

God of the Now

Luke 1:39 – 56

Often times when I go into one of the big box stores like WalMart or Target I will wander over to the book/video section and peruse the latest books. At times I see books by famous media and music personalities who have written their memoir or autobiography. I wonder, would I write a memoir? What would I want people to know about my life? What would I put in it? What would I leave out? The same questions could be asked of the Gospel writers. Matthew begins with the Lord's genealogy, Mark with the call of John the Baptist, and John with the theology of the Word made flesh. Another example is the involvement of Mary in Jesus' life. Matthew mentions her 7 times (maybe 9), Mark, 4 times, and John only by the term "woman". Luke, however, references her, along with the family, 13 times. Luke's Gospel gives us larger picture of Mary and also Jesus' family life.

We've begun a series on Luke's account of Jesus' life. How he begins his narrative is interesting and informative. What's included in his account and what's left out? Just to review, he begins with the story of a man, Zacharias (v.5) to whom the angel, Gabriel, appears (v. 11- 23).

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.

Next he moves on to this young woman, Mary, who is engaged to a man, Joseph. She too is visited by the angel Gabriel.

26 In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriela to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Both Zacharias and Mary are told of the soon addition to their individual family. To each would miraculously be born a son. This is where we left off last Sunday (v. 38), Mary's acceptance to her condition.

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

This morning we pick up the story in v. 39 with Mary traveling to an unknown town in Judea to visit her cousin, Elizabeth (v.39).

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

We're not told the reason for Mary's visit, or where the town in Judea is located. Scholars believe the town was south and east of Jerusalem. Nazareth, of Galilee, is north and west of Jerusalem. So Mary's trip was about 80-100 miles . Think about it. This would be like walking from Bemidji to Park Rapids (a 3-5 day journey). But now we understand how the Zacharia account connects Mary's visit to Elizabeth. But more importantly is the connections between Zacharia's son and Mary's son, in other words, the connection between John the Baptist (the last and greatest prophet) to the Lord Jesus (the Messiah).

The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth is easily divided into two parts, vv. 39 -45, the dialogue, and vv. 46 – 56, Mary's Song (Psalm). We'll take them in order.

39 – 45 Mary's blessings. Of importance is that Luke includes not one but two blessings.

41 and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

The first blessing is bestowed upon both Mary and the child (the Messiah). The second blessing is much broader, "blessed is she who believes ...". In specific the second blessing is not about Mary's condition but rather her faith (one who believes). Is this not true for all of us: that faith is a blessing that God gives to each of His people?

Rom. 12:3 Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Faith is a gift that God gives to each of us. It's a faith in knowing that God sovereign will is in control. In Mary's case she was in a difficult position, an unwed mother carrying the Messiah (the Son of God) In every case every unborn child should have a future and hope and considered a blessing.

46 – 56 Mary's Song (Psalm)

Elizabeth's blessings give us an external, relational perspective of Mary. It's Elizabeth's understanding of the situation. Mary's praise reveals her faith and a deep understanding of her relationship to God. Look at vv. 46 – 48

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,

Mary praises her Lord, not because she is something special, but rather the exact opposite. There was nothing about her that would outwardly commend her for service. And while she may not have understood the immensity of her role she certainly knew her God (vv. 49 – 54)

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

God's greatness and his holiness moved Mary to praise her God; He is merciful to those who revere him. He removes the proud in heart but exalts the humble. In God's might he removes those who are against his people. Think of God's working in Joseph's life, Moses' life, and David's. Time does not allow us to work through the many O.T. references echoed in Mary's psalm. Here is just one of many examples.

Psalm 98:1 Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. 2 The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

Mary's song gives us a keen insight into her understanding of God's grace and mercy. And the God of the OT of history and tradition was also the God of the now.

What can we take away from Mary's experience? What does Luke, better yet, God want us to glean from this account? Mary was just a poor, now pregnant, unwed young girl (maybe 15 – 16 years old). But yet, God used her in a mighty way. What does it tell us about her, about our heavenly Father?

Looking at Mary's encounter and how we can apply it to ourselves? We could easily say;

God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

So what was it that God saw in Mary? That's the question for us. Here are three applications and one warning.

1. God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." .

Did Mary truly and fully understand the angel's words? Did she grasp the biblical, prophetic, historic impact of what God was now doing? Keep in mind that God's prophetic word had been silent for over 400 years. And now this angel appears with this message.

31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 The angel answered, "The Holy

Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

When the angel announced this to her I can just imagine all the OT accounts, stories and prophecies that she had heard came flooding into her mind. Yet, those were 100's of years ago. And now it's happening to her? Can you feel the inadequacies she felt and possibly the fear. The God she worshiped is no longer a God of the past. He is the God of the now and she was part of his kingdom plan. The only response is, "I am the Lord's servant."

God is not the God of the past only. He is God of the now. If God comes to me, when he comes to me, in whatever way he chooses, what will be my response? I'm too busy, not now Lord, who me(?), I'm too old (young), I'm not trained, etc. Or, in awe will I say, 38 *"I am the Lord's servant," "May it be to me as you have said"*

God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

2. God can use ordinary people best who are humble (v.47)

*47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant
51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

One characteristic Mary emphasizes is humility. She realized that she had nothing to enhance her position with the Lord. She had nothing that would esteem her in his eyes. And she also knew that God favored the lowly and humble people. This is born out in both old and new testaments.

Prov 6:16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

Prov 16:19 Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

God has little use in his kingdom for the proud and arrogant. Why is this? Because it minimizes and depreciates God's glory. Pride detracts from God's activities and goals. Pride gives the idea that we and not God have power, ability and control over time and events. Pride gives the idea that man has infinite sovereignty when all we are is but a puff of smoke on a windy day, a fading shadow.

So God chooses a poor, young girl from a small village in Galilee (to fulfill scripture by the way) and exalts her to the highest position, the mother of God. But our culture doesn't view it this way. Parenthood, motherhood is an inconvenience, a disruption to our plans. Children are an expensive commodity hardly seen as a gift from the Lord. Nor does our culture see the benefit, the reward, the blessings of raising children in a godly home where God will use obedient and humble parents.

God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

God can use ordinary people best who are humble (v.47)

3. God can use ordinary people best who are faithful.(v45)

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

What's interesting to note is that Elizabeth changes her blessing. In v. 42 she says "blessed are you among women". But proclaims, "blessed is she who has believed..." The verse changes from 2nd person to 3rd person; from the specific, you, to a more generic "she who has..." Why the change? I think our Lord wants us to know that all who believe (have faith) in what God is doing in his/her life is truly blessed. We need to believe that God will accomplish what he puts in our heart.

God accomplished an extraordinary act in an ordinary young woman. Why, because she was obedient, humble and faithful. Those same spiritual ingredients can apply to us today.

God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

But one caveat (warning),

Allow God to define extraordinary

When I remain obedient, humble and faithful I also stay out of the way and allow God to use me in extraordinary ways that only he can define. Throughout Scripture we read of God working in the lives of ordinary people to accomplish kingdom tasks. Not because of them but because they had faith to act to accomplish his sovereign will. Today do we find ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary tasks? Take a slow walk down the hall past the Connection Center. All those names and faces of ordinary people doing God's extraordinary acts. There are even ordinary people in our congregation this morning who God has used in extraordinary ways. If you seek them out they just might tell you their story of how God used them for his kingdom purposes .

God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient, humble and faithful

Allow God to define extraordinary

verses and wording for overhead projector

Slide #1

26 *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriela to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

38 *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.*

Slide #2

39 *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.*

Slide #3

41 *....., and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"*

Slide #4

Rom. 12:3 *..... Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*

Slide #5

46 *And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,*

Slide #6

49 *for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."*

Slide #7

Psalm 98:1 *Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. 2 The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.*

Slide #8

God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Slide #9

1. God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

38 *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." .*

Slide #10

31 *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.*

Slide #11

38 "I am the Lord's servant," "May it be to me as you have said"

Slide #12

God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

2. God can use ordinary people best who are humble (v.47)

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.

Slide #13

Prov 6:16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Slide #14

God can use ordinary people best when we are obedient (v38)

God can use ordinary people best who are humble (v.47)

3. God can use ordinary people best who are faithful.(v45)

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Slide #15

God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Who are obedient, humble, faithful

Allow God to define extraordinary

sermon notes:

God of the Now
Luke 1:39 – 56

1. God can use ordinary people best when we are _____ (v38)

38 "I am the Lord's servant," "May it be to me as you have said"

2. God can use ordinary people best who are _____ (v.47-48)

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant

3. God can use ordinary people best who are _____.(v45)

45 Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Allow God to define _____

Life Group Questions

1. Scripture tells us God sends angels to serve (minister) his people (Heb. 1:14; Ps. 34:6 – 7). Have you ever experienced or know of someone who has experienced such an event?

2. In v. 45 Elizabeth gives Mary a general blessing;

Blessed is she who has believed . How are we to understand this blessing in our own lives? Has the Lord ever spoken to you in such a way that gave you a direction or guidance?

3. Reflecting back on your life, do you see God doing "great" things for you that you cannot explain other than being divine intervention? (cf. vv. 46 – 49).

4. God's mercy is for those who fear him "from generation to generation". Have you experienced God's mercy in your family's life or a close friend's life? (Ps. 44:4 – 8; Zeph. 3:17).