

Message Series: Preparing for the Savior.
Message 4: The Birth of John the Baptist. Luke 1:39-80
Pastor Roger Ridley, Gretna Baptist Church – December 3, 2006

The Christmas Season brings the observation of a number of traditions, one of which is the singing of Christmas Carols. Whether it is *Silent Night* or *We Three Kings* we all have our favorites we like to sing.

In the verses which precede the birth of Christ in Luke's Gospel, Luke brings our attention to what might legitimately be considered the first three songs of Christmas.

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 1:39f...

Technically, by modern standards, what we find in these verses would not be considered songs, but if we think of a song as an outburst of praise to God, then certainly these are tremendous songs about the birth of Jesus Christ. As I mentioned, there are three of them: the song of Elizabeth, the song of Mary, and the song of Zechariah.

Something of interest to me is that although the backdrop of this passage is the birth of John the Baptist, these songs all look beyond him to the One he would proclaim: the Lord Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah. John's life, even before his birth, was never about him, but always about Jesus. What a great testimony that is to each of us. We get too wrapped up in ourselves, when in fact our lives should be all about Jesus Christ.

I. The Song of Elizabeth

First, we have the Song of Elizabeth in verses 39-45...

These verses describe a visit by Mary to Elizabeth, her relative, whom the angel Gabriel had said was six months pregnant. She went because the angel said Elizabeth's pregnancy in her old age was proof that what he said would happen to her was true. Her visit was to confirm the angel's message.

Upon her arrival, at the sound of Mary's voice, three things happened:

1. The baby in the womb of Elizabeth leaped for joy! When is a child a child? Is it after birth or before birth? This statement clearly indicates before! Elizabeth is six months pregnant but the child she carries recognizes the voice of Mary and responds with joy.
2. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Since this was before the birth of the church, the Holy Spirit did not indwell every believer as He does now. Instead, the Holy Spirit came upon individuals to fulfill a specific purpose. In this case, it is the song of Elizabeth.
3. Elizabeth began to sing. As I mentioned before, it probably doesn't look much like a song, but many have come to recognize it as a song of great joy expressed in behalf of Mary and the child she carried.

The word *blessed* means *great joy*. Mary was blessed, not because she was special in and of herself, but because of God's choice in her life. A person is blessed when God's favor is upon them. The glory does not belong to the person, but to God alone.

You and I can also be blessed, the key is found in verse 45, "*And blessed is she that believed.*" When you and I exercise faith in the One Mary carried we receive God's favor. We may not be special in the eyes of the world, but like Mary, we will be specially blessed of God.

In Elizabeth's song, joy was also expressed over the fruit of Mary's womb. Even though the angel had spoken to her only a short time before, Mary is already pregnant. And as we know this wasn't just any pregnancy and wasn't just any child. Verses 31-35 make it clear that He was the Messiah, and the Son of God.

It was the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb that caused John the Baptist, at six months in his mother's womb, to leap with joy, and caused Elizabeth to sing out with joy. The coming of Jesus was a cause for celebration.

There are many Christians today that do not celebrate Christmas at all, and I understand that, especially in light of the overwhelming commercialism of the season, but whether we celebrate it as a special day or not, the birth of Jesus should put a song in every one of us. It should bring joy to our lips, because Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, has come!

II. The Song of Mary

Have you ever had one of those worshipful experiences when one song leads to another? Apparently that's what happened when Mary visited Elizabeth, because as soon as Elizabeth finished, Mary began to sing out as well. Look at verses 46-56...

Without question, Mary's was a song of praise. Right from the start, in verse 46, Mary sings out...

The word *magnify* means *proclaim greatness*. Mary then proceeded to sing about the greatness of God.

She began by acknowledging God as her Savior. That is significant and should not be overlooked. There are those who believe that Mary was born without sin and lived without sin, but her confession shows otherwise. She understood that she too was a sinner in need of a Savior.

She went on to express her gratitude that God would take note of her. In the eyes of the world there was nothing special about her, but because of God's choice, she would be remembered, not for what she was but for what God did. We should all have that same thought in mind. There is nothing about us that deserves God's attention, but He regards us and blesses us, and deserves our praise!

However, Mary didn't stop there. She went on to praise Him for His might, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness. By themselves, all those attributes of God are true and worthy of praise. But let's not forget what sparked her song of praise. In Mary's womb was the long awaited One, the Messiah, the Son of God. It is in His coming that we especially see God's power, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness because it is through Him that God's promises are met in our behalf.

Through His Son, God has regarded our low estate and done for us what we could not do for ourselves, what He didn't have to do, and what we didn't deserve.

Thinking on that should cause our soul's to also magnify the Lord, just as Mary's did.

III. The Song of Zechariah

Christmas is one of the most discouraging times of the year for many people. They feel lonely and hopeless. If you remember, Zechariah and Elizabeth had felt that same way. They were good and godly people, but after years of prayer, asking God for a child, Elizabeth was still barren, as a result they felt disgraced and hopeless.

But, that had now all changed. In verse 13 an angel appeared to Zechariah and said that Elizabeth would bear a son in her old age. Nine months later that's what happened. Look at verses 57-67...

Throughout Elizabeth's pregnancy, Zechariah was unable to speak due to his doubting the angel's message. For nine months he was unable to express his excitement, but after the birth of his son, and his obedience in naming him John, his speech returned, and filled with the Spirit, Zechariah began to sing. Look at verses 68-80...

These words of Zechariah, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, expressed a song of hope. As we would expect, he immediately praised God. Wouldn't we all! After years of praying for a child, to have that child, how could we not thank God for it! But notice, in verse 69, instead of thanking God for his child, he thanked God for Mary's child; for rising up a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David. Zechariah was filled with hope as he realized all the messianic promises were reaching their fulfillment, and his son would have a role. Look again at verse 76...

John would be the forerunner of Christ, and would proclaim the knowledge of salvation, that it was not by works but the remission of sins and the mercy of God.

Verses 78-79 provide a beautiful picture of this salvation available in *The Dayspring from on High*.

The picture is of a group of travelers who are overtaken by darkness. They are unable to see where they are going and their feet are on a dangerous path. But suddenly, in the darkness comes a light, which shows them the way and enables them to escape. The darkness is the darkness of sin, and the Dayspring is the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at John 1:6-12...

Jesus is that Light, the Dayspring from on High, the hope Zechariah sung about. Have you received Him as the Light of your life? That's what Christmas is all about. Salvation has come in that child sung about by Elizabeth, Mary, and Zechariah so long ago.

In 1974, just four days before Christmas, I experienced the joy, the praise, and the hope they sung about when by faith I received Jesus Christ as my Savior. If you have never done so, you can today.

Just as Mary did, admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Believe that Jesus is the One sent by God to take away your sin.

Call upon Jesus to be your Savior, forgive your sins, and be the eternal Light of your life.

Upon doing so, you too will experience the joy, the praise, and the hope that can only be found in Him.