

Sermon – Luke 1:39-56 – Personal / Group Study and Reflection

“Counting our Blessings”

Luke 1:39-56 (English Standard Version)

Mary Visits Elizabeth

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 fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” 56 And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

The following questions relate to the morning sermons (8.30 and 10.30 services) on Sunday 15th December 2024 (available on the church website).

Feel free to pick and choose questions / sub-questions as appropriate for your group's interest, preferred study style and time available. They are simply there to facilitate good discussion / reflection. Do **NOT feel you need to go through them all.**

(1) Opening Icebreaker.

- (a) What sorts of things do you regard as blessings? In other words, when might you say: “I was really blessed because of” (e.g. given business class flight upgrade; got good weather on holiday; had the all-clear from a medical test).
- (b) What do you mean by ‘blessed’ when you say ‘blessed’ in this way?

(2) Meaning of Blessing. Blessing is a powerful concept across the Old and New Testaments.

(a) What do you think the Bible means when it says 'blessed'? Look at the original Hebrew and Greek words translated 'blessed' in Genesis 1 v28 and here in Luke 1 v42, 45 and 48.

(b) To what extent is being blessed by God independent of hardships and struggles. What does this tell us about the essence of God's blessing. Mary for example was fearful of being pregnant out of wedlock yet still praises the Lord and says how blessed she is. And later, had to flee to Egypt after Jesus' birth; was materially poor; saw her son brutally executed.

(3) How we are blessed. Mary is clearly blessed in unique way by being given honour of bearing and nurturing Jesus. But her song of praise (Magnificat) in v46-55 highlights many ways we too are blessed, and which are cause for rejoicing.

(3.1) Spiritual insight and part of God's plan. Mary believes God's word and that God is always faithful to His word (v45-55). And as a result, she receives the spiritual insight to see that she is part of God's plans and purposes, and that this is a great blessing to her.

(a) Reflect on how God has been faithful to His word in your life – personally, your family, wider events.

(b) To what extent have you had spiritual insight from believing God's Word / God 'speaking' to you in respect of:

(i) your place in God's plans and purposes; and (ii) what is happening in the world and how God might be moving? In what ways has this been a blessing to you?

(3.2) Exalted. Mary highlights how God blesses by ... exalting the humble and scattering the proud and bring down the mighty from their thrones. She sees herself exalted because of her humble estate and servanthood (v48, 51, 52)

(a) What does 'being humble' and 'being exalted / lifted up' by God look like to you? Give examples.

(b) What does God 'scatters the proud' mean to you? Do you see the hand of God in world events in this way (e.g. recent rapid fall of the Assad regime in Syria)?

(c) Why is being exalted by God such a blessing to Mary ... and to us?

(3.3) Filled with good things. Mary highlights how God blesses by ... filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty (v53).

(a) What do you think is meant here by 'hungry' and 'filled with good things by God'? Give examples.

(b) How might we miss the good things that God wants to fill us with?

(3.4) Shown Mercy. Mary highlights how God blesses by ... showing mercy to those who fear Him from generation to generation (v50).

(a) What do you think it means to 'fear God' and what does God's mercy look like to you? Give examples.

(b) Mary draws a link between our fearing God and receiving God's mercy. How then do you reconcile times when God seems to be merciful to those who don't fear him, and what does this tell us about why we should nevertheless fear him?

(3.5) Saved. The greatest mercy and blessing are that we are saved. It is why Mary begins with "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (v46,47). Mary is rejoicing in a person, her Lord, God her Saviour. She is rejoicing in being in relationship with God. This is source of great blessing to her.

(a) Take some quiet time to let 'your soul magnify the Lord' and reflect on what being saved by Jesus means to you. And give thanks for the many ways you have been blessed by God over your lifetime.