

## Discipleship in the Lectionary – 12/19/2021



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, December 19<sup>th</sup>

Luke 1:39-45

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### **Old Testament Meets New Testament**

What appears to be a meeting of two pregnant relatives reveals so much more. This is a God-ordained meeting of the representatives of two covenants. The Old Testament meets the New Testament. John would be the last of the old covenant prophets, announcing the imminent arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus would be the Messiah. While both are still in their respective wombs, this is their providential first meeting in Elizabeth's house. In addition to the clash of the covenants, there is another story here. Luke's Gospel is known for the prominence of women. The meeting of Elizabeth and Mary has much to tell us about the faith we are called to exhibit as well as a foretaste of the transformations within social order with the coming of Christ's Kingdom we prepare for on this final Sunday in Advent.

### Luke 1:39-45 Commentary

*<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.*

"In those days..." links these events to the preceding verses. Mary thus travels to meet Elizabeth immediately after her encounter with the angel Gabriel. The timing in the text also supports the immediacy of Mary's journey. Gabriel visited Mary in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (v.36), and she remained with her for about three months (v.45). The location is not precise nor apparently important to the historian Luke – an unnamed town in the hill country of Judea. Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in the country and thus a relatively insignificant place in the eyes of the world.

*<sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,*

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb. This is not necessarily an uncommon event, but the text indicates how Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, under the inspiration of the Spirit, Elizabeth interpreted the movement as her baby leaping with joy in her womb. John's reaction (while still in Elizabeth's womb) to the pregnant Mary fulfills Gabriel's prophecy, "... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (1:15). Even before birth, John points the way to Christ.

*<sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."*

The previous verse indicates Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and thus what comes next is Spirit-inspired. Elizabeth is thus a prophetess. She *proclaims* (*anaphōneō*) in a loud (*megalē*) cry. We can see the root of the

English word “megaphone” here. Elizabeth proclaims Mary’s blessedness. Mary was blessed because she believed. Mary was the blessed among women because of the holy baby she would soon give birth to. This Bethlehem Babe would in turn bless multitudes. Elizabeth recognizes Mary’s unborn baby as the Messiah (*my Lord*). This humble wife of a humble priest in the Judean hill country recognized Jesus as the Messiah of God before He was even born.

### Reflections

Arguably one of the most important events in human history occurs in an insignificant backwater witnessed only by two insignificant pregnant women. Neither of them should have been pregnant in the first place. Both women experienced shame. Elizabeth had lived a life of shame because of her barrenness and Mary was about to start living a life of shame because of her pregnancy during her betrothal. Yet God ordained the first meeting of the Old Testament and New Testament to occur in this way. Our God delights in taking what is small and insignificant in the eyes of the world to do extraordinary and unexpected things. Such is the Kingdom. All things are possible with God.

Mary and Elizabeth demonstrate that God can come to us at any stage in our lives and call us to a special purpose. Elizabeth was old and Mary was barely a teenager. For Elizabeth and Zechariah, their dreams of a son were finally realized when they had given up dreaming long ago. Prayers were answered. Shame was taken away. May we be encouraged that it is never too late for God to act in our lives. As we wait in hope let us give thanks that our shame has been removed and respond to God’s love by welcoming those who carry shame, those whose dreams have died, those who are insignificant in insignificant places in the eyes of the world.

God continues to do new things in our time. As we make our final preparations to celebrate the Nativity of our Lord in the shadow of Covid for the second time, our nation experiences another great Kairos moment. Winds of change blow strong. Christ calls His Church to act. Like the changes brought to Elizabeth and Mary’s lives, such radical change is always accompanied by fear. The words of Gabriel to Zechariah and Mary echo across time, “*Do not be afraid*” (v.13, v. 30). But we have a choice to make. Do we respond with the hesitancy of Zechariah or the boldness of Mary?

*“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” (1:38)*



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## The Magnificat

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”