



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for December 14, 2008**  
**Released on Wednesday, December 10, 2008.**

**"Elisabeth's Commitment"**

**Lesson Text:** Luke 1:39-45

**Background Scripture:** Luke 1:5-24; 39-45

**Devotional Reading:** Isaiah 7:10-14

**Luke 1:39-45**

**39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;**

40 And entered into the house of Zechariah, and saluted Elisabeth.

**41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:**

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

**43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

**45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.**

**Lesson Aims**

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Retell the story of the meeting between Mary and Elisabeth.
2. Explain the role of faith in the life of one who is used by God in significant ways.
3. Express appreciation to one other person for how God is working in his or her life.

**Introduction-  
Commitment**

Many years ago, a college-aged war protester was photographed holding a sign that said, "Nothing is worth dying for." This picture was on the front page of many newspapers, and his claim generated lively discussion on campuses. It is one thing to protest a war; it is quite another thing to claim that nothing is worthy of absolute allegiance. To die for something is the ultimate commitment. The question at the time was this: Was this sign an expression of a world whose only absolute commitment was to noncommitment?

This quarter's lessons seek to help us understand commitment from a biblical perspective. Commitment is difficult to define adequately and tricky to evaluate initially. Sometimes, we have no idea of the breadth or the depth of a commitment until it is put to the test, for in the end commitment must be demonstrated rather than simply verbalized. The groom who is truly committed to his bride will honor his vows of fidelity to her. The woman who is committed to her children will sacrifice her

time, her comfort, and even her personal happiness to see them thrive. The believer committed to his church will give his time and money to it in significant ways. Last week's lesson looked at the commitment of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This week, we consider another player in the drama surrounding Jesus' birth: Mary's relative Elisabeth. These two women have much to teach us about commitment, both to God and to each other.

### **Lesson Background**

In the Jewish households of the ancient world, the birth of a baby was no less a special event than it is today. The "barren woman" of Old Testament times was a married woman who failed to have children. Her lack of children was a huge disappointment to her husband. Furthermore, it was the cause of pain in her own life; it was an unfilled void. Therefore, there was great joy when a woman who had been childless for many years was blessed with children (see Psalm 113:9). This barren-woman-become-mother was the situation of Elisabeth in today's lesson. She understood her pregnancy in old age not as an inconvenience, but as a blessing (Luke 1:25).

Today's text takes this joyous commitment of two mothers to their unborn sons and factors in their deep commitment to God and His plan for the nation of Israel. The women experienced miraculous pregnancies—pregnancies that could be only God's work.

They were both affected by angelic visitations. They both had husbands who struggled to come to terms with these events. And in the end they both submitted fully to God's will and allowed their bodies to become vessels for the working out of His will.

The opening narrative of Luke tells the story of Zechariah and Elisabeth. They were a married couple who believed that parenthood had passed them by. They were described as being "well stricken in years" (Luke 1:7). It would be unusual in Elisabeth's day for a woman to experience a first pregnancy even in her late twenties or her thirties. Women married very young, and if there were no pregnancy within a year or two of the consummation of a marriage, the woman was considered to be barren, unable to have children.

Both Zechariah and Elisabeth were from Judaism's priestly tribe, the Levites (Luke 1:5). Zechariah was a member of the priestly course of Abijah, 1 of 24 such divisions. Members of each of these divisions served as temple workers for a week at a time in Jerusalem on a twice-yearly rotation. These priests lived elsewhere the rest of the year.

Elisabeth is described as being of "the daughters of Aaron," meaning the daughter of a priest. Zechariah was dutiful to serve at the Jerusalem temple when his division's time came up (Luke 1:8). We may surmise that since they had not been granted children, they had directed their devotion toward this type of service.

### **Hasty Visit (Luke 1:39, 40)**

Most people have had to make a "quick trip" at some point in their lives, a hasty excursion that didn't allow for much advanced planning. Such trips are occasioned by unforeseen emergencies or special opportunities. Today's text begins with such a journey.

### **Excited Meeting (Luke 1:39-41)**

#### **1. What did Mary do right after being told of her pregnancy and that of her relative Elisabeth? (Luke 1:39-41)**

Previously, *Mary* was visited by the angel Gabriel. Mary learned during that visitation that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. The angel also told Mary

that her relative Elisabeth was experiencing God's grace in a miraculous pregnancy of her own (Luke 1:36).

Almost immediately after receiving Gabriel's message, Mary prepared to visit Elisabeth some sixty or more miles south of Nazareth in Judaeen territory. She remained there about three months (v. 56).

## **2. What might have been some reasons why Mary wanted to see Elisabeth?**

Perhaps Mary felt that no one is going to understand her situation in her hometown, and she needed to find someone who could understand her. We must keep in mind that Mary is engaged, but not yet married to Joseph (Matt. 1:18).

Perhaps Mary wanted to share the good news to Elisabeth in person. After all, Mary was going to carry the Savior of the world in her womb, which is a miracle of God. Mary knew that Elisabeth was expecting a miraculous birth as well; Elisabeth was barren, but she was told that she will birth John the Baptist.

As believers, we need to share some of the things that God has done, or is doing for us with each other. Sometimes, there is nothing like listening to another believer's story to keep our faith strong. When God does great things in our lives, we must be willing to tell others about it.

## **3. Why can we say that these women viewed life from God's perspective instead of a human one?**

As they were discussing their pregnancies with each other, they realized that God was the one that was making the pregnancies happen. They were both godly women; thus, they were able to see things from God's perspective.

It is not always easy to see life from God's perspective. Since we are in a physical world and we live in physical bodies, our natural propensity is to think naturally. Times do come when events are obviously beyond what is natural, and then we realize that God is at work. In our day-to-day living, however, we tend to forget about God's control over every event. As we grow in our knowledge and understanding of God and how He works, we gradually begin to view all of life's situations as being under His guiding control. This is called sovereignty.

As believers come to a deeper understanding of how involved God is in our lives, our joy grows. Things we face are not accidental or lucky. Rather, they come about because of the gracious guiding hand of God. As we increasingly understand this, we become better able to handle those times in life that prove to be hard trials. We are also able to more fully enjoy the good things that God sends our way. This is what Elisabeth and Mary were experiencing. The joy they expressed to each other in their meeting was tremendous.

## **Supernatural Signs (v. 41)**

God's involvement does not stop with the two miraculous pregnancies. The special presence of God enlivens the reunion of Elisabeth and Mary.

## **4. At what moment was Elisabeth filled with the Holy Spirit, and what things happened just then? (v. 41)**

Upon entering "the house of Zechariah" (v. 40), Mary finds the goal of her journey: "Elisabeth." It was when Elisabeth heard the greeting from Mary that the baby in her womb leaped and she was filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 41).

We should not overlook this significant moving of the Holy Spirit. "He is styled The Spirit because He is a spirit; He is styled Holy because He is holy to the measure of infinity; He is identified as The Spirit of God because He belongs to the Godhead; He is called The Spirit of Christ because He is by Christ sent into the world" (Chafer,

Systematic Theology, Zondervan). This Person suddenly filled Elisabeth and enabled her to express truth she was previously unaware of.

We must remember that during Old Testament days, the Holy Spirit came upon people to accomplish some particular goal and then removed Himself when that goal was achieved. It is only since the ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost that He remains permanently in a person who has been born again (John 14:16-IS). Elisabeth lived in the days prior to the Spirit's permanent dwelling in believers; so on this occasion she experienced something she had probably never experienced before.

### **5. What spiritual benefits have you received from a relationship with an older relative?**

Probably all of us have a favorite older relative. We have been blessed by his or her wisdom and guidance. We have learned valuable lessons that will not soon be forgotten.

This fact should cause us to aspire to be a blessing to all relatives, but especially to younger ones. Those of us who are aunts, uncles, and grandparents have opportunities to make a significant impact on nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Often they will listen to us when they will not heed their own parents.

### **The Spirit Stirs Rejoicing (v. 42)**

The Gospel of Luke reveals a great interest in the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:16; 4:1; 11:13; 12:12). Elsewhere as here, Luke presents a person as being *filled with the Holy Ghost* in order to utter a prophecy (see Luke 1:67; compare 2:25, 26). Therefore, Elisabeth's words that follow constitute a divinely inspired word from God. She is acting in a prophetic manner on this occasion.

### **6. What two blessings did Elisabeth express in greeting Mary? (v. 42)**

Elisabeth's words are not privately whispered to Mary, but proclaimed loudly enough to be heard by anyone nearby. Elisabeth does not waste words, but pronounces a simple blessing on Mary and a second blessing on Mary's child.

Elisabeth set an example for us when she pronounced a blessing on Mary. Mary was indeed blessed by the Lord. She had been honored with the sacred task of bringing the chosen one of Israel into the world so that He might become the Savior of the world. For certain, we should not *worship* Mary (or any other human being). But there is a measure of respect that is due her from all who love and serve the child she bore. After all, if God approved of this young woman's life and character, shouldn't we?

### **7. Why did Elisabeth refer to Mary's baby as "my Lord" (v. 43)?**

Elisabeth's reference to Mary's baby as "my Lord" (v. 43), would serve to reaffirm what Gabriel had said earlier to Mary (c.f. vs. 26-38).

Elisabeth clearly understands the root cause of blessing in this situation. Mary, her young relative, has been chosen to be *the mother of the Lord!*

The New Testament speaks often of God's divine plan of providing for human redemption by sending His Son (see John 3:16, 17; Galatians 4:4). Yet we can think of many other ways in which the Son of God could have come into the world. He could have appeared as a full-grown man, ready to begin His work on day one. He could have been born into one of the wealthy households of Jerusalem, where He would have had easy access to the venues of power and influence. He could have come to earth on a cloud of glory, giving instant credibility to His mission by the nature of His appearance.

But God chooses none of these avenues for the advent of the Lord Jesus. The Messiah begins His human existence in the womb of a peasant girl from an insignificant village of poor reputation (John 1:46). From Mary and Elisabeth we learn that no person who is willing to serve God should underestimate his or her value. God does not look upon our outward appearance or circumstances. The Lord looks instead at our hearts (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

### **8. What was it Mary did that pleased God? (v. 45)**

Mary has the one requirement that pleases God, and uses it to make His plan work: faith. She is *blessed* because she believes. Her submission to God's will leads to the fulfillment of the angel's fabulous predictions for her son. Her boy will grow to be the true heir of David's throne, to preside over an eternal kingdom, and to be understood as the Son of God himself (see Luke 1:33–35).

It is difficult for us to appreciate fully how key Mary's role is in all of this. At this stage, the creator of the universe entrusts His plan to save sinful humankind to a teenaged girl of simple yet powerful faith. We marvel at this plan, even twenty centuries later.

### **Conclusion**

An elderly friend of mine once confided to me that his early goal in life had been to become a fighter pilot in the Air Force. As a young boy he had done all he could to prepare himself. He had read voraciously and knew extensive details about every plane in active service. He had worked to keep himself fit so he would be able to pass a physical.

Eventually, he applied and was accepted into a pilot training program. In the end, though, he washed out because his eyesight was slightly below the necessary standard. He went on to have a productive career in another field and to raise a family of wonderful children, but the desire of his heart was denied because he did not meet the standards of qualification.

What sorts of qualifications do we need to enlist in the service of the Lord? Today's lesson is about two key players in the divine drama of human salvation, and we can learn much by examining their lives. We don't know about their eyesight, but we do know that both lived in tiny villages and probably had minimal educations.

Neither Elisabeth nor Mary could bring great influence or wealth to the task of ministry, but both possessed loving, submissive hearts. They were women of faith, and they were committed to each other. They did not permit rivalry to enter their relationship. Because of these and other factors, God trusted them to be the mothers of John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ.

The basic qualifications for God's service are commitment to the Lord and commitment to His people. Such commitment finds its source in faith. But this is not "blind faith" as the world might think of when it hears the word faith. This is faith based on evidence. Both Elisabeth and Mary had evidence from Israel's history. They also had the evidence of their miraculous pregnancies.

God can always use one who has submitted to His authority and strives to do His will. As another marvelous woman of faith, Christina Rossetti (1830–1894), wrote, "What can I give him, poor as I am? ... [I] give my heart."

### **Prayer**

Everlasting Father, may we find encouragement in the examples of two of Your great servants, Mary and Elisabeth. Their circumstances were humble, yet their hearts were rich. As Mary was pronounced blessed for her faith, may we continue to receive Your bounteous blessings as we too walk in faith. And should You need us for

a task, may we be found worthy. We pray these things in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Practical Points**

1. No matter what our circumstances, God provides people who will understand and encourage us (Luke 1 :39-40).
2. Fellowship with other believers will confirm and strengthen our faith (v.41).
3. We should not hesitate to acknowledge God's blessing on others (v. 42).
4. Those who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit will not value themselves too highly (vs. 43-44).
5. It is by believing God and His promises that we experience true blessing in our lives (v. 45).

### **Thought to Remember**

God still blesses faithful, committed people.

### **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

They were simple shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem and keeping watch over the sheep when a glorious band of angels announced the birth of Christ. Absorbing this wonderful sound and sight, they sought out the child and are remembered every Christmas. Study Luke 2:8-20 "**The Shepherd's Commitment**" in preparation for this lesson.

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