

Mary meets her cousin Elizabeth and worships
Luke 1:39-56
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In his book "Touch and Live", author George Vanderman wrote about a young man's experience when he made his first climb in one of the mountains in the Swiss Alps. To do this, he hired two guides to lead the way. As expected the climb was hazardous and steep, but he felt secure with one guide ahead and one behind.

Once the three of them reached the summit. The first guide moved aside to let the young man have the first spectacular view, but forgot to tell him about the strong wind gales.

So, when the young man leaped to his feet, his guide dragged him down and said "On your knees sir, you are never safe except on your knees".

With the "on your knees" quote, I think of prayer, worship and praise and adoration to God.

In our scripture text, Mary had traveled a long distance to be with her elderly cousin who in turn confirmed to Mary that she was about to become the mother of the Christ child. That experience filled her with awe and was able to praised God with a new sense of vigor. Mary modeled for us what true devotion is. My text is **Luke 1:39-56.**

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. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, 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! ⁴³ But why am I so

avored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord⁴⁷ 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,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, just as he promised our ancestors."⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. May God grant understanding to his words. Thanks be to God.

Mary was a young, intelligent, warm-hearted teenager. I picture her as someone who looked like Keisha Castle Hughes who played the mother of Jesus in the 2009 Nativity movie.

Mary's life in Nazareth was one of routine and predictability as she and her family lived in a one room mud brick house. Her chores started early in the morning as it was her job to carry a large clay jar to the town well. It was also a time for her to meet with friends and get the news of the day.

Once she returned home, Mary kept busy as she grinded wheat and barley into flour. She helped her mother cook and clean. And if there were any younger children, she was there to take care of them.

When it came to her religious faith, she had a strong belief in God. And I suspect that in the evenings, as the family gathered around the fire, her faith grew as she listened to stories of the Jewish faith and of course the hope of the Messiah who was to come.

As was the custom in those days, Mary and Joseph were pledged to be married, but in the first year they lived apart while Joseph got the house ready. We know Joseph was a man who worked with his hands as a carpenter and part of those duties was working as a stone mason. Interesting is that the scripture does not record any of his words. But from what we can see from other parts of scripture, he was receptive to the things of God and made good decisions.³⁹

Verse 39 says: **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.**

I am fascinated by this verse and what actually transpired because it was a 90 mile journey. My questions are these.

1. Did Mary tell her parents and Joseph before or after she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit?
2. Did she keep the pregnancy a secret or did she reveal it when she came home?
3. How did she convince her parents to let her visit Elizabeth so suddenly?
4. How did she actually get to Ein Karem, the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah?

5. Did her father or Joseph arrange for her transportation?
6. Did she ride a donkey? Was she a passenger on a cart or did she walk or was it a combination of all the above?

The Bible is silent regarding these answers, but the suddenness of trip like this makes me ask these questions. Already her life must have been in an inner state of upheaval and uncertainty. On the trip, she must have been in constant prayer asking for further direction and guidance.

Human nature has not changed. Mary needed confirmation. Although she was blessed and had great news, I think she carried an uncertain burden and we don't know the extent. She needed someone who would understand. It is the same with us, at times we need someone to confide in, to help us show the way. Isn't it great when we can find someone who can do that for us?

Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. It was Elizabeth that helped prepare the way for Mary. And it was Elizabeth who would understand and she recognized Mary's child as the Holy One of God, when the child leaped in her womb.

I just want to pause here for a moment and meditate on what happened in Elizabeth's womb or uterus because it reminds me of the hot button issue of the unborn that the Supreme Court is facing right now. What I have been hearing over and over again from politicians this past week in the news is that is abortion is a right.

Now what has changed since Roe v Wade was enacted in 1973 is that we now have ultrasound pictures and the fetal MRI images that are far more graphic than they were years ago. We also have a better understanding about the growth stages of life. If elected officials and judges got a chance to look at the pictures and the latest findings medical books, would it be politics as usual? This

past week, I was surprised to learn that DNA of the mother is different from her child. There is two persons, not one.

If Mary were living today, she probably would have been advised to have an abortion. Just think of it. A young 13- or 14-year-old, unmarried female. I know some people that have been so advised but went against the medical team advice and had beautiful children – many who are adults today.

Though Mary was blessed to be the mother of the Christ child, I suspect she had a difficult time in her struggle to provide answers to her parents, Joseph, and her small community. Although she could have been consumed with stress, she was able to worship.

Hear her words in verse 46. **My soul glorifies the Lord.** May we be like Mary and set aside our concerns and difficulties and by faith make our boast in God.

President Theodore Roosevelt once stated, "***You may worship God anywhere at any time, but the chances are that you will not do so unless you have first learned to worship Him in some particular place at some particular time.*** Again, may we be like Mary and put our heart, soul, mind and concentration into our worship.

There is a story of a man who had a dream in which he was escorted into a church by an angel. But there was something strange about that particular church worship service. The organist moved his fingers over the keys, but no music came out. The choir sang and their lips moved, but not a sound was heard. Other phases of the service were carried out, but silence prevailed.

Then the man finally turned to the angel and said, "What does this mean?" The angel replied, "You hear nothing because you see this service just as God sees it. The people are not putting their hearts into worship-only their lips and God hears nothing.

And during this Advent season, may our worship be rooted in this reality, that God is no longer far off, but right here with us.

The French have a proverb that provides insight for worship. It states: "**A good meal ought to begin with hunger.**" It is hard to enjoy a meal when you are not hungry. But when we are starving, anything tastes good. If we approach worship with a spiritual type of hunger to meet God, we will be filled and satisfied.

Many years ago when Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip went on their honeymoon, they attended worship services at a place called Ramsey Abbey. Usually, the worship services were sparsely attended, but when it was learned that the queen and the prince would attend, the church was filled to overflowing, with many on the outside. The curious who seldom attended church were there, not to worship the Lord but to see the queen and her husband.

Now I will admit, I did the exact same thing. In the late 1980's when I was in seminary, I attended a Baptist church one Sunday morning in Springfield, MO just to see Vice President George Bush. At the time he was running for president. On that day, I sat in the balcony and watched the VP the entire service.

My wife was watching the media personnel also in the balcony. All but a few were disrespectful, not standing, not bowing their heads for prayer, etc. One or two were respectful. My theme is to worship God with an attitude should be one of submission and of a humble heart.

How do we worship outside of church?

First have a humble and contrite heart

Second, listen to inspirational music

Third, Honor God with what you watch on television.

Forth Honor God with our finances. Recently I spoke how giving to God his due is worship but what about the rest of our finances? Is he honored how we spend our money?

Mary did not have an easy life, but she hung in there. Her life was one of ups and downs and distractions, but she was able to pray and sing praises. It would please God if we did the same. It does take a concentrated heart and commitment to do that in our daily walk. How do you honor God?

Please look up the song "Mary, Did You Know" by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene and arranged by Tom Fettke. We sang in church. It is a beautiful song that questioned if Mary knew the extent of the significance of her Child, The Savior of the World.

Merry Christmas!