

Introductory

This material is exclusive to Luke. This text is not appointed to be read on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. In the three-year lectionary from LW, Luke 1: 39-45 (46-55) is appointed to be read on Advent 4C. This is the only Sunday this text is appointed to be read in LSB. The Magnificat is one of four liturgical canticles recorded in the Gospel of Luke. From WIK,

These songs are Mary's Magnificat; Zechariah's [Benedictus](#) (1:67–79); the angels' [Gloria in Excelsis Deo](#) (2:13–14); and Simeon's [Nunc dimittis](#) (2:28–32)

Prior to this, Luke begins with a “Preface,” explaining his rationale for writing this book. Then he goes into some detail about the conception and birth of John the Baptizer, including conversations involving Elizabeth, Zachariah, and Gabriel. Then The Annunciation, Gabriel’s announcement to Mary about her role in bringing forth a son, and the manner of conception of that Son by God.

Textual Notes

39. Having been told by Gabriel (36ff) that her relative Elizabeth was six months pregnant and still being called “barren,” Gabriel then departed, and “Ἀναστᾶσα δὲ Μαριάμ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὴν ὄρεινὴν μετὰ σπουδῆς εἰς πόλιν Ἰούδα – Mary rose up in those days, journeyed urgently into the hill country, to a city of Judah,” almost certainly the city of Hebron.

On a very basic level, Mary needs to compare notes with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was eightyish years old, long past the time of childbearing, especially for a “barren” woman, and Mary wanted to know more about that. As far as Mary herself was concerned, what was going on inside of her own womb was similar to – and even more miraculous than – what was happening within Elizabeth.

The timing is such that the pregnancy of Elizabeth is six months ahead of Mary’s. Her leaving with “σπουδή” means that Mary leaves Nazareth for Elizabeth shortly after learning of the conception of Jesus. She stayed at the home of her relative for three months, which means that Mary left about the same time that Elizabeth was bringing John the Baptizer into the world.

These days, it’s not uncommon for a teenaged girl to be with child. In fact, children having children is a problem. In Mary’s world, such a thing was rare, perhaps unheard of in a small town like Nazareth. Today, Nazareth is a city of over 77,000 people. In the time of Mary, it was a small village, a place where everybody knew everybody’s business, and people would have talked.

I don't think it was the primary purpose of Mary leaving Nazareth, but the result was that she did not have to endure the whispers and looks of the citizens of her hometown. To be sure, it was only a temporary solution; When she returned to Nazareth after three months, she would have been showing, and the neighbors would have commenced to do what they do with somebody like her.

Some of the Actual Bible Scholars point out that the journey was "in haste" because Mary would have wanted to catch a caravan with which to travel. How often would such a group leave Nazareth, headed seventy or eighty miles to the south? Some think furthermore that Joseph would have arranged for such a trip. Others think that he probably escorted her there and returned home.

Those ideas are all plausible, conceived in silence, and are by no means essential to the story. So is the idea that Mary went quickly to Elizabeth out of care for her aged relative. But that tends to make the story about Mary being a good Christian. To be sure, Mary was a good Christian, and she may well have been concerned about Elizabeth, but that's not the essence of this account.

We note that the manner of John's conception and birth played out in a mostly public way; everybody knew that something unusual was going on with that couple. On the other hand, the angel had told Mary and Joseph what was up with Jesus, but nobody else knew. We further note that John's conception was highly unusual, but Elizabeth was impregnated by her husband.

The angel made abundantly clear to both of them that Mary was decidedly not impregnated by her husband. Whereas we presume that Elizabeth and Zachariah had engaged in normal marital relations since their wedding day, and they had to have been sexually active for John to be conceived, Mary and Joseph had never engaged in sexual intercourse. God is the Father of Jesus.

40. Mary seems to have known where she was going, "καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ζαχαρίου καὶ ἡσπάσατο τὴν Ἐλισάβετ – and she entered into the house of Zacharia and greeted Elizabeth." The house is said to belong to Zacharia, but she is there to see Elizabeth. The kind of greeting spoken of here is common in the NT, occurring sixty times in many and various contexts.

41. There was nothing unusual about Mary greeting Elizabeth, but that greeting got John's attention, "καὶ ἐγένετο ὡς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας ἢ Ἐλισάβετ, ἐσκίρτησεν τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς – and it happened, as he heard the greeting of Mary, the baby in her womb leaped." The word "leap" or "jump" occurs here, shortly later here (44), and later in Luke (6:23).

As for her part, "καὶ ἐπλήσθη Πνεύματος Ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλισάβετ – and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." I find that phrase, "filled with the Holy Spirit," ten times in the NT. Nine of them are by the hand of Luke (including Acts), The phrase means that the person so filled – Zacharia, John, and now Elizabeth – is about to proclaim the Word of God, and in turn each of them do.

In Ephesians (5:18), Paul tells his readers not to get drunk, but to be "filled with the Spirit" juxtaposing drunkenness with proclaiming the Word. Perhaps the most noteworthy occurrence is

at Pentecost. People wonder and the exegetes ponder the meaning of being “filled” like that. The Pentecostals have a field day, tripping over one another to define exactly what that could mean.

42. The Word Elizabeth proclaimed is quoted, as she proclaims of Mary, firstly “καὶ ἀνεφώνησεν κραυγῇ μεγάλῃ καὶ εἶπεν Εὐλογημένη σὺ ἐν γυναιξίν – and she cried out in a loud voice and said, ‘blessed are you among women.’” The verb “blessed” is a passive perfect participle; it means that Mary is the recipient of God’s blessing, and that her being blessed will continue into the future.

If those words sound familiar to us, they sound a lot like the words Gabriel said to Mary earlier, at the Annunciation. That’s one thing. The other thing – the commentaries like to talk about Hebrew Parallelism – is that “καὶ εὐλογημένος ὁ καρπὸς τῆς κοιλίας σου – and blessed is the fruit of your womb,” another passive perfect participle with the same meaning applied to the unborn Jesus.

43. That being the case with Mary, Elizabeth wonders aloud, “καὶ πόθεν μοι τοῦτο ἵνα ἔλθῃ ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Κυρίου μου πρὸς ἐμέ – and from where this to me, that the mother of My Lord to me?” Using ellipsis – clearly a subjunctive form of the verb “to come” is implied, she compares herself to Mary. She is the mother of John by Zacharias. Mary is the Mother of God by God the Father.

The term “κύριος – Lord” usually with the definite article (“The Lord”) comes down to us from KJV times. It’s the word the English use to speak of “The Lord of the Manor,” and all that implies. The Scots talk about “The Laird of the Manor.” In the NT, the word almost always refers to God, sometimes the Father, sometimes the Son, at least once (2 Corinthians 3:17-18) the Spirit

At the Third Ecumenical Council, convened in Ephesus (431), Nestorius argued that Mary should be called “*Christotokos*, Greek for ‘Carrier of Christ’, and not *Theotokos*, Greek for ‘Carrier of God.’” (WIK). The Orthodox position won out, and it was confirmed appropriate for the Church to speak of Mary as “Mother of God,” even though that makes some Lutherans uncomfortable.

44. Elizabeth is not uncomfortable. She notes that upon hearing the greeting of Mary, “ἐσκίρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ μου – the infant in my womb leaped for joy.” The noun “βρέφος – infant” or “babe” occurs eight times in the NT, and it is the specific term for a very small human, and John is probably just into the third trimester when Elizabeth says what she says.

If you want to go off on a tangent, you can talk about how Luke the doctor clearly portrays John as a human being, which he is. The baby did not “kick” as some alleged Bible scholars allege, but he moved on account of the very human emotion of “joy.” Go ahead and quote some more Bible, make the case for Life, and then move on. We do not observe Life Sunday at my church.

So, far from two unusually pregnant women relatives merely comparing notes, we have Elizabeth “filled with the Holy Spirit” noting that John leaped for joy at his first meeting with The Christ, but not until he heard the Word of greeting from the lips of Mary. It makes you wonder what exactly Mary said in that greeting to Elizabeth – what made John recognize the Christ within her?

Others would follow Elizabeth in proclaiming the Word, and others after John would find joy in meeting The Christ. This is also the beginning – very early on – of a relationship between Jesus and John that would continue into their thirties. How much they did or did not interact with each other between now and the time when He went out and was baptized by John we don't know.

Given that Mary and Elizabeth seem to be well-acquainted with one another – we can speculate about what we would call family reunions and meetings in Jerusalem at feast time, maybe they coincided with one another – it's entirely possible, perhaps likely, that the two boys spent a lot of time together growing up. John certainly knows who Jesus is when He comes to be baptized.

45. She continues, referencing Mary's response to Gabriel's words, “and μακαρία ἡ πιστεύσασα ὅτι ἔσται τελείωσις τοῖς λελαλημένοις αὐτῇ παρὰ Κυρίου – and blessed the one believing that there will be a fulfilling of those things spoken to her from the Lord.” Just because an angel said what Gabriel said to her, it doesn't mean she had to believe it. She did. Not all women would have.

And Mary seems to know her OT fairly well,

46. For Mary to say that her soul “magnifies” the Lord means she recognizes the greatness of God.

47. First John, now Mary “rejoices” and she calls her Son “God my Savior.”

48. She speaks of her own humble state and declares that from now on all generations will call her blessed, and we do. In speaking of her state, it's clear that her blessedness comes not from self, but from the son she carries in her womb, which is “blessed.” Mary knows it's not about Mary.

49. It's about her Son because He “is mighty...has done great things” and is “holy.”

50. She declares the mercy of the mighty, who has done great thing, who is holy,

51. He is strong, and He will use His strength to oppose the proud.

52. He has already (OT) brought down kings and exalted the humble.

53. Some more Hebrew Parallelism, feeding the hungry and sending away the rich, who have food.

54. It might not look like it now, but He has assisted “His servant Israel” and shown them mercy.

55. He has spoken to His people through Abraham et al. Not many gods did that.

56. After the Song of Mary, “Ἐμεινεν δὲ Μαριάμ σὺν αὐτῇ ὡς μῆνας τρεῖς, καὶ ὑπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς – Mary stayed with her about three months and returned to her home.” That's a huge silence. What did they do for three months? Ate, slept, worked. What did they talk about? The things first-time moms talk about, and their pregnancies were more interesting than most.