

Title: The Reunion (Part 2 of 3) – Luke 1 verses 39-45

Purpose: To consider and understand the source of the amazing JOY of this family reunion between Elizabeth and Mary.

INTRODUCTION

Christmas Family Reunion - Dread or great joy?

Well Christmas day is just 4 days away and counting.

And for most people that is going to mean:

- some rather large meal & probably
- some rather large family gathering

Thinking of the typical extended family gathering: - Q. I wonder what you are anticipating?

If you had to choose 3 “words/phrases” to best describe what it will be like – Q. What would you choose?

“Pure joy”, “sheer racket”, fun, chaos, delightful, loving, drunkenness, sleep, telly, “way too much food” ...

Today's story

As I was reading and re-reading this story of Mary visiting Elizabeth I couldn't help but notice that this type of meeting is taking place the world over right at this very time of year.

Up and down this country (and elsewhere of course) the reality is, or shortly will be, that people are beginning to gather. Family reunions are fixed in our diaries and either you will yourself be travelling or perhaps you will be receiving family members to your place.

Verse 39 of our passage this evening “At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea.”

What I want to do

And what I want to do, for the next few minutes, is try and transport us back in time to this humble setting, there in the hill country of Judea, and to try and understand the amazing **EXCITEMENT & JOY** that breathes through the whole reunion story (and it is just 7 verses long).

The journey

Now I don't know if it was an easy journey or not.

We are not told precisely the town she was going to, only that it was in the hill country of Judea, so it would have been **65 or so miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem**, and if it was **Hebron** where she was going, that would be **another 15 miles further South** still – so all in all, **PERHAPS A 3 DAY JOURNEY**.

But what we do know about this journey is that: **it was one that Mary was intent on**, one that **she was in a hurry** to undertake. She couldn't wait to see her relative because between them they shared a lot in common.

Her relative

From the earlier section we are told that Mary and Elizabeth were related.

Perhaps Elizabeth was **an older aunty**, **perhaps** they were **cousins** – we don't know, but either way they were part of the same extended family.

I suppose that like a lot of us, we just see the extended family on a rather occasional basis – but when we do it is usually an occasion for some serious catching up on news.

A greeting

And here in our passage it does start in the time honoured way – a simple (and we assume) a standard greeting.

Speaking of Mary, Verse 40 says "...she entered Zechariah's home and **greeted** Elizabeth."

Q. What did she say?

Well, it is not recorded – but we can imagine some sort of typical blessing – perhaps just a single word "**SHALOM**" – "**Peace**" in Hebrew.

A word that is very simple but actually remarkably textured and rich in meaning.

A word which conveys the wish that: the recipient would know, **entire personal well-being, and human flourishing.**

The baby leaps

Now, I think you have to admit, that if the greeting was standard, the reaction that Mary got back, was not.

Verse 41 "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby **leaped in her womb**, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."

Elizabeth's miracle baby, given that she had been barren all her life up and till 6 months ago, would have at this stage been normally quite active. So getting kicks would have been routine for her. (It is always a comforting sign for a mother that her baby is well when it inflicts a bit of pain by way of kicks.)

Here now we are told that the baby **leaped because of JOY**.

Verse 44 "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, **the baby in my womb leaped for JOY.**"

Something stirred in John

Do you not think it amazing that before John was physically born into the world, something was already stirring within him. They Holy Spirit of God was moving him to leap with joy. There is, I think, a parallel here that we can observe ourselves.

It is the case that before people actually come to the point of being born again, before people come to that clear place of certain confession of faith – that God, through His Holy Spirit, begins to work stirring them ahead of time.

People, although they are not planning to receive Christ or believe, start to feel warmed to God and toward belief.

Now I am aware that sometimes it works the other way around. People present in a different way and **instead of**

warming toward God they start to war against God, they seem to enter into something of a wrestling match with God.

Scripture itself suggests that this was the case with Paul and we see this in **Acts 26** – I'll read a couple of verses there:

(Verses 12-15) "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied."

So it is remarkable that the unborn John (who will later become John the Baptist) is already being stirred whilst still in the womb.

Q. What caused the JOY?

Now one question that we want to try and answer in this part of the Scripture is:

Q. What actually was the real cause of the JOY?

Obviously Elizabeth and Mary were thrilled to be meeting up and catching up – but that does not explain what is taking place here.

Elizabeth filled with the Spirit

Notice what happens when the baby leaps inside Elizabeth – **Verse 41** tells us that she is filled with the Holy Spirit – and arising from this we then get her inspired words and they are pretty amazing:

Verses 42-45 "In a loud voice she exclaimed: '**Blessed are you** among women, and **blessed is the child you will bear!** But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. **Blessed is she who has believed** that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'"

This infilling with the Spirit of God gives us a true window into what was happening.

It was at the hearing of the greeting that the baby leaped for joy – and we have an insight into Elizabeth's feelings at that very moment.

And it was nothing like – how very lovely to see you young Mary, how you've grown since last time I saw you the other year at Passover.

No! She says: "**But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**"

Just think that through a moment. This is a case where we really ought to extrapolate things from the lesser to the greater.

IF it is incredible, in Elizabeth's sight, that **the "mother of my Lord"**, as she terms the Messiah to be born, should come to her, **THEN, HOW MUCH MORE** is it yet more unbelievable that Jesus Himself is in the house, even though just

days/weeks old.

There is no question that there are **A COUPLE OF THINGS THAT ARE BRINGING AND PRODUCING JOY** in this reunion:

- **the FIRST is the presence and operation of the HOLY SPIRIT:**

Let me trace this out a little in Scripture so we can be assured that this is correct – speaking of Jesus in connection with the presence of the Holy Spirit – **Luke 10 verse 21** says “At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit....(and then he goes on to pray to the Father)”

Take the disciples of Jesus, following a period of evangelism and persecution, we read in **Acts 13 verse 52**: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Paul in **Romans 14 verse 17** “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Or again – Paul reminding the believers at the church of Thessalonika about how they stood firm under pressure: **1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 6** “You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”

Let me give one final example – and this is from **Ephesians and chapter 5 from Verse 18-20**: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- **the SECOND is the revelation and reception of the Word of God here in this reunion:**

Did you notice how, under the illumination of the Spirit, Elizabeth is able to discern where true blessedness lies.

(We should be clear about what blessedness really means. When we say blessed we are not simply saying happy. You see if we say we are happy that is really a measure of how we feel. If we say that someone is blessed then we are speaking about something that they are. One is much more subjective, one is much more concrete and objective.)

She is able to recognise that **FIRST Mary is blessed** – she says **“Blessed are you AMONG women...”** – notice that she **does *NOT* say “Blessed are you ABOVE women...”** – we have no reason here to be making Mary out to be no longer an ordinary woman – she had not suddenly become sinless, this is no reason for us to believe in some sort of **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION FOR MARY HERSELF!!** (that Roman Catholic teaching that Mary herself was protected from original sin because from the moment of her conception she was kept sinless).

Well because this is ***NOT* IN THE BIBLE** and is also ***NOT* NECESSARY EITHER**, given that God is able to protect His Son from being infected with sin throughout his conception within a sinful virgin.

And really if you look at it logically it is, IN ADDITION, *NON-SENSICAL* for if Mary was going to need to be SINLESS for Jesus to be born SINLESS, what about Mary's mother – she too would have to have been born SINLESS for MARY to be SINLESS and back and back it goes!!

The second identification of blessedness that Elizabeth sees is the unborn child: “and blessed is the child you will bear!”.

We should notice that this passage REVOLVES AROUND unborn children: the reunion only takes place because of them, the JOY is evidenced first in the UNBORN JOHN leaping inside the womb, and Elizabeth's sense of being so blessed herself, so highly favoured is because of the presence of Mary's unborn JESUS – the Messiah, the Son of God.

We should not miss the implication here. Some would say, these babies (**especially Jesus**, since he is only days old) are *NOT* really babies, they are just developing fetuses and so they do not yet qualify for any personhood – BUT Elizabeth calls Mary's unborn “my Lord” – “...why am I so favoured that the mother of **my Lord** should come to me?” (Elizabeth worships a fetus).

The bible does not adopt this viewpoint – the policy it takes is “**A LIFE IS A LIFE FROM CONCEPTION, NO EXCEPTION.**” – so we are always better off and more in line with the Bible to talk of unborns rather than fetuses because that tends to remove their full personhood in God's sight.

One last recognition of blessedness through the illumination of the Holy Spirit – Elizabeth is able to see that Mary herself is blessed because of the FAITH that she has exhibited simply trusting all that the angel Gabriel had originally told her before she conceived.

You cannot help but be reminded of Abraham back in the Old Testament there in [Genesis 15](#) when God had told Abraham that he would have a son in his old age and [Verse 6](#) says “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Mary is the NT counterpart to that story an example, she is the mother of faith, whilst Abraham the father of faith.

Let me give you a Scripture for this aspect of how joy comes not only with the presence and working of the Holy Spirit but also with the entrance of the Word of God:

This is a **passage very much parallel and complementary to that one in the [Ephesians 5](#)** about being filled with the Spirit and then overflowing with songs and hymns and spiritual songs.

[Colossians 3 verse 16](#) “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

CONCLUSION

Let me come full circle to where we began and the prospect of a JOY-FILLED CHRISTMAS REUNION with one or more family members.

Q. Do you expect it to be a happy time?

Q. Do you anticipate that there will be the presence of REAL JOY?

Well I hope so.

This passage has given us at least 3 bases for JOY to be present in our own REUNIONS that we are eagerly awaiting:

1. The Presence of the Holy Spirit – He in scripture is frequently connected with JOY – “Be not drunk on wine but be filled with the Holy Spirit” and the outflowing of this will be seen in much rejoicing and singing.

2. The Presence of the Written Word of God – The revelation of those things that represented true blessedness came through the Word revealed by the Spirit of God (which for us is now in written form).

3. and let us not miss the most important of all and that is – The Presence of Jesus Himself – The Incarnate Word

Elizabeth recognises this and calls the Christ child (only conceived a few days/weeks back) “my Lord”.

With Jesus in the house, all things are made complete.

My prayer is that you will have a truly BLESSING LADEN & JOY FILLED Christmas Reunion.

To Him be the Glory.

AMEN