

### **Luke 1:39-56 (ESV)**

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.

Hope for the best. Prepare for the worst. That’s the approach most of us live by.

This weekend we hoped for good weather for the JESUS Walk. It’s turned out even better than what we hoped for. But we also had to be prepared just in case the weather turned bad on us. (if you’ve been here for a while, you know what those kinds of JESUS Walk weekends are like)

All of us have certain things that we hope for. We know that all of our dreams won’t come true, but we hope that at least some of them will.

Hope is more than wishful thinking. Hope is the expectation that what is desired will take place.

The three cardinal Christian virtues are faith, hope and love. All three are tied to the Gospel. What is the hope of the Gospel?

That the sovereign God of the Bible does what He has promised. Through the seed of the woman He will crush the head of the serpent. He will restore what sin has broken.

That's the reason why we celebrate the birth of Christ.

- He is the seed of the woman.
- He is the promised one born into a fallen world.
- He came to redeem the children of Abraham.

That may sound abstract and far removed from your everyday life. But that remains our hope today.

We all hope for a better world. We hope for peace and prosperity. We hope for good health and a joyful life. But what is the basis for such hopes?

A strong economy? The next election cycle? Advances in science and medicine? All those things would be welcomed, but they guarantee nothing.

The world is broken. The curse of sin separates us from the God who made us. We cannot fix what is wrong in ourselves or in the world.

The very things that we hope will bring us happiness will often be the source of our greatest heartaches. People will disappoint us. Plans will falter. The best of our intentions will fall short.

Until God restores what sin has broken, the world will continue to dash our hopes and mute our joys.

The hope of the Gospel is that the life, death and resurrection of JESUS Christ is the guarantee of the ultimate triumph of God over sin and death.

Mary and Elizabeth carried that hope within their wombs. It is our prayer that you will know that hope in your heart. Believe the Gospel. Put your trust in Christ.

On this third Sunday of Advent, we have this reunion of Mary and Elizabeth. Both women were with child. Both had much to look forward to.

Their hopes were growing inside them as they anticipated what the LORD would do with the infants they carried.

### **Luke 1:39-41 (ESV)**

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,

There are two things about hope that I notice here. First, hope is forward looking. Even if your best days physically speaking are behind you, there is something even better anticipated.

Mary and Elizabeth looked forward to giving birth. Holding a child in your arms is worth waiting for. Hope anticipates what is yet to come.

Advent is always forward looking. Four Sundays to prepare for the celebration of Christmas. But the incarnation is more than a holiday.

The birth of Christ happened in history, but its ultimate meaning points us to the future. We look forward to His return, and the reunion that we will have Him and all the redeemed.

No matter where you are in life, with JESUS Christ, you have a future and a hope.

The second thing I notice here is that hope has to be shared. When you have hope, you can't just keep it to yourself.

Verse 39 says that Mary went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah. That trip would have taken a few days.

We don't know if Mary traveled alone or if she was accompanied by others, though I can hardly imagine a young woman making that kind of trip on her own.

The reason for her trip was twofold. First, she was told by the angel Gabriel that her relative Elizabeth was in her sixth month of pregnancy. Mary came to share in that joy.

Of course Mary was also with child, though at this point that was not public information. Elizabeth knew, and so did the child that was within her.

Mary felt safe with Elizabeth. Back in Nazareth, things might not be so safe. Nobody was likely to believe or understand the circumstances of Mary's condition.

Mary and Elizabeth could share the joy of knowing that God was doing a great redemptive work through them.

We had our first child while we were in seminary. Some of you remember Doug and Marci Walker who were from Tyrone who went to Covenant a year ahead of us.

One of my favorite pictures is with Sandy and Marci both great with child standing side by side in all their maternal glory. There's a radiant glow to an expected mother.

Mary and Elizabeth had the added joy of knowing that the LORD would use the fruit of their wombs in redeeming God's people. That was a joy that they had to share with one another.

Most all of us have certain people that we gravitate to and enjoy being with. Family, close friends, those you have connections with. Most of the time you're closest to those who share a common interest with you.

You root for the same team; you have comparable tastes; you participate in similar activities.

When you find someone with whom you are spiritually compatible, you share a special kind of fellowship. Your hopes, dreams and aspirations are very much alike.

Spiritual fellowship doesn't require that you have the exact same view on every doctrinal issue. It does mean that you have the same kind of hopes and expectations.

Mary and Elizabeth were both with child, but more than that, they were both expecting and looking forward to what the LORD would accomplish in His redemptive work.

When Mary greeted Elizabeth, instantly the two of them felt that kinship. If you are blessed with such a friend, relative or spouse, you know how sweet that fellowship can be.

If you don't have anyone to share that kind of kindred spirit with, make that a priority of prayer.

Believers are meant to encourage each other in the faith. Mary and Elizabeth needed each other. You need someone to confide in as well.

This applies to men as well as to women. I don't know who Joseph confided in back in Nazareth. There are no quotes from Joseph at all in the Bible.

In the JESUS Walk Joseph is the only person that we had to write lines for outside of Scripture.

What we know about Joseph is in Matthew's Gospel. In a dream he was told about Mary through an angel. Who could Joseph talk to about that?

Men don't often get together to talk about our feelings. Sometimes we don't talk at all. Men handle things differently than our counterparts.

But men have goals, hopes and aspirations as well. When men come to my office to talk, it's usually because something that had such high expectations didn't work out.

A job, a plan, a dream. We hope for the best, but we're not always prepared for the worst.

Spiritual fellowship happens when you deal with the joys and setbacks in life knowing that God has a purpose for everything that takes place.

When you believe that, you find someone else who has that same conviction, and you encourage one another. That's what Mary and Elizabeth did.

May the LORD grant to you someone with that same kind of kindred spirit so that together you can **rejoice in the LORD**.

Notice how Elizabeth responded when Mary approached.

### **Luke 1:41-45 (ESV)**

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."

There was a dear elderly couple in the church that I grew up in that were just like that. (Lindsey & Zelma) As a new believer I would come home from college and make it a point to stop by their house.

They would welcome me with this same kind of warm greeting, as if I was the most important person in the world to them. They would always ask, "What is the LORD doing in your life now?" They never failed to encourage me as a young believer.

For Mary, this kind of greeting from Elizabeth lifted her spirits like nothing else could.

She was away from home, perhaps for the first time. She was in her first trimester. There were all kinds of changes going on in her body and in her life. But together they could rejoice in the LORD.

### **Luke 1:46-49 (ESV)**

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.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to cause believers to rejoice in the LORD. When your spirit resonates with God's Spirit, the joy of the LORD will be your strength.

Mary's song of praise is known as the Magnificat. In the JESUS Walk we put these words to music. Mary may not have sung this song, but it's a glorious hymn of praise to God.

It's patterned after the song of Hannah in the OT. It's a hymn that expresses the wonder and goodness of God. Hannah had prayed for a child, Mary was told that she would be with child.

Both Hannah and Mary knew that the fruit of their womb was a gift of God. He is the giver of every good gift. Apart from His blessing, all of our lives would be barren.

It takes a work of the Holy Spirit to reveal that to us. When I talk with people who have no interest in the things of God, I have to remember that it's the work of the Spirit to show us our need.

The Spirit convicts us of our sin and misery. The Spirit makes our need for a Savior evident. The Spirit humbles us before God and draws us to JESUS Christ.

The only way that we can worship God in Spirit and in truth is through the Holy Spirit.

That's why the book of psalms has always resonated with the people of God. The psalms are the hymns of the Bible. They sing of the goodness of God.

### **Psalm 103:1-5 (ESV)**

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! <sup>2</sup> Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Mary was still quite young when she sang her Magnificat. Elizabeth was well along in years, yet her youth was renewed as the Holy Spirit filled her heart.

It is said that Christmas is for the young at heart. I believe that, but it doesn't matter how old you are in chronological age to be young at heart. The Holy Spirit revives the hearts of God's people.

The Spirit leads you to wonder and awe. The Spirit gives joy and peace. The Spirit causes you to rejoice in the God of your salvation.

Finally, the mercy of God is the basis of our hope. The Christian faith is not about getting what we deserve; it's just the opposite. It's about grace and mercy.

### **Luke 1:50-55 (ESV)**

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.”

The basis of Christian hope is the mercy of God. He is aware of your needs. He knows what you long for. He will not forsake those who look to Him in faith.

He will have mercy on you not because you earned it, but because He is gracious, compassionate and merciful.

I close with this: if you think that you deserve a good life and a place in heaven when you die, you will not like the Christian faith. You will be constantly disappointed with what you're dealt with.

But if you come to Christ in faith asking for mercy, your joy will be found in the hope of the Gospel.