

## Sunday, December 4, 2022 | Go Tell It on the Mountain

### Week 3 | Luke 1:26-56 | "Mary: Paragon of Faith"

We started our Luke study two weeks ago by kicking off the series "Go Tell It on the Mountain." And during that message, we unpacked the four things Luke wanted his audience to know. Firstly, Luke was among many who had written about Jesus' life. Secondly, though he was not an eyewitness, he was close friends with those who were. Thirdly, he took all he had heard and placed the facts of Jesus' life in order. And, lastly, he wrote all that he wrote because he wanted to give his reader, Theophilus, certainty about the things he had been taught. And the takeaway for us was that we are to see ourselves as Theophilus. In other words, we are to imagine that Luke is writing to us and that, like Theophilus, we are to share the Gospel with others.

Last week, we moved to the story of an elderly couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth. We learned through their life that God will always keep his promises. That no matter if we are cynical and slow to believe, like Zechariah, or we're disgraced, like Elizabeth, the Lord will keep true to his words and for those who believe, he will even redeem his people.

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Today, we'll be introduced to the mother of Jesus, Mary. And to aid our understanding, we ought to view this next scene in comparison to what's proceeded it. For instance, rather than occurring in the metropolis of Israel, Luke will draw our attention to the countryside of Galilee. And instead of localizing us in the famous Temple, we'll be taken to a little-known hamlet called Nazareth. And whereas before, we were acquainted with an elderly couple who were a part of the upper crust of Jewish society, our narrator will introduce us to a young woman who, given that she's unmarried, had little to no social standing. But the most striking contrast is that in place of Elizabeth's barrenness, we're told of Mary's virginity.

Against this backdrop, Luke will paint the most remarkable example of belief in all Scripture. Mary is the paragon of faith. And considering that her name literally means "excellence,"<sup>1</sup> I find it appropriate that she has become such an outstanding model for disciples throughout the generations. Would that we all were like her.

**READ:** Luke 1:26-56 (ESV)

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel **Gabriel** was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a **virgin** betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the **virgin's** name was **Mary**. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O **avored** one, the Lord is with you!" <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found **favor** with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name **Jesus**. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the **Son** of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the **throne** of his father David,<sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob **forever**, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a **virgin**?"

<sup>35</sup> And the angel answered her, "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**. <sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> For **nothing** will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby **leaped** in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the **Holy Spirit**, <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a **loud** cry, "**Blessed** are you among women, and **blessed** is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb **leaped** for joy. <sup>45</sup> And **blessed** is she who **believed** that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul **magnifies** the Lord, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God **my Savior**, <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me **blessed**; <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> And his **mercy** is for those who **fear** him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> **He has shown strength** with his arm; **he has scattered** the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; <sup>52</sup> **he has brought down** the mighty from their thrones and **exalted** those of humble estate; <sup>53</sup> **he has filled** the hungry with good things, and the rich **he has sent away** empty. <sup>54</sup> **He has helped** his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Luke teaches us **three** things about God's favor:

**i. God blesses because his grace is unmerited (vs. 26-38).**

Gabriel says to Mary, "Greetings, O **avored** one, the Lord is with you!" and "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found **favor** with God." Now, because our self-estimation is often bloated and biased, we might tend to think of Mary as being special. That there was something extraordinary about her to be called the "avored one" of God and to have found "favor with God." However, to be sure, Mary is not the **source** of grace but a **recipient** of it.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the condition of her "avoredness" is not based on her merits but on God's **unmerited** favor.

Mary is a **common** vessel of God's grace, not the source, nor can she give that same grace to others. As we read in her song, she refers to God as her "Savior," clearly implying that she, like the rest of Israel and humanity, needed saving. Thus, God blesses Mary not because of who Mary was but because of who God is. This is why, scripturally, the invocation "hail Mary, full of grace," and all its many permutations, is unequivocally **wrong** and detracts from the true giver of grace which is **not** Mary but God.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Jesus himself will make this distinction about his own mother later in Luke 11:27-28.<sup>4</sup> There, a woman will say, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts from which you nursed," to which Jesus replies, "But blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Jesus' point is that his mother was blessed not because of who she was but because of what she did: **Mary kept the word of God**. She was a **believer**, and so received the gift of the believer: blessedness (cf. 1:45). Jesus wanted others to exhibit the same kind of faith that his mother demonstrated.

God blesses whomever he wants to bless and gives little to no consideration for the virtues of the ones he blesses. In fact, a cursory glance at the Scriptures will reveal that many of the so-called "heroes" of the faith were deeply flawed, and some made unbelievable mistakes. Yet, repeatedly, God is shown to be daringly gracious with his followers.

**READ: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

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<sup>2</sup> Garland, David E., *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2011), p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Garland (2011), p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> For **by grace** you have been saved **through faith**. And this is **not** your own doing; it is the **gift** of God, <sup>9</sup> **not** a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, **which God prepared beforehand**, that we should walk in them.

Mary is a remarkable person; this is true. Her faith is excellent, especially compared to the faith of that old Zechariah priest. However, great faith does not truly make you a great person. It only makes the one you put your trust in great. Great faith elevates the greatness of our God.

**ii. God's blessing comes to those who believe in his promises (vs. 39-45).**

If anything can be said for Mary, she came to grips with the fact that she'd have a child pretty quickly even though she was still a virgin, a point, I might add, that Luke highlights three times (vs. 27 (2x's), 34). Her belief in the angel's words didn't need to be reassured, as with Zechariah; she was quick to believe. The only question she had was, "**How will this be, since I am a virgin?**" Which is like asking, "I don't understand. How can I have a child if I'm still a virgin?" Meaning that Mary never once doubted that she'd have a child. She just needed a further explanation about the actual process. It is similar to how you might tell a child who doesn't know anything about airlines that they're going to fly somewhere, and they respond by asking, "How? I've never done that before." You then proceed to explain what an airplane is. Mary wanted Gabriel to elaborate on his message; she did not want him to prove that it would happen as Zechariah wanted.<sup>5</sup>

In response to her query, Gabriel gives her an extraordinary explanation. He says, "**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.**" Sadly, some liberal interpreters throughout the centuries have claimed that the phrases "come upon you" and "overshadow you" meant that God had actual intercourse with Mary, similar to how the Greek gods—i.e., Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, etc.—were known for their many dalliances. However, those phrases are **never** used in the context of sex in any Greek document, religious or non-religious.<sup>6</sup> In fact, rather than imply something sexual, Gabriel was invoking spiritual language from the O.T. Particularly regarding the phrase "overshadow," the angel was using terminology that evokes the Tabernacle and how God's presence was said to have resided in that special place (cf. Ex. 40:33, 35). As theologian James R. Edwards explains, "The divine cloud that established his presence in a place now does so in a *person* [author's emphasis]. The divine overshadowing of

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<sup>5</sup> Bock (1994), p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> Garland (2011), p. 82.

the earthly Tabernacle was a *foreshadowing* [author's emphasis] of the living Tabernacle, the incarnation."<sup>7</sup>

This thought that God's presence was to be found in the person of Jesus rather than the Tabernacle is best expressed by John's prologue to his own gospel account:

**READ: John 1:15, 10-14 (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

<sup>2</sup>The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In Him was life, and that life was the Light of men. <sup>5</sup>And the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. <sup>11</sup>He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. <sup>12</sup>But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His name, <sup>13</sup>who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [lit., "pitched his tent" or "tabernacled"] among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

Thus, to explain to Mary the mystery of the incarnation, Gabriel used terminology that this young Jewish girl would understand. In the same way that God's power and presence filled the Tabernacle of old, the Lord's power and presence would "come upon" and "overshadow her" to create a human vessel for the Almighty. And to this, Mary responds with what? "**Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.**" No further explanation was needed. Gabriel's clarification was sufficient for this young girl. Later, Mary's family member, Elizabeth, praises her specifically for this readiness to believe when she says to Mary in verse 45, "**blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.**"

Dear Christian, blessing comes not from virtue or labor but from belief in God's word.

**iii. God's blessedness reverses fortunes (vs. 46-56).**

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. E. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 49.

Considering I did a whole series walking through the songs of the likes of Mary, Zechariah and the angels out of these very passages last year,<sup>8</sup> we'll have to limit our discussion to the overall theme of Mary's song rather than dissecting every line. And at the heart of Mary's Magnificat is this principle: **God reorders the societal hierarchy.**

It is not the proud, the mighty, or the rich who are blessed but the humble, the weak, and the poor. Through God's blessedness, humanity's fortunes are reversed. The gift of God's Son to Mary and, ultimately, to all humankind means that even if someone were to live a life of difficulty, failure, and hunger, but they knew and believed in Jesus Christ, they would be the ones who are blessed for all eternity while those who may have lived a life of ease, success, and plenty would be cursed for all eternity if they fail to come to grips with their own need for salvation through Jesus Christ. **To have Jesus is to have it all. To have it all except Jesus is to have nothing at all.**

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

**Those who are the recipients of God's unmerited favor will naturally want to magnify the Lord.**

In this passage, Mary is the paragon of faith. We ought to walk as she walked. We ought to believe as she believed. We ought to worship as she worshipped.

Gratitude, thankfulness, and appreciation occur when someone receives something they know they did not earn or deserve. A prideful person is a thankless person because they think everything they are given or have is deserved. This is why Mary takes such issue with the "prideful," "mighty," and "rich." They do not think to be thankful for they can always fill their needs.

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<sup>8</sup> Hyrne, Ben, "Great Joy: A Christmas Series," December 2021, *Grace Pointe Baptist Church*, <https://www.gracepointelife.com/sermons/great-joy/>, [accessed December 2, 2022].

## Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

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