

39 In those days Mary got up and hurried to the hill country, to a town of Judah. 40 She entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 Just as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! 45 Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!"

Mary got up and hurried. What was her rush? What is your rush? Did you have a hard time getting ready for church this morning? Are you having difficulties getting ready for Christmas? It seems like everyone is in a hurry nowadays, and a lot of it is self induced. We commit to doing so much for our children or our job. We decide to buy things we can't afford, and we have to work our way out of debt. This causes us stress and deadlines that we can't meet. So we are in a hurry. As a result we have a hard time enjoying anything.

But Mary was in a different kind of hurry. She was in a hurry to go see her cousin Elizabeth. Why? Because something miraculous was about to happen through both of them. Elizabeth was miraculously giving birth to a child when she was beyond childbearing years, as Abraham's wife Sarah did hundreds of years before in the book of Genesis. Now Mary had been visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she too was going to have a child miraculously. Only Mary would not have a child through her husband, for Joseph and Mary were not living together or having sexual relations. Her child would be through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. She would have a one and only virgin birth of God's Son, Jesus.

Mary couldn't tell Joseph this. He wouldn't believe her. Her parents would believe her either. It would be thought of as blasphemy. The only person she could tell would be her older cousin Elizabeth, who was also experiencing a similar miracle. She would understand and be supportive. So Mary decided to go on this about 70 mile journey to the south to speak with Elizabeth. She was in a hurry. She didn't know what else to do. Who knows if she even told Joseph or her parents where she was going? What was Mary, maybe 17 or 18 years old? It's hard to know? Nonetheless she made the trek alone down south - on foot - to the hill country in Judah to visit Elizabeth. Elizabeth would have been 6 months pregnant. Mary was barely pregnant. Elizabeth may have been in her fifties, maybe sixties. Mary was much younger. But they were brought together not only because they were relatives, but they were also sharing miracles in their wombs.

Life is a gift. Our society has found a way to forget that. We measure babies by how much work they will be or how much money they will cost. Millions of women decide to murder these precious creatures because they want to try and eliminate the guilt of their sin or out of sheer selfishness and greed. They regard the child as nothing more than a choice, something they can decide to kill if they want. But God says there is life in the womb, someone that He is knitting together and forming. Life is a gift, especially human life - where these infants are given an eternal soul. This life is worth something in God's eyes!

When two different women are expecting children at the same time, it can bring a camaraderie between them. They find out what they are having, a boy or a girl. They talk about their due dates. They share how they are experiencing back pains and heightened senses of smell along with different tastes. There is excitement when they look at life as a gift from God. They wonder if their children will grow up to be friends. My son is currently going to college with a son of one of my old classmates. When they were but infants they played on a playground in Watertown, WI. Now, years later they are friends. It is neat to see. You wonder that about your children. Who will they grow up to be?

We take interest in other children, but our primary focus is on our own. Each mother has special hopes for her child. There are many mothers here today because of their babies. When all of the other children are singing, they have their eyes especially on their baby. The rest of them, yeah they're cute too - but they don't matter as much as their baby. I say this partly to contrast and think about what you are about to hear next -

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Elizabeth was shouting for joy, and she was more excited about Mary's baby than she was with her own! Why? Think about who was within the wombs of these two women. One child was miraculously born to prepare the way for the Savior of the world! The other One would be the actual Savior of the world! He was God in the flesh, who came to take the sins of the world on His shoulders. This was a once in a lifetime thing, and Elizabeth knew it! This is what Christmas is all about. Think about the words of the more popular song that is out on the radio today,

Mary did you know that your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know that your baby boy would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy is heaven's perfect lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great I am

Mary didn't even have to tell Elizabeth what had happened. The Holy Spirit revealed it to her, and Elizabeth was overjoyed and honored to have the younger Mary with her baby in the womb at her house. The older was honored to be with the younger, all because of WHO was in the womb. There is not a hint of jealousy. Elizabeth is happy to have John. She is even more happy that Mary is going to have Jesus. They would not be competitors. They would be on the same team, with the same Lord and the same God, the One growing in Mary's womb!

She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! It was by the fruit of a tree that sinful humanity began the curse on this world when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge. But it was by the fruit of the virgin Mary, as promised to Adam and Eve, that Satan's head would be crushed. This baby would grow to conquer sin by His death on the cross. He came to

conquer death by His resurrection from the dead. Mary was blessed with the privilege of getting to carry and raise her own Lord and Savior. Mary rejoiced too, and was filled with humility. Even John joined in the celebration with a jump within the womb. If you think about it, Elizabeth wouldn't even get to see John get married or have children. She may have died when John was in his teens or younger. But she knew that John wasn't just given to her, but to prepare the way for Jesus. She was fine with that and happy with that, for her eyes were more happy to see Jesus coming than her own son.

That's the way Christmas is supposed to be. Parents come here to see their children sing. They are enamored with the gift of life that God has given them. They are filled with love at seeing their children sing and be all dressed up. But are you listening to the words of their songs? Have you come to worship them, or the Savior they are singing about? Do you pay attention to Jesus as you do to your child? Are you as excited about Him as you are them? There's a danger here, isn't there? God gave you children to enjoy. But He didn't give you children to worship. He didn't want them to be your gods. If you only come to hear your children sing, then what is the true focus of your life? How often do we do that with the good things God gives to us? It's not just our children, but our spouses, our jobs, our sports teams - so many idols we make! So sad!

John the Baptist was not sad! He miraculously leapt at the voice of Mary. He too could have faith, even in the womb. This is the same as what Paul said of Timothy, who Paul said had known the Holy Scriptures **“from infancy.”** This even made Elizabeth more joyful, to think that her own child also rejoiced at the coming of Jesus. So think about this. God wants you to raise your children to know Jesus and believe in Jesus and praise Jesus. God can work faith in the youngest of children. Isn't it a wonderful thing to hear them sing praises to Jesus and hear the excitement in their voices? They sing loudly. They don't care if they're off tune. They excited about it. All of this singing is done to glorify our God and Savior. It is a wonderful thing. It's what God gave us children for, to raise to the glory of God. Oh that we had such a child like faith!

That's what Elizabeth praises Mary for! **Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!** When Elizabeth's husband was told that she was going to have a baby, he doubted it. He thought that because she was so old the Lord couldn't do such a thing. He was a priest. He should have known better than to try to figure it all out! As a result, God made it so he couldn't talk until John was born. Mary was different. She asked questions, but when the angel Gabriel told her how it would miraculously happen, she said, **“May it be to me as you have said.”** She didn't doubt. She simply believed.

Mary didn't try to figure it all out. She just trusted the angel's words, that God could do what he said. This is what is so blessed about the children. They hear this wonderful message about God being born of Mary to die for their sins, and they rejoice and sing about it. We get cynical in our older age. We see the wages of sin through sickness, lies, murder, and disease. We wonder to ourselves, “Where is God in all of this?” Some get angry with Him. Some abandon Him. They stop listening. They choose to believe the cynics and the skeptics and the angry mob. Or they just get caught up in the everyday business of life, and they forget about the One who gives us all this stuff. It is possible to lose faith, and many unfortunately do so.

Hidden behind all of this sin and death, there is a God who wants us to seek Him and see Him. He has come in the womb of Mary and taken on flesh! The Creator of the Universe became one of us! He made Himself

approachable and even touchable! He made Himself vulnerable. Why? Because He loves us. So He could die for us! Now we know that God knows what death feels like. He's been there, done that. But He knows what life feels like too. He's eaten our food. He's been to our funerals and weddings. He's seen our diseases, and He's chased out our demons. He's come here to rescue us from this world of death, through faith in His Son, the same kind of faith that Mary had. He's come here to give your life meaning and hope and joy. He's come here to make you sing too. Don't try to figure it all out! Just look at Jesus and believe!

Children's services always make me smile. You never know what's going to happen, no matter how much they rehearse. My nephew stuck the wheel of a hot wheel up his nose once right before a service and had to have it removed in the hospital. Another child was running up the sidewalk, tripped and knocked out a tooth or something like that and also had to go to the hospital. That wasn't so funny. When I was in grade one child threw up on two other children. Lots of fun! These children that we come to hear sing, they can be messy.

They also grow older and get messier. Sometimes they grow very sinful. Sometimes they die early. Sometimes they get married and grow apart from you. Sometimes they get too old to say, "I love you too." Children can cause a lot of pain.

That's why we need Jesus all the more. Elizabeth's life wouldn't be easy raising a child in her older years. Mary never could have imagined the things He would do or what would happen to Him. It broke her heart. But He also gave her hope and us hope too, for He came to save you and me through His death and resurrection. He never stops loving you. He never stops wanting to hold you and talk to you and listen to you. If your children are raised to believe in Jesus, and you believe in Jesus, you'll find a love that binds you both together, a hope that keeps you going, no matter what happens. Your life won't revolve around how old they grow to be or how many grandchildren you have. Your life will revolve around that little baby hidden in Mary's womb, and you'll find a joy you never had before. You have a loving God who took on flesh for you and for me. His name is Jesus Christ. He is love - for you. We don't need to be quiet about that. We can sing and shout and jump for joy because of Him. Amen.