

Text: Luke 1:39-56

Title: "Blessed by Believing"

Introduction: Merry Christmas Everybody!

This worship series is called, "It's Not Your Birthday!" Now, I know that a couple of you may happen to have December 24th or 25th as your birthday, but the point is that we celebrate Christmas because of the birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph in a little town called Bethlehem.

Most of us get a day or two off of work or a week off of school. We get together with family and friends and have parties. The stores have big sales and we are reminded to get each other gifts to show our appreciation and our love to one another. All of this is done in remembrance of the GIFT of the Son of God to the world and to Mary. We do these things to remember that God loved each of us so much that he GAVE as a GIFT His only Son to come and die on a cross so that you and I can be forgiven and made right with God again. We give gifts, because we remember that people/wise men came from other countries to give gifts to this new King who came to live on earth.

But, I think most people have forgotten "Whose" birthday it is. For many people Christmas is an excuse to spend a lot of money, eat a lot of food, go to a lot of parties and expect to get gifts themselves. We use Christmas as a holiday (which derives from Holy Day btw...) to get away from the normal routine of life.

Here's what we want to do this Christmas Season – get away from the normal routine of Christmas! Remember that we celebrate because of JESUS! Ask Santa to only bring your kids 3 gifts (that's what Jesus got!). Remember that Jesus the baby grew up to be Jesus the Savior and Lord and Jesus challenges us to carry on the ministry that He started – namely inviting people to get to know God and start living life the way God created them to live!

How did Jesus do that? He took care of the needs of the people ... he fed them, he healed them physically, He cared for the people and they knew they were loved... especially those people who may not have been loved by their society (prostitutes, tax collectors, fishermen, etc.) THEN, Jesus introduced them to a faith in Him/God.

That's what we get to do! We, as followers of Jesus Christ, get to carry on that work of caring for those in need and loving the daylights out of the "Least of These".

In 2009, approximately \$450 Billion will be spent world-wide on Christmas. Most of that will be spent by people getting gifts for other people. Many of those gifts will not be needed! A lot of those gifts will end up in storage units by 2011!

Jesus taught us that if we really want to please Him, give something useable to those who really need it! Jesus said that what we do to and for "the least of these" – for most of us, there is someone we know who is in more need than we are – we do to Him. It's Jesus' birthday. Let's give Him a gift!

Here is my invite to you ... utilize one of the ways we have of REALLY GIVING this Christmas and help out someone who needs some help ... giving tree, food pantry, cookies for food pantry, t-shirts for orphans, etc.

Let's Pray!

Before we go any further, let me invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other is a brief outline of how we are going to break down the Scripture. Please grab a pen and fill in the blanks and write down whatever else you think will help you in your faith journey or day-to-day life. When we leave here, please take this home and refrigerate it. Re-read our scripture a few times this week... Go over the notes that you write down, so that what we learn today sticks with you a little better. For those of you who are listening online or are IPODing, you can download our program and outline off of our website so you too can fill in the blanks!

Our Scripture for today is part of the ongoing story of the people/family that God chose to use to bring Jesus into the world. Two weeks ago, Zechariah found out from the angel, Gabriel that his wife, Elizabeth was going to have a baby... And she was OLD! Last week we read that Gabriel came back to tell Mary that she was going to have a baby, even though she was YOUNG! This week, the two women get together...

READ LUKE 1:39-56 NOW!

I have a profound statement to make before we get too far into our Scripture for today ... are you ready? **MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT!**

That's right, I said it! Seriously! Different! Last weekend we watched as a little girl showed that in some ways she is much stronger than one of the stronger men here in worship. How? Because men and women are different!

Do you all like watching people? I do. I like watching when two or more couples get together, like for dinner. They will be sitting at the table and the two women are about a foot apart and chattering like two parakeets with ADHD. I have no idea how they think of enough to talk about. The two men are doing the normal man thing. They are laid back in their chairs, straining their necks to see the flat screen that has ESPN on and commenting about what's happening every few minutes (btw – no TV = even less conversation ... “Good burgers, huh?” “Yep!”).

The women, meanwhile, can't stop. If one has to go to the bathroom, guess what? They both go ... you know why? They have more to say and they cannot afford to waste the time! **MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT!**

I can guarantee that if both of those men have to go to the bathroom at the same time, one will stay at the table until the other one gets back. I can also guarantee that you will NEVER hear from a man ... “Hey, Fred, I have to use the restroom. Want to go with me?”

When women get together, they don't talk; they **SHARE!**
MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT! More on that in an upcoming worship series...

Just imagine the **SHARING** that went on in the context of our Scripture for today... You've got **TWO** pregnant women: one too old to have kids and one who has never been with a man. Do you think they might have some sharing to do!?!?

Here's what we are going to find ... Three people full of joy over what God has done.

Here's what has happened: Mary finds out that she is going to be pregnant out of wedlock in a small town. An angel, Gabriel, tells her that it's okay and that her cousin Elizabeth, who is too old to have children, is 6 months pregnant...

Mary is probably scared. Mary knows that she is going to be ridiculed in her own hometown. Mary needs to have some time with someone who might understand. And so our Scripture says, “A few days later, Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea...” to be with her cousin Elizabeth. (MAP and PICTURES)

I. **Elizabeth’s Joy** (vs. 39-45)

- A. Mary did not have to wait long to feel comforted once she arrived at Zechariah and Elizabeth’s house. It says that she entered the house and greeted Elizabeth and that her first reaction was “a glad cry”!
1. You’ve heard women do that right? I don’t have to give you an example...
 2. If you have heard a woman receive good news (“Mom, you’re going to be a grandma!” or “We’re getting a puppy!”), you know what a “glad cry” is.
- B. To a young girl like Mary who had gone through some pretty confusing experiences in the past few days, it was probably great to have what the angel, Gabriel told her, confirmed. Here is her older cousin telling her, “God has blessed you ... Why am I so honored that the mother of my Lord should visit me?”
1. Remember that Zechariah AND Elizabeth came from the Tribe of Aaron, the priestly tribe. Elizabeth grew up in a home where the Messiah was probably spoken of often!
 2. For her to say to Mary the phrase, “... the mother of my Lord...” probably confirmed for Mary that things were going to be okay! She wasn’t losing her mind, etc.
- C. Then, Elizabeth tells Mary, “You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”
1. Because Mary believed the Word of God, she experienced the power of God in her life.
 2. Mary believed God enough to agree to have this child. “I am the Lord’s Servant. May everything you have said about me come true” takes a lot of guts!
 3. I wonder how many times we miss out on experiencing God’s power in our lives because we read God’s Word and don’t LIVE like we believe that it’s true.

II. **John’s Joy** (v. 41)

- A. Then there is the unborn baby in Elizabeth’s womb. Gabriel told Zechariah in the temple that his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born...
1. When we are filled with God’s Spirit / Spirit of Unconditional Love, we sense when God is near.
 2. John did. Even before he was born.
- B. John did the same after he was born. With a vengeance he declared the coming of the Son of God.

1. John spent his adult life excited that the world was about to change for Good!
2. People came from far and wide out to the wilderness to hear John preach and teach and baptize people in preparation for Jesus ministry to start.
3. John was full of Joy that Jesus had arrived!

III. Mary's Joy (vs. 46-56)

And then, there's Mary. When Mary heard Elizabeth's words of confirmation and encouragement ... when Mary heard that even Elizabeth's unborn child was excited to be around the Son of God, maybe it finally hit Mary what a major part of history she was playing!!

And so, she went back to God to say "thanks"... We call her song of praise "The Magnificat", because in Latin, the first word of verse 46 is "Magnificat", meaning, "to magnify". All Mary wanted to do was magnify or praise God above all! And so she did ... She praised God for what God did:

A. For Mary (vs. 46-49)

1. Mary praises God for being her Savior. "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!" Mary was a sinner like all of us and needed a Savior! (v.47)
2. What else did God do for Mary? God chose Mary, a lowly servant girl, to be the mother of the Messiah / the Lord / the Son of God. What an awesome responsibility and privilege given to her! (v.48)
3. What else did God do for Mary? She calls God the "Mighty One" who has "done great things for me". (v.49) Mary understands that God is performing a miracle in her life and it's not about her!

B. For Us (vs. 50-53)

1. Mary praises God for what God did for US... God's mercy (not getting what we deserve) for all who believe in God.
2. Mary mentions three groups of people here that she senses God cares deeply about:
 - a. The **Helpless** (v.51) as God scatters the powerful in this world. Remember, their world was life oppressed by powerful people (Roman Empire).
 - b. The **Humble** (v.52) will be brought up as the world's mighty are brought down.
 - c. The **Hungry** (v.53) will be filled with good things and those who think they have a lot will find they have very little.
3. Do you get the picture from Mary who God invites us to care for as we follow Christ?
4. Jesus spent his life showing us how to care for the Helpless, the Humbled, and the Hungry ... the whenever you did something for the "least of these, you did it for me (Jesus)".

C. *For Israel* (vs. 54-55)

1. Remember that the Messiah was promised to the Israelites first!
2. God chose to use the Jewish race as the entry point for God to impact humanity. Jesus was Jewish. Jesus disciples, preached to and cared for Jewish people first and then challenged the disciples to widen their scope to the non-Jews.
3. Mary praises God for keeping His promise to her people!

IV. **And So It Starts** (v. 56)

- A. We believe because of the timing that Luke mentions that Mary probably stayed with Elizabeth until her son, John, was born ... and then, Back to Nazareth and the Ridicule.
 1. Mary had to go and face the music ... she had to hear what Joseph had to say now that Mary's pregnancy was becoming evident.
 2. Mary had to go back to Nazareth and experience what the town people were going to say.
 3. Hopefully, her time with Elizabeth helped her to be assured that what God said through Gabriel was true.
- B. Here's what else started ... The Messiah's Life Starts as God's Gift to a poor peasant girl.
 1. From that act of love by God towards Mary, we see what we, as followers of God are to do ... give and help and love and care for "the least of these".
 2. Jesus showed us how throughout His ministry ... read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John! Jesus changed the world he lived in for Good!
 3. This whole Christmas thing ... this celebration of Jesus' birthday, reminds us of why we are here. You and I, as followers of Jesus Christ are to change the world for Good!
 4. ...And you are doing it ... other churches = can't ask them to give to anything else. I've been bragging about you all ... \$9,200.00 to rescue children from slave labor, drug rings, and child prostitution in India, Cambodia, St. Vincent, Bosnia and Croatia ... (*my lack of faith / t-shirts!*)
 5. Like Elizabeth told Mary, "You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said." Mary believed and her act of faith changed the world for Good.
 6. You believed ... and You are Changing the World for Good!
 7. As your pastor, I am so blessed to be a part of it!
 8. "Can anything good come from Nazareth/Boscobel/Mt. Zion/Crawford County?"
 9. Now, you women have something to SHARE!!

Let's Pray!