiring a journey of 3-4 days; quite an undertaking for a teenage girl 13-15 years old, which she would not have made unescorted.

II. ELIZABETH THE MOTHER OF JOHN

Vs. 41: "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." Luke's mention of the Spirit filling Elizabeth is crucial. This indicates her remarks and emotions are being directed by God Himself. God revealed Elizabeth's pregnancy to Mary by an angel, but it's not revealed how Elizabeth knew of Mary expecting the Christ child. God's Spirit must have inspired this awareness. John, divinely ordained to "go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, . . . to make ready for the Lord a prepared people" (**Luke 1:16-17**), announces to his mother the Messiah's presence by leaping within her womb. Gabriel had promised Zechariah that "John" would "be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (**Luke 1:15**). This is the third mention of the "Holy Spirit" (**vss. 15, 35**) within the first 41 verses of Luke's account. The Holy Spirit's active role in

superintending the events of **Jesus'** life and furthering Christ's Kingdom in the hearts of His followers receives more emphasis in **Luke** than in **Matthew** and **Mark** combined. Nearly 90 references to the Holy Spirit in **Luke** and **Acts** demonstrate the presence of the Holy Spirit is the single most distinctive mark of a follower of **Jesus Christ**. *The Holy Spirit for Luke is a Spirit who reveals, speaks, and guides.*

Vs. 42-43: "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?" Elizabeth's Spirit-driven words are a prophecy of Mary's role and status in the unfolding drama of salvation as, "the mother of Lord." The "loud cry" shows Elizabeth's excitement over this remarkable incident.

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" reveals **Jesus** has already been miraculously conceived within Mary. Mary is called "blessed" based upon her privileged maternal relationship with her son **Jesus** at this point in time. Elizabeth's words do not declare Mary is more blessed than any other woman, or that she is to be "acclaimed" or "praised." **Luke 11:27-28** cautions us not to make too much of Mary's status, because what counts more in God's eyes is our obedience to Him: "As He [Jesus] was saying these things, a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'The womb that bore You and the one who nursed You are blessed!'²⁸ He said, 'Even more, those who hear the word of God and keep it are blessed!'" Nowhere in the New Testament is Mary called "Mother of God;" even in the authorized Catholic translations. She is described as the mother of **Jesus**, the Messiah and our "Lord." Luke uses "Lord" for "God" (**1:46**) and **Jesus** (**1:43**) interchangeably in **chapters 1-2**. Luke affirms at this early stage of his "account" of **Jesus'** life (**1:1-3**) that **Jesus** deserves the title, "Lord," even as does God.

We must not miss the absence of all jealousy in Elizabeth's attitude toward Mary. She expresses instead profound humility, revealing she's honored even to have any role in these events. Had she been self-centered instead of God-centered, Elizabeth could have taken offense that she would not bear the Christ Child instead of merely being mother of His forerunner. After all, Mary is but a teenager, from a despised town, and of Israel's peasant class. Elizabeth is a mature woman, both in spiritual and physical development, and a more likely candidate to handle the awesome responsibilities associated with being **Jesus'** mother during His infancy and youth. Elizabeth is also of priestly descent and married to an honored priest. She is even an older "relative" of Mary and entitled to be in a position of leadership over her.

Vs. 44: "For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." Such "joy" begins the fulfillment of Gabriel's prophecy found in **Luke 1:13b-14**: "[Y]ou will name him John."¹⁴ There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth." This is the joy that fills the hearts and lives of those who embrace **Jesus** as their Savior and Lord.

Vs. 45: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." A different Greek word is translated "blessed" than in **vs. 42**. This is not an appeal to God to continue to "bless" Mary but expresses how much others recognize she's already "blessed." Elizabeth addresses Mary in the third person, "blessed is she who believed," rather than, "you who believe." Elizabeth holds Mary up as an example of the blessings all Christians can experience for our God-honoring faith, rather than merely honoring Mary for her personal faith in God. She also congratulates Mary for "blessed," obedient faith in God, in stark contrast to her husband Zechariah's lack of faith (**1:20**), despite how even more incredible the task God has assigned to Mary is than what God has assigned to Zechariah. *Teleiosis* ("fulfillment" or "completion") is a key theme in **Luke**. It's behind our English word, "teleology," the study of design or purpose in nature. It's Mary's faith in the "fulfillment" of God's promises that Elizabeth commends. Someone pointed out, "When God wants to do something wonderful, He begins with a difficulty. When God wants to do something spectacular, He begins with an impossibility!"

CONCLUSION

Are we as God-honoring in our faith in the fulfillment of God's promises to us today, as were Elizabeth and Mary, even when it seems humanly impossible for God's promises to come true in our lives? Someone has said, "You can't break God's promises by leaning on them!" Here's a promise **Jesus** gave to His followers in **Luke 6:38** (GNT): "Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you." Do we believe **Jesus'** promise is still true today?

Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) was born in Holland to a devout Christian family. After Germany defeated the small Dutch military and occupied the Netherlands, May 15, 1940, the Nazis sought to exterminate local Jews. For sheltering nearly 800 Jews and helping them to flee the Nazis, Corrie and other family members were arrested when the Gestapo raided the Ten Boom home on February 28, 1944, including her 84-year-old father, two sisters, and her brother Wilhelm, a Dutch Reformed minister committed to leading Jews to **Jesus Christ**. Due to a "clerical error," Corrie was released from prison December 28, 1944, just ahead of an order of a desperate Nazi regime to kill all female prisoners her age.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, which Billy Graham made into an excellent movie in 1975, Corrie tells of a miracle during her time in the German death camp Ravensbrück. She had smuggled her Bible and a small bottle of liquid vitamins into her barracks. Her beloved sister Betsie was sick and growing sicker, but she demanded Corrie first give a dose of vitamins to all the other ill their barracks before she would accept any. In coming days, a strange thing began to happen, which she describes in her own words. "The Davitamon bottle was continuing to produce drops. It scarcely seemed possible; so small a bottle; so many doses a day. Now in addition to Betsie, a dozen others on our pier were taking it. My instinct was always to hoard it – Betsie was growing so very weak! But the others were ill as well. It was hard to say no to eyes that burned with fever; hands that shook with chill. I tried to save it for the very weakest – but even these soon numbered fifteen, twenty, and twenty-five. . . . And still, every time I tilted the little bottle, a drop appeared at the tip of the glass stopper. It just couldn't be! I held it up to the light, trying to see how much was left, but the dark brown glass was too thick to see through. 'There was a woman in the Bible,' Betsie said, 'whose oil jar was never empty.' She turned to it in the Book of Kings, the story of the poor widow of Zarephath who gave Elijah a room in her home: 'The jar of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of Jehovah which he spoke by Elijah' [**I Kings 17:16**]. Well – but – wonderful things happen all through the Bible. It was one thing to believe that such things were possible thousands of years ago; another to have it happen now, to us, this very day. And yet it happened this day, and the next, and the next, until an awed little group of spectators stood around watching the drops fall onto the daily rations of bread. Many nights I lay awake in the shower of straw dust from the mattress above, trying to fathom the marvel of supply lavished upon us. 'Maybe,' I whispered to Betsie, 'only a molecule or two really gets through that little pinhole – and then in the air it expands!' I heard her soft laughter in the dark. 'Don't try too hard to explain it, Corrie. Just accept it as a surprise from a Father who loves you'" (*The Hiding Place*, 202-203).

What did the angel Gabriel tell Mary? "'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. For nothing will be impossible with God.'" How did Mary respond? "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'" What testimony did Elizabeth give to Mary's faith in a God of the "impossible," which applied equally to her as well as to Mary? "And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.'" Do others give such testimony to our faith in a "God" of the "impossible"?