

Title: Good News to New Mothers
Text: Luke 1.39-56
Theme: Joy is rooted in God
Series: Advent #3
Prop Stmt. Good News is rooted in God, who is good

A homiletics professor was giving his seminary students some tips on how to prepare a sermon, and particularly how to pick a title. He told these men that they should pick a title that if it were displayed on the church sign would motivate a bus full of people, who happened to be driving by, to stop, because all of the people wanted to run inside. The next day in class, one of the students announced that the title of his sermon was, “There’s a bomb on your bus.”

I’ve not always been the most creative when it comes to sermon titles. The Puritans were famous for having 26-32 words in their sermon titles. Of course, their sermons would last upwards of two hours or more. But, while it may not sound all that imaginative, today’s title: “Good News to New Mothers” is more than a bomb on a bus, the title reflects a text that is explosive with joy. In this Advent series, I am preaching from what I call “the lost chapter” in the Christmas account. In order to really grasp all that takes place in Luke 2, we need to be very familiar with these 80 verses in Luke 1. Luke, a gentile, and probably a physician, uses a narrative device that film directors use to this day. He goes back and forth between two different scenes so that when they all come together, you can understand what is going on.

Scene 1 is the announcement of Gabriel to Zechariah regarding the birth of John.

Scene 2 is the announcement of Gabriel to Mary regarding the birth of Jesus.

Scene 3 is the account of Mary’s visit with Elizabeth, and Mary’s song.

Scene 4 is the account of John’s birth, and Zechariah’s song.

Scene 5 is the account of Jesus’ birth.

Scene 6 is the account of Jesus’ naming, presentation at the Temple and Simeon and Anna’s prophesy.

But in going back and forth, Luke is so careful to show all of the singing and poetry that accompanied the birth of Christ. It was as if the Creation was awakening to the presence of the Creator. All that Luke is doing is showing how many different promises that God gave (OT) are all coming together in Christ. But, in this text it is so much more than an informational rush to get excited over. In this text, the Spirit of God through Luke shows us how two girls who are so full of God, and full of joy and full of peace. Their lives have just been turned upside down, and it ain’t all easy – either. But they exude such a God-intoxicated confidence that we are drawn to them, and should be.

Let’s make some general observations together:

Most of this text is a conversation between Elizabeth (4 verses) and Mary (10 verses). This conversation has a lot of joy in it, and particularly by Mary, this conversation

references many different promises of God even as she acknowledges the many kind and powerful actions of God.

In addition to the key concepts of blessed and happy, there is a lot in here about the power of God in putting down the proud, lifting up the humble and taking care of the needy. Both Elizabeth and Mary's response is God-centered. And because of that, we are drawn to them.

Here are two God-centered girls! One is older, one is younger. Both are expecting, and they are related. However, the thing that really binds them together is not the commonality of their circumstances, but the depth of their love of and trust in God.

Can you believe what is happening to us?

1. **Joy explodes when you believe God's Promises!** (39-45)

A. **Mary and Elizabeth both believed in what God told them.**

We know they believed because they acted upon them.

1) Mary demonstrated her belief by going to visit Elizabeth.

Mary immediately responded to the news that she was given (v.36). She probably traveled 80-100 miles to see Elizabeth. The trip probably took her 4-5 days, and based on the description – “a town in the hill country of Judea” she was probably not all that far from Bethlehem.

2) Elizabeth demonstrated her belief by her blessing and greeting.

Mary comes into the house and Elizabeth who is in her 6th month, feels her child doing back-flips in her stomach. Then Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit responds to Mary's visit by blessing Mary, who by her trip has come to bless Elizabeth. But notice what Elizabeth says starting in v. 42.

She blesses Mary. She calls her, “blessed among women.” This phrase is used in Jewish history (Judges 5.24) to refer to a woman who is bearing or who is being a deliverer for the nation. Then Elizabeth blesses Mary's child. She marvels at why Mary would honor her with a visit, because (notice the language), Mary is the mother of “my Lord”. Wow! She knew that Mary was called to carry the Messiah! In believing what God has revealed to Elizabeth, she demonstrates her joyful acceptance of the role that she has been called upon to play. Then Elizabeth blesses Mary for her belief in God's promises (v.45). Of course, this is in a bit of a contrast to Zechariah who, if he were home wasn't able to say a thing.

B. **Both were models of humility.**

Now stop for just a second! Consider what these two women knew. While they both were made aware that they expecting boys whose lives were not only God-ordained, these boys were the specific fulfillments of promises that God made hundreds and hundreds of years ago. That is exciting, but there was also great potential for enormous conflict. Girls you know this don't you. Pregnancies are intimately personal and yet so public all at the same time. The fact that you are expecting seems to invite the entire world to tell you their stories. (explain)

Elizabeth was old and Mary was young. Elizabeth's pregnancy was amazing and Mary's was clearly miraculous of the first order. Elizabeth's son would be great, and Mary's son would be greater. Elizabeth the older, could have been threatened by Mary, the younger. Elizabeth could have been jealous over Mary's Son being pre-eminent over her son. But, Elizabeth is fine with that and Mary stays and serves her for 3 months, presumably up until the time that John was born.

Girls who are full of God are not threatened by the joys of others. Girls who are intoxicated with the promises of God are not jealous of the joys that others share. God's grace to you is meant to be shared. What a gift, Mary gave Elizabeth by coming and honoring her by serving her and rejoicing with her. What a gift Elizabeth gave Mary in return.

People who promote themselves are always wrecking their own lives.

C. The Spirit of God was in charge of it all.

The whole scene is ordained by God to confirm in such a personal and unmistakable way his promises to these girls. The Spirit of God has His finger prints all over this. The pre-born child John, even in the womb, responds to the presence of the one who is going to carry the Christ-child. John's reaction inside of Elizabeth illustrates his ministry of responding to and pointing to Christ. John was the one who went before and prepared the way. From the announcement, through his pre-natal development, John's entire existence is for the expressed purpose of making Christ known. Elizabeth responds with a welcome and a revelation. Again, note how Luke points out that here, the Word of God came through a woman. God, through Luke is highlighting two girls who are full of God because they are full of His Word and they are humbled by it. These girls were called to an unusual task. Their children would have unusual ministries and both would die by execution at the hands of wicked people.

The promises they were given, were bigger, so much bigger than the treasures the world typically values. (explain)

When we live a little closer to the edges of life, there will be many opportunities for joy and for jealousy. Can you be deliriously happy if God chooses to bless someone else even more than you? Can you be humble when God chooses to bless you even more than others? When you do, you put the community of Christ on display.

2. Explosive Joy is rooted in believing God's Promises about Himself. (46-56)

Mary's song is based in part on Hannah's song. (1 Samuel 2) Mary's song follows the same basic outline of Hannah's song, but Mary adds some other passages from the OT. Hannah's song really focuses on her triumph over her enemies, while Mary's song has more humility and reserve to it. This text has often been criticized because people have wondered how a girl could compose something like this on the spot.

First of all, nothing in the story line claims that it was completely written on the spot. Mary had a long trip over several days to consider all that Gabriel had said to her. Additionally, many Jewish children were taught multiple Psalms in their homes and in their national celebrations. In fact, long before minivans, and personal gaming systems in them, families traveled in Israel on foot. Three times a year they gathered in Jerusalem and as they traveled they sang. And they sang the Psalms. You will notice that many of the Psalms are called the songs of ascent. That is because as they traveled toward Jerusalem, they were ascending up in elevation. These kids learned the word of God as they traveled even to obey it. It is quite a bit removed from "99 bottles of beer on the wall" or "she'll be coming around the mountain" isn't it? So, this song, while it reflects Hannah's outline has many quotations from the Psalms. It makes perfect sense to me that as Mary walked the same road that she traveled every year to Jerusalem that she would reflect on those songs of promise and hope in a fresh and personal way. I am therefore assuming that either this response, recorded here, was something that she was composing along the way, or at the very least, these promises were resonating in her heart and she, along with Elizabeth, perhaps put them into this psalm of praise. It is a beautiful poem of prayerful praise; which really illustrates a very important truth. We learn God's Word in order to learn how to respond to our circumstances. It is obvious that from a child, Mary learned the promises of God.

A. **God's Promises must be learned.** (46-55)

All of this points to the fact that God's promises must be learned. Have you ever just stopped and wondered, how could this girl just believe all that God had said to her? Did she not have any idea of how incredible of an event this really was? But wait! Here is a girl, who already knows so many of the promises of God. Her spirit and soul (using her words) are immersed in His Word. This God-centered response came out of her because God's Word was already inside of her. She had already spent her entire life believing in God's promises. This was her life. Parents! Raise your children in the Word. Raise your children hearing the Scriptures. Model humble obedience for them. You and your children will be faced with big challenges. If you daily learn and embrace God's promises, then as you cultivate a trusting heart of obedience in the normal course of life, you will be preparing yourself and your children to trust God with obedience in the challenges of life.

In this song, God is described as Savior (47), mighty (49, 51-52) merciful (48, 50, 53, 54), just (53) and faithful (55). These themes are repeated all over the OT and are particularly repeated in the Psalms. God gave his children 150 Psalms in order to teach

you how to weep in a God-centered way, how to rejoice in a God-centered way, how to persevere, how to pray, how to confess sin, how to view your children, how to look at history, how to be at peace, how to sing, how to dance, how to play, how to work and even how to die all in a God-centered way. Mary spent her life praying the Psalms. They were learned.

B. God's Promises must be reviewed. (46-55)

But once they are learned, they must also be reviewed. So, what we have in this text, is not only an example of how one girl responded to an enormous issue in her life, but this response is recorded for OUR review, so that our hearts are being reminded that God is Savior, mighty, merciful, faithful, holy and just. Some of you are facing right now, or will face very shortly some major life challenges. What is governing the way you are responding? Are you handling this the way the world would? Is your counsel godly, or is it worldly? Let's seek to immerse ourselves in these truths and delight in them.

The song itself has 3 different points:

1) God's grace (to Mary) 46-49

Mary is responding with all of her being (soul and spirit) to God because He has once again, done an amazing thing that confounds the wisdom and ways of the world. He picks the lowly to do the most amazing things. He knows His servants. He has been mindful (full of thoughts) about them. But the way that Mary responds to this is not like she won American Idol. She knows she is a nobody in the eyes of the world. God's selection of her only magnifies God's grace, not her worthiness. So, her celebration and joy is not centered on her winning this coveted position, (although she is right that we will call her blessed), her celebration is on the fact that, yes! God does look after the lowly.

Before she was "Mary, the mother of our Lord", she was Mary what's her name from Nazareth! But God knew her all along, just like God knows you and knows your trust and obedience and faithfulness and joy.

By the way, the phrase "from now on" (48b) is an important phrase in Luke's gospel that indicates that because of this event, things are going to be different. Four more times he uses it in the gospel and once in Acts.

Let me ask you – Can you remember your "from now on"?

"The Mighty One" (49a) describes God who promised the improbable (Zechariah and Elizabeth) and promised the impossible (virgin birth) and delivered!

2) God's acts 50-53

Now Mary turns her attention toward God, mighty in power, who is rich in mercy. Rich in mercy (Eph 2.4) is how Paul describes him. God describes Himself to Moses on Mt. Sinai as the God who loves to pour out His mercy upon the children of those who love him for a thousand generations. From generation to generation speaks of the enduring faithfulness of God to be merciful. Even in the last 400 years, while the prophets were silent, while Alexander the Great conquered and suddenly died, while his generals Ptolemy and Seleucid and their dynasties fought over and on this land, while the Maccabean revolt came and went and the Hasmonean dynasty ruled, and the hand of Rome tightened its grip on the territory, God had not forgotten His people. God had not ignored His promises. He did know. And know He has acted. He has been merciful all along.

He is merciful to the lowly, but He is righteous to the proud. Rest in that! Rejoice in that! Trust in that! Sing because of that!

If you are rich, be careful that you do not trust in your riches, but you use your riches as a means to serve Christ and His people by being merciful. We are warned not to love riches and power and use people to gain them. We are admonished to love people and use resources and opportunities to serve them. That is the entire point of Christ's incarnation. He gave up the wealth and benefits of his position for rejection and death because his rejection and death was the means by which his people would be saved. Those are the steps we walk in.

3) God's Sovereignty 54-55

The actions of God, dipped in mercy, driven by His glory, are all-encompassing. His promises to Abraham and his descendants are not ancient artifacts of a long-forgotten world. They are guarantees from the God of history, and the God of the present, and the God of forever. His actions are motivated by his loyal love. His mercy is grounded in his covenantal promises. Stand on his truth.

Concl.

I wrote a friend of mine this week who lives in Chicago. I said, well, our mayor may be in jail, but at least our governor isn't. The grand savior of our country, hailed great one and president-elect hasn't even been sworn into office and a close member of his political circle is heading to prison. This is life in the kingdom of man. Mary knew about life in the kingdom of man. She lived while the powerful were only merciful in order to stay in power. But her song speaks of a revolution that is going to take place. A king is coming who is not like the kings and rulers that typically characterize this world. This king and his kingdom is built on the lowly, because only the humble realize they need a Savior.