

Mary and Elizabeth — Why Do I Need Christian Friends?

December 14, 2014

Welcome to CrossWinds. This Christmas we are studying the birth of Jesus from the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke on both the Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses.

Our theme for the series comes from Luke 2:15-17.

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and **see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.**” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And **when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.** Luke 2:15–17 (ESV)

We have two goals this Christmas.

1. See what really happened on that first Christmas by studying the first two chapters of Luke.
2. Tell our friends and community the Christmas story, just like the shepherds did on that first Christmas.

We are using our advent prayer cards to remind us to pray for three people in our lives that need to know the good news of Jesus.

This morning, as we continue our study in Luke 1, we meet two amazing women. These women would normally be overlooked in the annals of history. One was a young, illiterate, pregnant junior high girl from a small town with a bad reputation. Her name was Mary. The other woman was an elderly, childless wife from the Judean hill country, a part of the world that looks like the desert. Her name was Elizabeth.

Neither of these women would normally have any significance in world history. In God's upside-down economy, he took these women and gave them amazing roles to play in his master plan to redeem billions of people and to transform those he redeems from the recipients of God-justified eternal fury to recipients of God's completely undeserved transforming grace. This is exciting stuff. It begins with these two women.

Before we get to Mary and Elizabeth's story, let's recap the big story. We first met Elizabeth two weeks ago through her husband Zechariah. She was elderly and without child. Her husband Zechariah was a priest in a tiny rural village nestled in the Judean Hill Country. He was a small town priest that served a small town synagogue. He was flying completely under the radar. He wrote no books. He didn't have a podcast. His name could not be found on Facebook. God knew he and his wife were faithfully following him.

Twice a year Zechariah came to the big city of Jerusalem to serve in the temple. When Zechariah's name was drawn by lot he received a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to burn incense in the temple at Jerusalem. When in the holy place, he didn't just pray for the nation but he also prayed about the great burden on his heart. He and Elizabeth wanted a child, even though they were elderly.

The angel Gabriel immediately showed up telling him that his elderly wife would conceive. They were to name their child John, which means God is gracious. He would be a great prophet. John turned out to be the greatest Old Testament prophet to walk the planet. What is most exciting about John is he prepared the way for Jesus, the Son of God.

A touch more than six months after Elizabeth conceived, God dispatched Gabriel to deliver another message. This time it was to the small rural town of Nazareth to inform a young teenage girl, probably between the ages of 12 to 14, a junior high student, that God chose her to be the mother of the Son of God. Even though Mary was engaged and not yet married, she would conceive by the Holy Spirit coming into her womb. She would give birth to the very Son of God, the Savior of the world. She would be the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

Immanuel means God with us. God was coming to be with us. That is the theme of Pastor Jordan's advent devotional. The second person of the Trinity poured all of himself into a human body. He never left behind any of his godness but he joined himself to a human body forever in Mary's womb. Jesus did this because he loves us. He did it to become the perfect sacrifice so he could offer his life in place of our lives to save us from our sin.

One of the last things Gabriel said to young Mary was that her relative Elizabeth had also miraculously conceived. Mary's miraculous conception was without a husband in her virginity. Elizabeth's miraculous conception was with a husband but it was in her old age. Both were supernatural and unexplainable pregnancies. They didn't have a maternity ward in Elizabeth's nursing home.

Mary, as a pregnant junior high girl carrying the Son of God, had lots of questions and an understandable amount of anxiety. What would happen when she started to show? Would Joseph still marry her when he found out? Would anyone believe she was a virgin? Would she be a single unwed mother the rest

of her life? What about her reputation around town? Would everyone call her a whore? What would her parents think? These were big questions for a 12- or 13-year-old girl. Wouldn't it have been nice if there was someone older who could understand her and help her through these times?

Wait a minute. There was somebody who understood. Her name was Elizabeth. Gabriel clued her in on this. Mary needed Elizabeth. This morning we will see why, just like Mary, we also need Christian friends, especially in stressful times. As we work our way through this text we will simply make four applications of the text for our everyday lives.

Church is worth the inconvenience of the trip.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. Luke 1:39–40 (ESV)

Elizabeth was in hiding during her pregnancy. She was praising God for the miracle of a child, getting the nursery ready and celebrating the fact that she won every argument because Zechariah could no longer talk, at least temporarily. Mary set out to see Elizabeth, the only other person on the planet who could understand a supernatural pregnancy. Most of us think this was a short trip. Maybe Mary hopped on her moped and drove across town. Maybe Elizabeth lived around the corner. Not true.

This was a huge trip. Mary, the pregnant 13 year old, lived in Nazareth. Elizabeth lived in the Judean Hill Country. We are talking an 80- to 100-



mile trip. There were no flat roads. The map shows you the route a traveler



likely chose. It is rough country. Just the distance between Jericho and Jerusalem is 15 miles. The elevation change is 3,400 feet.

When you get to the Judean hill country, where Elizabeth lived, it

is constant up

and down climbing to make any progress. This is what a 13-year-old girl was willing to endure because she was desperate to be with somebody who understood what God was doing in her life.



This is an incredible reminder to each of us about the importance of building relationships in our church body with other people who understand what it means to have God at work in our lives. We need each other, especially in difficult times. There is wisdom and encouragement we need from Christian friends.

...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)

Mary needed the encouragement of Elizabeth. It was worth the inconvenience of the trip. Elizabeth, who was all alone for the last six months, also needed the encouragement of Mary. She also needed someone who understood her. They needed each other. Later, when Mary left Elizabeth, God gave Joseph a dream to explain that Mary was telling the truth about being a virgin. Joseph became the next friend who believed in Mary and supported her

as a pregnant virgin carrying the Son of God. This was a stressful time. Mary needed support. God gave it to her first through Elizabeth then through Joseph. We need each other for support, especially when God has tough callings on our lives.

This is one of the detriments of our live streaming program. God continues to bless our live streaming with as many as 50 to 80 viewers a week. I get texts from Arizona after a sermon from friends who were watching online. My wife watched online when caring for my mother. My mother watched online while dying in the nursing home. I know people in Wisconsin and Washington state that join us online. People watch all the time when traveling. We are very thankful to have broadcast technology. God uses it.

There is a down side to live streaming. Live streaming is better than not attending church, but live streaming is not church. How do we take communion together online? How do we practice the one-another commands of the Bible online? How do we use our spiritual gifts to serve others when we never see others because we are online? If church is all online, where is the Christian community and friendship that we need, just like Mary and Elizabeth needed. A church can't be all a church is to be when it is online.

There are some people who, rather than doing the hard work of finding another church after they move, are content to sit in their kitchens and live stream from us or other churches rather than finding a new permanent church. If live streaming is your permanent church, you are denying yourself the community

you need. Christians need to encourage and support one another by meeting together.

Mary didn't just need the streaming message from Gabriel. She also needed the face-to-face community with Elizabeth. Mary, a 13-year-old girl, was willing to walk endure a lot of travel inconvenience for community. She traveled 100 miles in the rock dessert. I know travel is hard in the winter for us too, but we have seat warmers. Most of us have car seats that are nicer than a La-Z-Boy. Mary didn't. Church is worth the inconvenience of the trip.

God confirms his call on our lives through other Christians.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." Luke 1:41–44 (ESV)

As soon as Mary came in the door, baby John the Baptist let for joy in Elizabeth's womb. John the Baptist knew in utero that freshly conceived Jesus was in the room. He responded with baby aerobics, jumping jacks.

Elizabeth was also filled with the Holy Spirit. That means God's Holy Spirit came on her powerfully. She blessed Mary, saying, "Blessed are you among woman and blessed is your child. Why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

About a week before, Mary was visited by Gabriel and told she would conceive Jesus. She honored God by setting aside her plans for her life and humbly accepting God's plan for her life. Gabriel's earth-shattering

announcement took time to sink into her junior high brain. She probably needed the week's journey to Elizabeth's to let the Gabriel moment sink into her head.

She was probably questioning things and trying to make sense of everything. When she met Elizabeth, God's Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth and she spontaneously confirmed God's calling on Mary's life that was given to her through Gabriel. Look at the pattern of how God did this. He placed his calling on Mary's life. He confirmed that call through Elizabeth.

I want us to notice that when God places a calling on our lives, like he did for Mary, he doesn't just speak to our hearts. He almost always confirms his call on our lives through other people in the church. Elizabeth was the first to confirm God's calling upon Mary's life. Later it was Joseph that further confirmed that calling when God spoke to him in a dream.

There is the pattern for us to follow. When God puts his calling on our lives, he will confirm it through others. I have seen this with people in the church. They tell me they sense a call to ministry or they think God is calling them to be a worship leader. Maybe they think God is calling them to be a CrossWinds Academy teacher. How do I respond when they tell this to me? The first thing I do is celebrate with them. The next think I do is tell them to not tell anybody else. Get involved in the ministry you think God is calling you to. See if the Holy Spirit moves other people to affirm that calling in your life. If nobody affirms that calling, maybe what you thought was a calling from God turns out to be some bad pizza.

If somebody feels called to be a CrossWinds Academy teacher they should keep quiet about that calling and get involved teaching to see if parents affirm what they are doing and kids are growing in their love for Jesus. If that confirmation doesn't come, God may not be calling you. You probably ate some bad pizza.

This is a true story. I once interviewed a guy for an associate pastor position that was engaged. His fiancée broke off their engagement just days before he came for the interview. The interview became a grief counseling session. We didn't hire the guy. After counseling him, I discovered why his engagement fell apart. After dating this girl for a few weeks he told this girl that God had spoken to him, telling him to marry her. He literally said, "It is God's will for you to marry me." She was flattered and accepted his proposal. A few months into the engagement she saw areas of his life she didn't connect with. She broke it off. Her words to him were, "God may have told you to marry me, but he is not telling me to marry you." I think he had some bad pizza. If God was calling this guy to marry that lady, God would have confirmed it in her life. God always confirms his call upon our lives through others.

God is pro-life.

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." Luke 1:41–44 (ESV)

Two weeks ago, when looking at Zechariah, we learned that God is pro-life. This is such an important subject for our culture, and these verse are so important in this argument, I want to spend more time on this discussion.

John the Baptist's reaction to Jesus, while he was in utero, gives us important insight into the humanity of unborn children. Clumps of tissue do not leap for joy. Human beings leap for joy. John, while in-utero, was called a baby. The Greek word for baby is used to talk about children in the womb, children that are newborns and children that are toddlers. In God's eyes, unborns, newborns and toddlers are all the same. Let me show you. We have already seen the Greek word for baby is applied to unborn John the Baptist. Where is it applied to newborns?

And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Luke 2:12 (ESV)

Jesus in the manger was called a baby, just like John in the womb.

Where is it applied to toddlers?

Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." Luke 18:15–16 (ESV)

Here we have babies that are no longer newborns but a little older.

Even extremely young first trimester children are still babies. Mary just conceived Jesus. She was only a week pregnant yet she was recognized as a mother and the fruit of her womb as being the Lord. At one week pregnant, she is the mother of a specific person, the Lord. No matter which way you slice it,

from the moment of conception forward, the Bible considers them all human beings.

I say this because abortion is an incredible problem in our country. Let me show you what I mean.¹

1. One in every six women having abortions claim to be Christians. There are 1.5 million women having abortions each year. That means 250,000 women who have abortions every year claim the name of Jesus.
2. 32 percent of abortions are given to women ages 20 to 24.
3. 40 percent of women ages 15 to 33 had at least one abortion. Think about that around Spirit Lake. Do you know how many children should be in our schools?
4. 50 percent of women having abortions use it as their sole means of birth control.

The most dangerous place on the planet for a human being is in his or her own mother's womb. That is wrong. That should be the safest place on the planet.

What does God say about the killing of an unborn child?

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. Exodus 21:22–25 (ESV)

The Bible tells us abortion is a capital crime that deserves the death penalty. Statistically that means many women in this room are murders or serial

¹ <http://www.heartlink.org/directors/abortion/A000000073.cfm>

murders. Men not wanting to be inconvenienced by child support so they pushed their wife or girlfriend to have an abortion are accessories to murder. You may not go to jail for murder now, but when we stand before Jesus and are justly punished for eternity in response to our sins, murder is on the rap sheet.

This is serious stuff. Abortion is rampant and it garners the just wrath of God. Let that sink in.

Is there any hope? If you are a woman that murdered your child, where can you turn?

Mary, the poor, unwed teenage mother from a small town, the woman most likely to have an abortion, gave birth to a son who is your hope. Jesus grew up and went to the cross and said, "I will pay. I will take the punishment for murder that you deserve to endure." The Bible says it should be a hand for hand, foot for foot, eye for eye and life for life. Jesus said, "I will give my life to take the punishment you deserve for taking your child's life." Why did he do this? Because Jesus loves you! He loves you so much he is willing to die the death you deserve to die. He is willing to take the punishment you deserve for murder.

Justice for murder should be served upon 40 percent of all women in this country between ages 15 to 33. Jesus, out of his incredible love for us, died on the cross to take the punishment for murder that they deserve. Freedom from that sin is available to any woman as a free gift because ladies, he loves you more than any man could.

Jesus didn't just die for murdering mothers but he died for the liars, the cheats, the prideful, those who disobey their parents, those who are lazy and

those who cheat their employers. He died for the rest of us. He took the punishment we deserve and he gives us the favor of God we don't deserve. That is the good news of why Jesus came at Christmas. It is offered to each one of us for free out of God's love.

There is always a blessing when we believe and obey God's Word.

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord. Luke 1:45 (ESV)

How would you react if an angel told you that you would be an unwed mother? What would you say if your marriage to Joseph might be ruined? What would you say if you realized all your friends would shun you and think the worst? I think most of us would have trouble trusting God's plan. We would think God has a bad idea. He doesn't know what he is doing. What we find is Mary was willing to take God at his word and trust her life into his hands, even when it didn't make sense. She was blessed because of it.

There is always a blessing for taking God at his word. When God tells us something that doesn't seem to make sense but we obey him anyway, we are blessed for our obedience. For us, an angelic visit telling us we will be a pregnant virgin carrying the Son of God is not in our future. God says many other things in the Bible that don't seem to make sense but he asks us to obey his word anyway, just like he did to Mary. When we do, there is always a blessing that comes with believing. For example:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 2 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)

2 Corinthians 6:14 tells us not to date or mate non-Christians. Don't be unequally yoked with an unbeliever. Too many of us say, "But God, he is so cute." "But God, he really loves me." "But God, there is nobody else out there. I don't want to be an old maid." "But God, I can be a missionary and save him." Take God at his word! Believe him and obey him. You may be single longer than some of your friends but God will bless you for believing and obeying him. Remember that it is better to be single and wish you were married than to be married and wish you were single. Take God at his word on this and you will be blessed because of it.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...
Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

In Matthew 5:44, Jesus told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. What do we say? "God, they are evil. They were mean. They hurt me. I cannot love them. I will not love them. I will not pray for them. They deserve anything they get." My friends, there is a blessing for believing this and taking God at his word, even when it makes no sense in your head. Love your enemies and pray them. Don't hate them and hurt them. God doesn't ask you to rationalize this in your head. He simply asks you to obey him and trust that he will bless you because of it.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting words come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up." What do we say? "God, I was angry. They deserved a piece of my mind. They had it coming. I don't have to

apologize for what I said.” The word corrupting means rotten. That means no swear words, mean words or hate-filled words should come out of our mouths. Will you believe what God is telling you or will you ignore it and go your own way? Some of us need to repent of our words. We have people we need to offer an apology. There is a blessing for believing God and taking God at his word, even when it doesn’t make sense in your head.

This week, let’s apply to our lives the four lessons of this Christmas text. 1) Church is worth the inconvenience of the trip. 2) God confirms his calling on our lives through other Christians. 3) God is pro-life. 4) There is a blessing when I take God at his word and obey it, even if it doesn’t seem to make sense. Please stand as I close in prayer.



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