

Jumping for Joy

Christmas Cousins-Part 3

Luke 1:26-80

George was 92 and his bride to be was 89. There were so excited about getting married within a few weeks. They strolled hand in hand over to the pharmacy on the corner and asked to speak to the manager.

“We’re about to get married,” George informed him. “Do you have any heart medication?”

“Of course we do” the manager replied.

“Good . . . do you stock support-hose to help with poor circulation?”

“Definitely.”

“What about medicine for rheumatism, osteoporosis and arthritis?” George said, looking down at his list.

“We’ve got all that,” the manager said.

“What about hearing aids, denture supplies and reading glasses?”

“Yep, we’ve got that all readily available.”

“What about eye drops, sleeping pills, Geritol and Ensure in several different flavors?”

“Got all that on the shelves, ready to go.”

George said, “Do you sell walkers, wheel chairs and canes, too?”

The manager said, “We’ve got all kinds and all sizes . . . but why all the questions?”

George smiled and said, “Cause we’d like to use your store as our bridal registry.”ⁱ

We’ve been introduced to a couple in their 80’s, who, instead of shopping for things you’d expect them to be interested in – stuff they might want for their years of retirement on the farm . . . they were instead planning a baby shower.

They’d had their list . . . they had a pretty good idea of what life held in store for them . . . it would

be brands like Geritol, not Gerber. It would be rocking chairs, not a rocking horse . . . and certainly not the thought of rocking their own child to sleep. But all that had changed!

And now, they’re biggest challenge at the moment was trying to figure out where to put the baby’s room – and answer a million questions between them – like, how in the world would they ever keep up with a two year old.

Gabriel had appeared and his message had blown their minds – by the supernatural power of God, they were about to become parents for the first time – in their 80’s – and they were going to have a baby boy.

And not just any boy – they were about to become the parents of the first prophet to speak in Israel for 400 years.

If you were with us in our last session, you remember that Zacharias didn’t believe the angel – he asked for a sign – which I think is absolutely amazing. An angel appears from God with a message and Zacharias wants a sign from God.

But Gabriel agreed to Zacharias’ demand, and the sign the angel gives him is the paralysis of his vocal chords – he will be unable to hear or speak until the boy is born.

And with that, Gabriel disappears into thin air.

And he won’t show up again until he makes an appearance to Elizabeth’s cousin, a young girl named Mary who is neck deep in wedding invitations . . . she’s putting the finishing touches on her wedding dress. She plans to be married in the next few months and she dreams of the festival and the feasting and what it will be like to be married to her beloved.

All of her plans will be changed. The festival and the wedding feast and all the extended family plans are abruptly halted – her list of to-do’s has been changed forever.

You see, it’s her turn to be visited by Gabriel. Both she and Joseph are about to have their world turned upside down too!

Dr. Luke, the physician gives us the details in the first chapter of his Gospel.

Luke leaves Zacharias and Elizabeth for a moment as he shifts the spotlight onto Mary.

Gabriel’s Visit

Notice chapter 1 – let’s jump right to the announcement of Gabriel to Mary in *verse 31*. ***And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.***

Gabriel just backs the prophetic truck up and unloads.

He makes at least 8 predictions:

1. Mary, you will conceive in your womb;
2. you will bear a son;
3. you will name Him Jesus;
4. He will be great;
5. He will be the Son of God;

These five prophecies were fulfilled at Christ’s first coming.

The next three prophecies in Gabriel’s truckload will come to pass at Christ’s second coming.

6. God the Father will give to God the Son the throne of his earthly forefather David
7. He will reign over Israel forever
8. In fact, He will reign over everything and everyone forever and without end.

Eight rapid fire, centuries sweeping, kingdom coming prophecies that begin with her pregnancy and end with the eternal state of heaven.

I mean, Gabriel just unloaded the wagon.

I think it’s interesting that Mary gets stuck on the first prediction. You will conceive in your womb.

I don’t think she heard anything that followed.

In fact, her first response was exactly the same as Zacharias. **Notice verse 34. And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”**

Remember Zacharias’ response back in *verse 18*. ***And Zahcarias said to the angel, “How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man . . . and my wife . . . well, I won’t say she’s an old woman, but she’s advanced in years – you need to give me a sign.***

How are you going to pull this off?

And now Mary responds with the words, “How – I’m a virgin.”

I find it interesting that God held Zacharias to a greater accountability. He’s a veteran priest; he’s knowledgeable in the scriptures and in the history of Israel – God had taken an old couple and had given Abraham and Sarah a baby boy – if He did it before He can certainly do it again.

I need a sign for my unbelief, is effectively what Zacharias is saying.

So Zacharias is disciplined and Mary isn’t.

Zacharias didn’t believe the promise – Mary didn’t understand the process.

For Zacharias it was more a problem of theology while for Mary it was a problem of biology.

So Gabriel, in the kindness of God, provided insight – notice *verse 35*. ***And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.***

That word, “*overshadow*” is the same word used by Matthew Mark and Luke to describe the cloud of God’s presence that settled over the mount of transfiguration where Jesus was briefly revealed in brilliant light and the glory of God (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34).

] It’s also the same idea of the Old Testament description of the cloud that covered the tabernacle when the tent was filled with the glory of God. (Exodus 40:35).ⁱⁱ

That explains it but we still don’t understand it.

Gabriel kindly encourages Mary to hang on to his – notice *verse 37*. ***For nothing will be impossible with God.***

Gabriel isn’t just quoting scripture . . . he’s also speaking as an eyewitness.

- He stood in the presence of God. He knew.
- He had seen countless miracles throughout the previous centuries.ⁱⁱⁱ
- He had watched at the dawn of human history as God created with spectacular colors more than a hundred billion galaxies.

- He had watched God craft a man out of dust and a woman out of bone;
- He was there when God created the animal kingdom both seen and still yet to be discovered by human observation;
- Gabriel has seen the manna fall and the waters part;
- He's seen time stand still;
- he's watched lions mouths muzzled and fiery furnaces air-conditioned.

Mary, nothing is impossible with God.
And he should know.

- He's watched God take the life of every first born Egyptian and then and spark life in the womb of a barren woman;
- he's seen God float iron to the surface of water and bring repentance to the hearts of an entire nation;
- he's watched God send a chariot of fire from heaven to bring His prophet home and
- he's seen God tear open the earth and send His enemies to the fires of torment below.

He's seen God in all His terror and in all His glory.

Mary, let me tell you what I know and what I've seen. ***Nothing is impossible with God.***

God can overshadow your womb, bring to life one of your eggs by His divine touch and turn your womb into a Holy of Holies.

So that the offspring will be fully man and fully God – fully God – capable of living a perfect life in order to become *the* sinless sacrifice; fully human, thanks to Mary's egg and womb, fully flesh and blood – capable of being touched with the feelings of our infirmities and capable of suffering *and* capable of dying.

And Mary effectively responds by saying in **verse 38** – Here I am; I present my body to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to Him, which is the most reasonable thing I could ever do for Him.

Now what Gabriel says here is so gracious as the word of God condescends to match the heart of this young lady – perhaps no older than 15 or 16 years of age.

Look back at **36**. ***And look Mary, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.***

Gabriel just so happens to drop the name of Mary's cousin into the mix.

Here's what's happening.

Mary, you need somewhere to go. Your reputation is about to be destroyed. You're unmarried and about to become pregnant.

In fact, as soon as Joseph hears about this, he'll assume what everyone else will assume and I'm gonna need to visit him in the night to keep him from breaking off your engagement.

As we've studied the incarnation in light of these two cousins, Mary and Elizabeth, you need to understand that for Elizabeth – the news of her pregnancy will end her shame.

It will sweep away the dust of suspicion that has dogged her heels for 50 years. Her inability to become pregnant – as we've already discussed in this series – was tantamount, under the Abrahamic covenant – of God's displeasure.

So her pregnancy will end her shame and restore her reputation.

But for her cousin, Mary, her pregnancy will begin a life of shame; the clouds of suspicion will begin to gather and never leave her alone.

In fact, Jesus will be accused by the religious leaders of having a mother who was sexually immoral – ***John 8:41***.

Let me pull over to the side of the road long enough to say that serving God is about to become joyful for one woman and her husband and painful for another woman and her husband.

Elizabeth's world is about to be put together; Mary's world is gonna come apart.

How many will serve Christ so long as He puts everything together; how many will serve Him if He allows everything to come apart.

Mary's world is about to become confusing – filled with accusation and suspicion and gossip.

These events are going to be the talk of the town. Mary is expecting out of wedlock . . . and do we really know who the father is?

Even Joseph won't say that he's the father – what's up with that?

So, who's the baby's father? Some have said that Mary said the father was God. Now doesn't that take the cake?

This is a delicious scandal – and everyone will want to taste it.

It's going to be on the cover of every tabloid at every checkout lane in Food Lion. Headlines will read:

Mary expects child . . . Joseph not the father!
Mary's wedding plans postponed!

Mary expecting . . . and missing!

Mary knows that her family will be outraged. Her father will be shamed. The Rabbi's will be incensed and she may very well be in physical danger.^{iv}

And oh the grace of God to Mary here . . . you know what's happening? Gabriel isn't just namedropping favorite cousins of Mary's.

This is more than, "Well you know, your cousin Elizabeth is expecting a baby too – and she's past child bearing years – isn't that amazing?"

No, it's more than that.

Gabriel is giving Mary information that ultimately provides hope and security and safety and understanding . . . and clarity.

Gabriel is saying, "Mary, you need someone who understands what it means to live under a cloud of suspicion. You need to learn from someone who learned to keep serving God in spite of tongues wagging and fingers pointing – and accusations of shame."

Ladies and Gentlemen, Gabriel is giving Mary the name of the only person on the planet who will be able to understand.

Mary's Visit

In fact, Mary will be able to help Elizabeth along that line too. *Notice verse 39. Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.*

This was a hundred mile journey – taking Mary 3-4 days to complete. No mention of a guide or chaperone or family member.

Oh, and by the way, if Mary had anything to hide – if she had sinned morally, the last place she would want to go is to the home of one of Israel's priests – whose duty it was to uphold the law!^v

Apparently Mary is alone – suddenly here she is, in their doorway, unannounced, unexpected, saying, "Hello Elizabeth."

And at the sound of her voice, notice *verse 41. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she cried out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed among women are you and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

These are Old Testament times. The Holy Spirit anointed people, He didn't indwell them. That will

take place after Pentecost and the creation of the New Testament church.

In the New Testament He came and stayed. In the Old Testament He could come and go – as He did with King Saul.

So it's in that context that the Holy Spirit anoints Elizabeth with His inspiring presence so that Elizabeth delivers this amazing declaration – and Zacharias, by the way – representing an unbelieving nation unable to hear from or speak for God – stands there watching.

But he's no doubt rejoicing too because for them both, the piece of the puzzle has just been found.

They had been given the message from Gabriel that their son would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

But where was the Messiah?

I mean, if our son is going to introduce to the nation and to the world the Son of God – where is the Son of God?

When does He show up? How does He manifest Himself? Where will He come from?

All of that is answered now. Elizabeth knew nothing of Mary's visit from Gabriel – she knew nothing of Mary's pregnancy.

But at this moment, there in the doorway of her cottage, the truth came to her in a moment!

And she said, "Mary, I know Who you're carrying . . . I am in the presence of my Lord."

Two cousins are bearing in their bodies the final instruments of redemption – the forerunner of the Messiah who will effectively become the last Old Testament prophet - John . . . and within Mary – the Messiah – the Living Lord – the Son of God.

And if that isn't enough of a moment to remember – did you notice what pre-born baby John does? Elizabeth summarizes it in *verse 44. For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.*

Are you sure?

Listen only a mother knows the sensation of when her baby delivers a kick, or turns over.^{vi}

Only a mother knows the sensation of that little baby moving around . . . getting agitated . . . doesn't want to settle down.

John is only nine inches long and weighing around 1 and ½ pounds. His skin is translucent; he has fingerprints and toe prints; sometimes he opened his eyes for brief periods and gazed into the liquid darkness of his mother's womb.^{vii}

John by means of the Spirit of God knows that he's in the presence of Christ whom he will later introduce and John, at 6 months in the womb, literally jumps for joy.

But he is a living person even then . . . he feels emotion even then.

And under the direction of the Holy Spirit he is so overwhelmed that he soars upward for joy, for he is in the presence of the preborn Son of God.^{viii}

This was effectively his first prophecy . . . before he's even been born.

And did you notice what Elizabeth said in faith – **verse 43 again – I am in the presence of my Lord.**

Unborn, but yet divine. I am in the presence of my Lord.

We're not given the details, but we can only imagine the following three months of fellowship in the home of Zacharias.

What wonderful times Mary and Elizabeth would have shared while Mary was a guest in her cousin's home.

They were kindred cousins . . . and who could understand them like they could:

- Both were miraculously expecting and Mary is also beginning to show;
- Both of their sons had been announced by the angel Gabriel
- Both were carrying sons who would fulfill prophecies of old
- Both sons would have ministries that converged and weaved together

No doubt these women speculated together over scriptures related to their son's lives and ministries; they prayed together; they talked about birth and babies.

Verse 56 informs us that *Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months before returning to her home.*

Bible scholars have pointed out that **verse 56** is a summary verse, given to inform us that Mary leaves after three months, but not necessarily before **verse 57** takes place.

Which I think is highly significant.

The context of John's birth indicate the Elizabeth and Zacharias kept the secret safe until after his birth. In other words, family and friends found out only after she delivered her baby.

Which means that Mary very well have played the role of midwife and nursemaid – with Zacharias as an assistant.

This would have been an important part of Mary's education in childbirth and delivery.

You see, three months after Mary leaves her cousin's house, she'll have to deliver her baby virtually alone – with no help from anyone but Joseph.

So even in this period of time, God was preparing Mary with what she needed.

But what a scene this was here at John's birth. The news is out. Elizabeth and Zacharias and everyone there are filled with joy.

The text indicates they had kept the pregnancy a secret all the way through the delivery of John. Only after the baby boy was born, were all the neighbors and family invited to share in their joy.

Now, what happens next became a defining moment of faith in both the hearts of these new parents.

Notice **verse 59**. *And it came about that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. 60. And his mother answered and said, "No indeed, but he shall be called John." 61. And they said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name."*

I love this scene.

It's time to name the boy . . . but Zacharias still can't speak a word.

So the family decides for him. We'll call him Zacharias Junior.

We'll have Big Zach and Little Zach.

And Elizabeth speaks up and says in **verse 60**, "No, we're gonna name him John."

And everyone says, "Nobody's named John – that name doesn't appear anywhere on the family tree . . . why would you do a thing like that?"^{ix}

It was the custom of this day to name a son after a father or grandfather – especially if their forefathers were noteworthy.^x

Where'd John come from . . . it doesn't sound anything like Zacharias – doesn't even start with a Z.

This must be post-natal confusion . . . we'd better ask Dad.

Verse 62. *And they made signs to his father, as to what he wanted him called. 63. And he asked for a tablet, and wrote as follows, "His name is John." And they were all astonished.*

They're just completely offended.

Don't you love it when family sticks their noses into your business?

You're going to do what with our grandchild? You're going to teach him that? That's not what the rest of the aunts and uncles and cousins believe. Just wait until the rest of the family finds out what you're doing.

Some of you right now are doing things and developing things and believing things as a family because of your obedience to the word of God and your extended family thinks you've lost your mind.

You're going to do what? You're raising them how?

Look at this scene here at the synagogue . . . all the family is bent out of shape because the miracle boy won't be named after one of them . . . he isn't gonna carry on the family name . . . why of all things . . . who ever heard of such a thing!?

But listen, John isn't there to carry on the family name. He's there to introduce Someone who will give to everyone who believes in Him a *new name*.

Their son is going to introduce an entirely new family!

His name is John – which means, the grace of God – which is, by the way, how you get into the family of God.

And all of a sudden, after Zacharias acts in obedience to the message from God his tongue is loosed – *verse 64. And he began to speak in praise of God. And fear came on all those living around them; and all these matters were being talked about in all the hill country of Judea.*

I'll bet they were!

- A surprise pregnancy.
- A priest unable to speak or hear.
- A lengthy visit by an unmarried pregnant cousin.
- Talk of prenatal prophecies and angelic visitations.
- Plan turned upside down and lives forever changed.

This is the talk of that region . . . in fact, we're still talking about it today.

I can't help but wonder . . . how prepared are we to have our world changed . . . our plans turned upside down.

We've got our grocery list of things to buy for the wedding – for retirement – for that first child – that adoption – that job – that career – that education – that house – that dream – that plan . . . and then God interrupts it all with something else:

- something different –
- something difficult –
- something sudden –
- something disturbing –
- something unexplainable.

But you know you must obey.

You know in your heart that there's no excuse for you to say anything else to God but, "Here, Lord, I'll set aside my personal list of items I'm expecting in life . . . and simply offer my body, mind and heart to you as a living sacrifice – holy, acceptable to you, which is the only reasonable thing for me to do."

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- i Citation from preachingtoday.com
- ii The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 8 (Zondervan Publishing, 1984), p. 832
- iii John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Luke (Kregel, 2005), p. 66
- iv Phillips, p. 68
- v Ibid, p. 68
- vi R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume One (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 40
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- X Expositor's Commentary, p. 838