

Luke 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 December 2014

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Before we turn to the passage that we read there in Luke's gospel, let's sing again, and we'll sing the second hymn in our sheet, From Heaven You Came, Helpless Babe. It also has a Christmas theme to it, certainly at the beginning, but then takes us through, beyond the birth, through to the death of Christ also. From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled, not to be served, but to serve and give your life that we might live.

This is our God, the servant king. He calls us now to follow him. Let's stand to sing this hymn. Let's sing this hymn.

From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled, not to be served, but to serve.

And in your life that we might live. This is our God, the servant king. He calls us now to follow him.

To bring our lives as a daily offering, of worship to the servant king.

[2 : 0 5] He calls us now to follow him. In the garden of tears. His heart, the servant king. He calls us now to follow him. By any hope he chose to live. His heart with sorrow, for strong.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[4 : 5 1] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Turn with me to the passage that we read in Luke's Gospel, and very especially the final verses that we read from verse 39 that record Mary's visit to Elizabeth.

This is a short passage, but it is a beautiful passage about two beautiful expectant women, and expectant in the most beautiful way.

Both expectant of the birth of the child in their womb, and both expectant of the fulfillment of the promise in their heart.

So, what we have here are four characters, four characters in this homely drama played out in the hill country of Judea.

[5 : 5 0] We have Mary and Jesus in her womb, and Elizabeth with John in her womb. And our focus this evening will be on the least prominent of the four, Elizabeth.

And I'm sure Elizabeth, if she were able to express an opinion, would protest at being the center of attention. She would do the very thing that she did in the story before us.

She would point us to Jesus. But though we will be focusing on Elizabeth, we will also, as we do so, allow her to do what is most needful, and that is to point us to Jesus.

And what I want us to do this evening is to focus on three spiritual realities concerning Elizabeth for us to understand, to admire, and in a measure to look for or recognize in ourselves as believers.

And the three spiritual realities that we're told of, that are described to us or recorded for us in our passage, are these, that Elizabeth was filled, Elizabeth was favored, and Elizabeth was faithful.

[7 : 10] And these are the three realities concerning Elizabeth that we want to think about this evening. She was filled with the Holy Spirit.

She was so favored by God, and she was faithful, as in full of faith and believing. So let's think of these three realities.

First of all, Elizabeth was filled. She was filled with the Holy Spirit. We read there in verse 41 that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

And what I want us to do is to think about this at two levels or in two ways. First of all, to think about the nature of this filling, of her being filled with the Holy Spirit.

And then, and the two things really go together, the effects of this filling, the effects in Elizabeth, of her being filled with the Holy Spirit. First of all, then, let's think a little about the nature of what is happening here to Elizabeth.

[8 : 20] She was filled with the Holy Spirit. What, or rather, who was Elizabeth filled with? Well, we're told very clearly and explicitly she was filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity.

She was filled with God, we could say. She was filled with the Spirit of God. Now, in the matter of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of God's people, Elizabeth stands at the dawn of a new age.

In the Old Testament, we read on numerous occasions of how the Holy Spirit would come upon, or similar language, come upon God's servants and prophets to equip or enable them for a specific task.

We've seen that even in these past few weeks as we've been going through the book of Judges, how we read of that language, or we come across that kind of language of the Holy Spirit, coming upon a servant of God, to equip that servant for a particular task.

That might be, as in the case of the examples we've seen in Judges, to deliver God's people, or more commonly, or more often, to bring a word from God to God's people.

[9 : 44] And so even the prophets, their ministry was one that was punctuated by those occasions when the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would be enabled to speak a word from God.

But the nature of this work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these men and women, it was an occasional work, an occasional work of the Spirit of God for a specific time and purpose.

But we say that Elizabeth stands at the dawn of a new age in the matter of the work of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, and even in the person of the child that Elizabeth is cradling in her womb, the work of the Holy Spirit will take on a new character, that of a permanent indwelling.

That is what we are told of John the Baptist, that he would be filled with the Spirit of God, even from his mother's womb. But Elizabeth is part of the old order, if we want to use that kind of language, of the old economy.

And so the Holy Spirit comes upon her and fills her at this particular moment to equip and enable her for a specific task. In this case, to reveal God's truth concerning the child in Mary's womb.

[11 : 15] So we can say that regarding the nature of this filling, of her being filled with this Holy Spirit. But what about the effects of being filled in the experience of Elizabeth?

And as we consider her experience, I think we can, certainly in some measure, draw from that, as we would examine ourselves and see in what measure we too know and experience the same impact and effects of the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

So what about the effects of being filled? And let me suggest three in what I would tentatively say is descending order of importance or priority, though I'm happy to be challenged on that, whether it is indeed in a descending order of priority.

But certainly three effects that I want to highlight. The first one that I want to highlight is insight. An effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit of God is that Elizabeth is granted insight, spiritual insight.

She is given insight into God's truth concerning herself and concerning the Messiah, concerning Jesus in Mary's womb.

[12 : 30] We notice, for example, that concerning herself, she is able to identify the reason for John's leap in the womb. Now, it's not an unusual thing for a woman who is pregnant, as Elizabeth was pregnant, and given the stage of the development of her child, for there to be a leap in the womb, some movement in the womb.

That in itself is not unusual. It's not extraordinary. But here we find that Elizabeth is able to identify the reason why this has happened. We read there in verse 44, As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Now, this isn't some maternal hunch. This isn't Elizabeth saying, well, I reckon that's probably the reason. No, she's able to declare with absolute confidence and certainty that this is the cause of John leaping in her womb in the manner that he did when Mary entered Elizabeth's home.

This insight is an effect of her being filled with the Holy Spirit. But then also, she is given insight, perhaps even more importantly, she's given insight into the identity of the child in Mary's womb.

There we read in verse 42, Immediately on being told that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, we read, In a loud voice she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

[14 : 09] And then, her insight into the identity of that child is revealed in verse 43, But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

She's able to declare. She is given this insight into the identity of the child that Mary is carrying. And this insight that is an effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit, we could describe this insight as spiritual and scriptural, and the two really go together.

I say that it's spiritual insight in the sense that it is Spirit-given. It is the Holy Spirit who grants her this insight, and so in that sense, it is spiritual insight.

There is no other way that Elizabeth could have known and declared what she did concerning John's leap and Jesus' identity with such confidence and security apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Her insight, in that sense, is spiritual insight. But I'm also describing her insight as scriptural. And I say that, and what I mean by saying that, is that her insight is grounded in and consistent with her knowledge of the revealed Word of God.

[15 : 31] We can safely and confidently assert that Elizabeth would have been familiar with many of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.

She and her husband, Zechariah, were part of this small holy remnant of Israelites who longed for the coming of Messiah. And so, this biblical truth would have been familiar to her.

But not only that, in the matter of the Word of God, she would also have been privy to God's message delivered through the angel to her husband, and then we can be assured, relayed by her husband to Elizabeth, a message that concerned her son and also concerned the son who she would prepare the way for.

And so, this was all Word of God that she was familiar with, Scripture, if you wish. And so, when the Holy Spirit comes upon her, even the Holy Spirit is not working in a vacuum.

Elizabeth is enabled by the Holy Spirit to perceive and declare that which is wholly consistent with her existing knowledge, limited though it may well have been her limited knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

[16 : 57] So, this insight that is in effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit is certainly spiritual insight. It derives from the Spirit of God, but it is also scriptural in that it is certainly consistent with the Scriptures and even the measure of her understanding of God's Word already delivered and provided to her.

So, that's one effect of being filled with the Holy Spirit in the experience of Elizabeth insight. But a second effect that I want you to notice and that really stands out and the passage is marked by is joy.

The whole scene is marked by joy, by excitement, by enthusiasm, by celebration. This is a joyful scene.

And this joy that we find in Elizabeth herself is joy that is grounded and irrepressible. We can call it grounded joy because it is grounded in the promises of God that have come to Elizabeth, but not only in the promises that she has heard, but also in the evidence of God fulfilling His promises.

In her own body, there was evidence of God fulfilling His promises to Elizabeth. Elizabeth has heard the promises and now Elizabeth is able to see and even feel the fulfillment of God's promises.

[18 : 27] And so, her joy is grounded in these realities. And these promises produce and provoke a joy that cannot be contained.

And as we read, she erupts in joyful praise and blessing. In a loud voice, she exclaimed. And then we read on what follows.

So, the effects of being filled with the Spirit of God are insight, joy, but let me suggest another one that we might not immediately think of or identify in the passage.

And that is what we're calling creativity. Creativity. Now, what is that about? Why do I say or why am I suggesting that one effect, and certainly in the experience of Elizabeth, of being filled with the Holy Spirit is creativity?

Well, I say that because Elizabeth's benediction, the blessing that she pronounces there, beginning in verse 42, is not only insightful.

[19 : 37] We've already noted that it is insightful. It declares God's truth concerning the one in Mary's womb. But not only is it insightful, not only is it joyful in her delivery, it is also poetic.

Now, this is lost somewhat, almost holly, really, in translation. But in the original, the form of words employed by Elizabeth as she erupts in blessing is unquestionably poetic.

There is a beauty even in the arrangement and composition of the words that come from her joyful, trembling lips. It's interesting to see how Luke is very interested in this whole aspect of poetry and song in the birth narratives, unlike the other evangelists, unlike the other gospel writers.

He picks up on this in Elizabeth's benediction and the magnificat that follows and in Zechariah's song. But here in the words of Elizabeth, there is insight, there is joy, but there is also art, there is poetry.

There is a beauty even in the manner in which she expresses God's truth. Now, why is this? Was Elizabeth a poet? Was this what we might call a natural, though certainly God-given gift that she possessed?

[21 : 01] Well, it may be. We don't know. Certainly it is spontaneous. This isn't something that she'd been able to sit down and think about. How will I order my words in such a way that it is more beautiful and more poetic?

No, this is a spontaneous outburst of art, of creativity on the part of Elizabeth. And so, given that that is so, it seems entirely reasonable to explain her poetic utterance as being principally attributed to her being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Isn't that an interesting thing? That one effect of Elizabeth being filled with the Spirit of God is that she is able to express herself with such poetry and beauty and creativity.

But when we think about it, it ought not to surprise us. God is the ultimate artist. All artistic expression and beauty is ultimately derived from and a reflection of the Creator.

He is the one who is the author of all creativity. Indeed, on that note, it is intriguing that the only occasion in the Old Testament where we find the near exact equivalent expression to the one that we have here concerning Elizabeth, that she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

[22 : 28] In the Old Testament, the one occasion where we find this same language used, a very similar language used, is in connection with a craftsman or an artist, Bezalel. In Exodus chapter 35, and in verse 30, or from verse 30, we read, Then Moses said to the Israelites, See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel, son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts, to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship, filled with the Spirit of God and so enabled to do all that is recorded, he was able to do.

So Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And what about you? What about us? Our privilege as New Testament believers is greater than the privilege enjoyed by Elizabeth.

As with her son, John the Baptist, God's purpose for us is that we be permanently filled with the Holy Spirit. The measure in which we are will be evidenced by our spiritual insight, grounded in Scripture, and our spiritual joy, grounded in our believing and claiming the promises of God.

And for some, not for all, but for some, even in the manner in which they cultivate and express their art and creativity for the glory and honor of God.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, this first spiritual reality that we encounter in this passage. But secondly, we can see that Elizabeth was favored. She's the one, or this is the language certainly that is employed to translate verse 43.

[24 : 25] But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Let's think about this, this favor that Elizabeth speaks of.

Let's think about the nature, the priority, and the response of Elizabeth to this favor of God. First of all, the nature of God's favor in Elizabeth's experience.

In what way was Elizabeth favored? Well, she herself explains to us the nature of this favor that she is so grateful for.

She says, I am so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me. The mother, Mary, was bringing the Lord, cradled in her womb, to the home of Elizabeth.

This is the nature of the favor that Elizabeth exalts in. She is being visited by the Lord, by the promised Messiah, by the Redeemer of Israel.

[25 : 26] Crossing the threshold of her humble home in the hill country of Judea was the Lord of glory. And so she is able to declare, I am favored.

I am so favored. This was the nature of God's favor that Elizabeth is pointing to and delighting in. But let's also think about the priority of God's favor.

And perhaps that's not the best way of expressing it, but really what I want to do is to notice that Elizabeth was favored in many ways, but that of all the favor of God that she enjoyed, it was this favor that stands out.

This is the one that enjoys, even in the mind of Elizabeth, a priority. And I say that because of the language that Elizabeth uses. She asks the question, why am I so favored?

Why am I so favored? And what I want to do just for a moment is to contrast that or contrast this language with what we read in chapter 1 and in verse 27.

[26 : 30] Rather in verse 25. In verse 25, we read from verse 24 partly to include this in our reading. There we read, the Lord has done this for me.

This is Elizabeth speaking. The Lord has done this for me, she said. In these days, He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people. So here, Elizabeth is already speaking of God's favor upon her.

And indeed, it was a great favor that she enjoyed. That she, in her old age, should give birth to a child, should be granted a child, and that as a result, her disgrace would be taken away from among the people.

Favor indeed. But what she now experiences, a woman who has already known God's favor, but what she now experiences, in the moment that Mary enters her home, surpasses even such favor.

She is now visited by the Lord. What of Elizabeth's response to God's favor? Well, we can describe it as joyful and humble submission.

[27 : 41] Now, we've already touched on her joy, so we won't dwell on that. But notice also how Elizabeth's response is of humble submission. This is evidenced in one of two ways, certainly.

To begin with, Elizabeth clearly is captivated and consumed, even not by her own miracle child, who we could rightly describe as a miracle child, but she is captivated in far greater measure by the child in Mary's womb.

Now, isn't that a strange thing? For a mother to be more captivated by the child in another's womb, and yet this is what we find. It is a child in Mary's womb that altogether captivates the attention and the admiration of Elizabeth.

And that in itself is an example of her humility, an example of her humble submission to God's will and to God's favor to her, but also to Mary.

But then also note how she describes the child in Mary's womb. She describes the child as my Lord. But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

[28 : 54] The child in Mary's womb is addressed by, identified by Elizabeth as my Lord, the one Elizabeth would gladly bow down before in praise and worship.

Her response to God's favor is of joyful and humble submission. So, Elizabeth is filled, filled with the Holy Spirit, favored by God.

But then finally, notice how Elizabeth can also be described as faithful, a third spiritual reality. Now, here I use the word faithful in the sense of full of faith or believing.

And I could have just said believing, but I wanted faithful because it tied in so nicely with filled and favored. Faithful, full of faith.

Elizabeth was very much of those who believed with the angel Gabriel that nothing is impossible with God. We've read these words in the verses that then introduce us to the account of this visit of Mary to Elizabeth as the birth of Jesus is foretold to Mary.

[30 : 04] And these are the words of the angel, for nothing is impossible with God. And Elizabeth certainly was one who believed that to be so.

And her conviction of faith is both simple and grounded. Let's just notice her simple conviction. Elizabeth, in a way that is simple, and we use that word not in any way to diminish her faith, far from it, but rather to admire it.

Her faith is simple and uncomplicated in that she is persuaded that God delivers. If God has promised, then it will be so. If God has declared, then it will come to pass.

Now, we see this in a particular way in verse 45, though it's not immediately evident. Notice what Elizabeth says in verse 45. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.

She is addressing, or certainly speaking, of Mary. And so at first sight, what Elizabeth is recognizing is Mary's faith. We read that, and that is the natural reading.

[31 : 15] Elizabeth is recognizing the blessedness of Mary in that she has believed what God has said to her. And of course, that was true. Mary did believe what God had said to her through his angel.

But there are those who would argue that this verse can be understood in a different way, and really all that it involves is changing how you translate one little word, and it's the word that.

that. And it can be persuasively argued that rather than having the word that, that in verse 45, you can have the word for.

And if it was the word for, notice the difference that it makes to the meaning of the verse. Blessed is she who has believed, that clearly in reference to Mary, for what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.

See, it turns things around somewhat. There's still a recognition of Mary's faith, but by translating it in this way, there is then a recognition that Elizabeth is saying, Mary has believed, and I also believe.

[32 : 20] I'm also persuaded that what God has said to Mary will be accomplished. I believe that too. Now, regardless of how you choose to translate the verse, I think we can confidently assert that Elizabeth was persuaded.

But it's interesting to notice that it's possible that even in the text itself, there is evidence of this simple, uncomplicated, but deep faith of Elizabeth concerning God's faithfulness and God's capacity to deliver on His promises.

Hers was a simple conviction, but it was a grounded conviction. Why did Elizabeth believe with such conviction? Well, we might say that there was a threefold foundation to her faith, her trust, her belief in God.

Her faith and trust was grounded in a life lived close to and in the service of God at the beginning of the chapter. We haven't read from the beginning, but there we have Elizabeth and her husband described in verse 6.

Both of them were upright in the sight of the Lord, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. Behind her, there was a whole life lived, believing in and trusting in and serving God.

[33 : 43] And so, her conviction, her grounded conviction, her simple conviction is grounded in this life that she has lived, but it's grounded also in the Word of God and in the message of the angel.

Why is she persuaded that these things will happen? Well, because she has been told. She has received this message from God, delivered through the angel to her husband and relayed to her.

In addition, of course, to the Old Testament scriptures that she was familiar with and trusted in. And then her faith and trust was grounded also in the evidence of her own child.

She didn't only have a promise yet to be fulfilled, though I'm sure that would have been sufficient for her. She had the evidence that the promise was being fulfilled in her own womb.

You can almost imagine someone asking Elizabeth if she were expressing with such conviction her faith concerning God's faithfulness. Perhaps someone who is less certain might have posed to the question, well, Elizabeth, how can you believe and trust in God with such security?

[34 : 55] Now, Elizabeth could have answered that question with words. No doubt she could have done so very satisfactorily with words, but she could also have answered with a telling glance at her rounded belly.

That would have been answer enough to Elizabeth's conviction concerning God as a faithful God who keeps His promises.

What about us? What about you? Do you believe that what God says He will do? Do you believe that the promises that He makes, He keeps? Do you believe that our God is a God who delivers?

Do you believe that nothing is impossible with God? Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. She was favored by God.

She was faithful, believing in God. Examine yourself. If you are a believer, you are also so favored. You are indwelt by the Spirit of God and charged to be ever filled by the Spirit of God.

[36 : 01] You have every reason to be faithful, to be full of faith and ever trusting in the One for whom nothing is impossible and who is faithful evermore.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the Bible. We thank You for the way in which it gives us the opportunity to meet with the saints of God in times past.

And we thank You that even at the distance that separates us, there is a sense in which we can connect and warm to those who share our faith. We thank You for the challenge that they give us, the encouragement that they provide for us.

We thank You that the God who dealt with them is the same God who deals with us. We thank You that You are a God who is pleased to bless Your people. You are a God who would fill us with Yourself.

You are a God who is ever willing and ready to favor us greatly. And we pray that we would be persuaded and ever more persuaded that we with Elizabeth are so favored.

[37 : 08] We thank You that You are a God who we can believe in, a God who is dependable and trustworthy and reliable. and we pray that our faith would be a simple faith, a faith that is grounded in our experience of God, in the Word of God, in the evidence of You being, promise, keeping God.

And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing now from Psalm 45.

On page 56 of our psalm books, Psalm 45a, and we will sing verses 1 to 6, and we'll sing these verses to the tune, Richmond.

A noble theme inspires my heart with verses for the king. My tongue's a skillful writer's pen composing lines to sing. Psalm 45a, verses 1 to 6.

Let's stand to sing. Psalm 45a, and we will sing it. Amen. Amen. Amen. Bible Explosives Criminal C ■■■■■id Let's stand to rock sell the best of men. Your lips are full of praise.

[38 : 56] For God has blessed you ever more. His light shines on your face.

O mighty one, take off your sword and hide it on your fire.

With glorious splendor hold yourself and create your majesty.

Ride forth in state victoriously for me ignis truth and pride.

Let your right hand display your taste of awesome power and might.

[40 : 15] Let your sharp barrels pierce the hearts of those who hate king.

And all the nations of the earth into subjection bring.

Your royal throne throne will last throughout eternity.

Your kingdom scepter will be one of truth and equity.

will see. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always.

[41 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.