

## Luke 1:39-45

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Preacher: Lourens du Plessis

[ 0 : 00 ] There's a Christmas carol you might start hearing again soon if you haven't already. It's quite popular even in non-Christian settings.

! It goes something like this. Mary, did you know that your baby boy would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?

Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new? This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you. I'm not going to sing it for you today, but you'll hear it soon enough.

We don't know exactly, do we, what Mary understood after the angel Gabriel came to announce to her that she would have a son and she would have to call him Jesus.

If her reaction later in Jesus' life is anything to go by, I'm not sure she did understand all of what it meant. Definitely not in the way that we understand when we look back at those events.

[ 1 : 06 ] How could she? You can understand how it would be quite overwhelming for her, an unmarried virgin girl in first century Palestine, without, again, everything that we've known since, about Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

And having just been visited by the angel Gabriel telling you that you're going to become pregnant and bear the son of God. We can try and place ourselves in her shoes and get a sense of how overwhelming all of this must have been.

And yet her first reaction, when she's heard that her elderly cousin Elizabeth had become pregnant as well, when the sign the angel Gabriel gave to her, when he announced this promise to her, was for her to go to her cousin.

And we can understand that at a very human level as well, can't we? That's what we do. When we're in a position where we have to process something that we can't talk to anybody about, that we feel no one else will understand, we seek someone out who would be able to understand.

And she's going through an extraordinary, unimaginable pregnancy, that should humanly speaking be impossible. Who will understand? Elizabeth will understand.

[ 2 : 38 ] And all of this may well have been kind of playing around in her mind and the human shame that would have come along with her position. Even if she had said to the angel, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.

And we know that too, don't we? We can have different emotions swirling around in us at the same time. That doesn't mean we don't believe one thing because we feel something else as well.

And in our faith it often is the same thing. We believe in God but at the same time we struggle with doubts and fears. Those things aren't necessarily mutually exclusive at the same time.

And so far we've seen a son, haven't we? Two sons in fact promised. We've seen an impossible promise we can believe in. And now we see a blessed promise in this passage.

And by now we're not surprised, are we, to find what we don't expect. Everything is unexpected when it comes to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 3 : 52 ] We might have expected a scene of them talking about their experiences if we've written the story. How did they feel? What was it like? What were their hopes and dreams for their children?

How disrupted their lives would be now? But you know, it will all be worth it because the children would be special. Or rather extra special in this case.

If we'd written the story, that's probably how the scene would have played out, I think. But no. No. John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit have other plans.

Now Jesus was probably just a couple of weeks old at this point. Since conception. Not more than a bunch of cells in some ways. We're not sure exactly how many weeks, but not much.

And the next extraordinary thing in the announcement of the birth of Jesus happens. Right here at this meeting of Mary and Elizabeth.

[ 4 : 55 ] It's not just Elizabeth who's overjoyed at having her cousin come to her. Her six month old baby in her womb leaps with joy.

Now babies move. Expectant mothers know that very well. And some more than others. I've read about a baby who kicked so hard he broke his mother's rib.

And that's not what happens here. This isn't an ordinary just a baby adjusting to get a bit more comfortable, is it?

No, the Holy Spirit comes over Elizabeth. And she effectively prophesies. Through her, that unborn baby, John the Baptist, starts his ministry of announcing Jesus even from the womb.

He was the last prophet. And the Bible tells us that Jesus calls him the greatest prophet because he was the one who would announce the coming of the Messiah.

[ 6 : 06 ] And he recognizes this. And he recognizes this to our eyes, probably still a very unformed baby in Mary's womb. She wouldn't have shown the pregnancy yet.

But he recognizes what is going on. And he leaps with joy. And we have this remarkable, remarkable fact recounted to us.

That Elizabeth knew what was going on because the Holy Spirit told her. And she tells us exactly what we should think of this obscure girl from a backwater place in Galilee.

That she's blessed among women and the baby in her womb is blessed. Blessed by God.

Recognized by God. And as we read last week, didn't we? Favored by God.

And the reason, though, is what's important here. The reason she's called blessed. It's not that she became supernaturally pregnant. As amazing as that is.

[ 7 : 10 ] If you think about it, that probably created a lot more problems in her life. That she could have very well done without. Thank you very much. She could have done without the drama, the hassle, the embarrassment, the awkward questions and explanations.

The looks on the street. The friends who shun her. And the problems with Joseph who wanted to break up the engagement. Mary's blessed, Elizabeth says.

And by implication, Elizabeth is blessed because Mary comes to her. Because she is the mother of my Lord. Now 1 Corinthians 12 verse 3 says no one can confess Jesus as Lord.

Other than by the work of the Holy Spirit. And that's what we see here as well, isn't it? Now just maybe quickly an aside I think at this point. I think our society has massively lost the plot on this.

Don't you think? John the Baptist here, unborn as is, six months in the womb, recognizes what we want to deny in our approach to human life.

[ 8 : 22 ] To the unborn children we don't recognize as babies. Have you noticed how the text also talks about babies all the way through? Are not fetuses or products of conception or cells or even horror of horrors?

A parasite? That's what people call unborn babies. John the Baptist, unborn as he was, leaps for joy because, as Elizabeth tells us, Mary is, is, not will be, the mother of her Lord.

Blessed, verse 42, is the fruit of your womb. And that is just a Hebrew way of talking about children, born or unborn. The Greek word translated baby here is used for born and unborn children as well.

So if we want to talk about whether the Bible is pro-life, I think John the Baptist is 1000% pro-life right here. He leaps for joy because even at that very, very initial stage of Mary's pregnancy, the Son of God had become Jesus Christ, a human being and God at the same time.

So we need to remember that. And I think if we believe the Bible that must drive our thinking and actions about abortion in our nation. But that's an aside.

[ 9 : 48 ] Mary is called blessed because she's given the privilege of giving birth to the Messiah, isn't she? And Elizabeth recognizes that.

Nothing special has happened to Mary in some sense, in the sense that she didn't become something she wasn't. She didn't become divine. She didn't become, as many people believe, someone we have to pray through to reach God.

But she is indeed blessed, isn't she? For all eternity, she will be the person who gave birth to the Lord Jesus Christ. Who taught him how to eat.

Who cleaned his diapers. Who taught him how to walk and get dressed. Who took him on play dates and to the synagogue to be taught. Who to share him with others when he had grown up.

And who watched him die on the cross. And suffered that anguish. She was blessed because God had chosen her, who had not done anything to deserve that honor, that privilege.

[10:56] Someone who didn't have status, who wasn't important. But God chose her to play a role in his saving plan for humanity. It doesn't always feel like a blessing to raise children, especially when they are little.

And it is only really later, I think, that we see that she fully understood what it is that he came and what he would do. But Elizabeth here recognizes through the power of the Holy Spirit that he would be the Lord.

She recognized something of what he was right there and then. She recognized someone who even her own son, Gabriel, remember, said John the Baptist would be great before the Lord. She recognizes that even her own son recognizes this baby as the Lord, as God. The promised Savior of the world God had promised.

But there is even more to it than that. That we see. As much of a blessing it is that Mary was going to give birth to Jesus.

[12:09] Elizabeth tells us in verse 45, And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

That she believed that what God promised to her would come true. That God had promised to Israel through all their history would come through. That what God had promised since the beginning of time, since the Garden of Eden, since the Fall, would come true.

And especially the promises that he made to her would come true. And that is the nub of it, isn't it? Now what we have seen so far is this contrast between Zechariah and Mary and how they react to this news, these promises of sons to be born.

Mary heard the promises from God and she believed them. Whether she understood it all and all the implications or not. Or whether she had all her questions answered or not.

And I think in fact we know she didn't. She didn't know, as the lyrics of that carol we spoke about at the beginning goes on, That her baby boy is the Lord of all creation.

[13:26] That one day he would rule the nations. That he is heaven's perfect lamb. That that sleeping child you are holding is the great I am.

The greatest blessing anyone can receive from God is for God to recognize us. To treat us like we don't deserve. To love us even when we are not just neutral towards him.

But the Bible tells us hated him. To adopt us as his sons and daughters. As impossible as a virgin conceiving.

But not impossible for God. And if that's you sitting here today, you are blessed among men and women. More blessed than what Elizabeth was calling Mary in some sense.

If you believe that those promises of God to you, that Jesus was born as a man, that he is the son of God, that he died for you. And that you are, that your sins are forgiven. If you believe in Jesus.

[14:32] I think often that's a massive stumbling block for people, isn't it? But they can't believe it all and therefore they don't believe any of it. That they want to understand everything and all the implications for their lives and all the questions they possibly have.

And that somehow those things keep them from believing what they can believe right now. The promises that God has made to them. Now that's you. Then God is asking you to recognize that Jesus is the Lord.

That his greatest promise to us to give us a savior to the human race has been fulfilled. To recognize what Mary recognized.

And that he can be your savior despite you not having done anything to deserve it. You don't have to be important. You don't have to have honor and status.

You don't have to be perfect. May you, maybe even physically, leap for joy this Christmas time when you put your faith in Jesus.

[15:37] And if you have believed God's promises, like Mary, may you leap with joy anew this Christmas time. May you marvel at the wonder of what happened 2000 years ago in Galilee.

But may you be even more astounded at the fact that he's made those promises to you. And that he gave you the favor to believe them.

Amen. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.