

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.

According to an article at www.opusdei.org, a Roman Catholic site, Air (Ein) Karim was the site of this historic meeting “according to tradition.” Ein Karim is what we would call a far western suburb of Jerusalem. At the time of the meeting, it was a stand-alone village. The location depends, perhaps, on whether Simeon was at the time serving at Temple in Jerusalem or not.

Assuming his very pregnant wife was with him, if it was Simeon’s on time in the priestly ROTA, then we can see him and Elizabeth staying at Ein Karim. But if he was not, then they most likely would have been dwelling in Hebron, which you may recall at the City of Priests, where they lived when not working in Temple. The vagueness of Luke indicates that it’s not an important point.

That same article opines of Mary,

She is not motivated by curiosity, nor does she make the journey to discover for herself whether the angel’s message is true. Humble, filled with charity – a charity

that leads her to be more concerned for her elderly cousin than for herself – Mary toes to the home of Elizabeth because she has discerned in the heavenly message a hidden relationship between Elizabeth’s child and the Son she carried within her.

In its article on The Visitation, WIK quotes Knetch (sic Knecht, Friedrich Justus),

Why did Mary hasten to visit her cousin? ... Firstly, the angel had referred her to Elizabeth, although she had believed his words without asking for a sign. She therefore believed it to be God’s will that she should visit her cousin, and convince herself of the truth of the sign given her, i. e. that Elizabeth was about to have a son. Secondly, Mary knew well that her cousin had grieved for many years on account of being childless, and she knew how happy she must be now that the cause of her grief was removed. Mary’s loving heart sympathised with the happiness of her cousin; she desired to wish her joy, rejoice with her, and join her in praising God’s mercy. He who really loves his neighbour has a loving sympathy with his joys and sorrows. Thirdly, Mary, as the holy Fathers teach, wished to minister to her cousin, and help her in her household affairs.

On a very basic level, Mary needs to compare notes with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was 80something 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 in Elizabeth.

The angel had told Mary (36-38) that Elizabeth “in her old age” had conceived and was going to have a child. Furthermore, she was in the 6th month, “ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα – because for God everything is not impossible.” Never does the angel command or even suggest to Mary that she go to visit Elizabeth. Yet in the next verse Mary does that “with haste.”

Mary knows that she did not become pregnant in the normal way. Besides comparing notes, perhaps she wants to be in the company of somebody who – like her – did not become pregnant in the normal way. Elizabeth would be an in-the-flesh affirmation of the declaration that “for God everything is not impossible.” They shared mutual conversation and consolation and more.

The timing is such that the pregnancy of Elizabeth is six months ahead of Mary’s. Her leaving with “σπουδῇ – haste” 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 went home 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, then 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 this story one 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 – of course – where she was going, “καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον Ζαχαρίου καὶ ἡσπάσατο τὴν Ἐλεισάβητ – 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 ὥς ἤκουσεν τὸν ἀσπασμὸν τῆς Μαρίας ἡ Ἐλεισάβητ, 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 after here (44), and later in Luke (6:23).

As for her part, “καὶ ἐπλήσθη Πνεύματος Ἁγίου ἡ Ἐλεισάβητ – 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 of “filled with the Spirit” is at Pentecost. People wonder and the exegetes ponder the meaning of being “filled” like that. Didn’t they have the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. Were they half-full?

The Pentecostals have a field day, tripping over one another to define exactly what that could mean, particularly how you can know that you or somebody else is “filled with the Holy Spirit. They hear of tongues at Pentecost and conclude that speaking in tongues is the affirmation that one is so filled. I have known these people. There’s a lot of peer pressure to speak in tongues.

The metaphor uses the imagery of breathing. We do that in and out for as long as we’re living, and if we stop it, damage quickly ensues that shortly you are dead. Pastors are filled with the Holy Spirit when they study (inhale) God’s Word – like when you are going to preach a sermon – and so filled they then proclaim (exhale) the Word. Layman, go ahead and get in on this if you like.

Like Elizabeth did.

42. Like Elizabeth. The Word she proclaimed 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 past and present recipient of God’s blessing, and that her being blessed will continue into the future.

Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible is a large book with small print, and the English word “blessed” takes up an entire page, which means that it occurs a lot in the KJV Bible. It also occurs a lot in other English translations, and it is actually a rendering of seven different Greek words (see Vine). Those Greek words include Nouns and Adjectives of two cognate Verbs.

Cognate words are different words that have a common origin or “etymological ancestor.” For example; we might say that a doctor (Noun) doctors (verb). I am housed (verb) in a house (noun). Those seven Greek words translated in the KJV with the word “blessed” come from two verbs and their cognates. The verbs are “μακαρίζω – to bless” (v. 48), and “εὐλογέω – to bless” used here.

The most familiar use of the word “blessed” is in the Sermon on the mount, where the adjective “μακάριος – blessed” is used repeatedly to describe Christians. As noted above, the word used here by Elizabeth – Εὐλογημένη, not μακαρίζω – is a passive verb, meaning that Mary is actively being blessed by an unnamed entity. That entity is, of course, God by whom Mary is being blessed.

The word μακαρίζω and its cognates – like the Adjective used in the Sermon on the Mount – has connotations of happiness, and that meaning is seen by many as the primary meaning. The word used here – literal meaning “good words” – is not at all about happiness, but about good words, or words of praise, directed at one person by another person. Here, God is speaking well of Mary.

If Elizabeth's words sound familiar, they sound a lot like 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 still 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 phrase makes some Lutherans squeamish.

44. Elizabeth is not uncomfortable. She notes that upon hearing the greeting of Mary, “ἐσκήρτησεν 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 in utero as a human being, which he is. He 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 did 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 that 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 πιστεύουσα 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. But 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.