



Sermon, December 8, 2019
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Cottage Grove and Junction City
United Methodist Churches

“A Magnificat Moment”

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Scripture: Luke 1:39-56

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” ⁴⁶ And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm,

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

⁵² he has put down the mighty from their thrones,

and exalted those of low degree;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,

and the rich he has sent empty away.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers,

to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home.

Host:

Welcome back everyone to this Sunday’s show. You recall that our special guest last week was the Archangel Gabriel, the very angel in charge of announcing to Mary of Nazareth that she was to bear God’s child, the Savior of the World. Our guest this week is another witness to

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those incredible events 2000 years ago, Elizabeth of Jerusalem, wife of Zechariah of the Temple Priesthood, and cousin to Mary of Nazareth!
Please give her a warm welcome!

(Applause. Elizabeth enters, is greeted by the Host, who directs her to a chair. They both sit.)

I am so excited to have you with us today, Elizabeth. May I call you that?
Elizabeth:

That is my name.

Host:

Yes, well, good... so, Elizabeth, you and your cousin, Mary, had some very interesting experiences regarding the births of your firstborn children.

Elizabeth:

My, you do get right to business, don't you?

Host:

(Caught off-guard) Uh, oh, sorry, it's sort of an occupational hazard. Small talk isn't really my thing.

Elizabeth:

You could ask me how the weather was when I left home.

Host:

Uh, sure. How was the weather when you left home?

Elizabeth:

It was beautiful: sunny and warm. Of course, that was 2000 years ago. I haven't the slightest idea of what it is like today.

Host:

(To the audience) This is why I don't do small talk. (To Elizabeth) Soooo, my understanding is that there were several occurrences associated with your pregnancy and Mary's pregnancy, isn't that correct?

Elizabeth:

My, this is rather personal. Does everybody talk so freely about such things these days?

Host:

Uh, well, we do have it written down in our Holy Scriptures.

Elizabeth:

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Is that so?

Host:

Yes, right here. Let me show you. (Hands her a Bible opened to the first chapter of Luke. She reads it quickly.)

Elizabeth:

I see. The whole family saga is right there for the world to see.

Host:

And all of human history as well.

Elizabeth:

Well, as they say, I guess my life is an open book. What would you like to know beyond what is written there?

Host:

Many people over the centuries have been struck by how similar your story is with that of Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. Hannah, as you recall, lived about 1000 years before you, and she faithfully came to the temple at Shiloh once a year with her husband, Elkanah, to offer sacrifices. Hannah was unable to bear children but Elkanah's other wife bore him several children, which was a source of deep shame to Hannah.

Elizabeth:

As if that is all a woman is worth: bearing children. You conceive: it's a moment in time. You carry the child for nine months. You still have a million things to do, meals to prepare, a house to keep, property to look over, fields or gardens to care for, if you have a forward-thinking family you can learn to read the holy writings, take care of finances, create art, sew your clothes, debate philosophy, write poetry, calculate the course of stars in the sky. And yet all we are valued by is if we have children or not. There is a lot more to being a woman, you know.

Host:

Well, that's so very true. I hope we are finally acknowledging that today. But, we do have a way to go before women are valued in the same way men are valued.

Elizabeth:

Seriously? After 2000 years? (Shakes her head)

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Host:

Sooooo, getting back to Hannah, she went to the temple this one time after they had offered sacrifices and prayed her heart out to the LORD, and Eli the priest asks her if she's drunk, and she tells him she is barren and is asking the LORD for a child, and Eli blesses her and sends her home.

Elizabeth:

Yes, and don't forget, she promised that if she bore a son, she would loan him to the LORD's service for his whole life. She entered into a covenant with God, and she started the covenant. That's important.

Host:

I agree, that's an important point. So, you and she shared a common predicament, you might say.

Elizabeth:

You might say.

Host:

And for both of you it was rectified by some divine intervention, you might say.

Elizabeth:

You might say. But keep in mind, we both conceived in the normal way. Not like Mary, at least as she tells it.

Host:

Yes, please tell us about that.

Elizabeth:

Well, we had gotten wind of Mary's pregnancy, and it seemed to have some unusual aspects to it, and ours was a bit unusual as well, so we arranged to get together. Of course, by that time, I was already six months along, and I was older than Mary, so she decided to come to Jerusalem to visit me. I remember the day she arrived distinctly. I was up on the roof of our home, setting some things out to dry. We actually lived in a small town outside of Jerusalem, but no one has heard of it, so it's easier to say we lived in Jerusalem. I heard footsteps crunching in the sandy roadway outside the house, and then someone at the doorway

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calling for me. At the moment I heard her voice, the most amazing thing happened, my baby started kicking and leaping like crazy in my womb. He had kicked before, of course, because he had quickened several weeks previously, but this was new. At that moment, I felt a complete rush of joy flow right through me. It was as if warm honey poured through my veins, as if every part of my body was filled with light and radiance. I quickly climbed down the ladder and ran to the door to greet Mary.

Host:

This is what we have recorded that you said, in our English translation: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Elizabeth:

Well, that sounds close. I can't remember the precise words, but I do know that in that powerful moment, both Mary and I felt as though Heaven and Earth had become one, that God's will was not a vague hope or desirous longing, but was actually happening. Something big was going on, and we were at the center of it.

Host:

It reminds me of the prayer that Jesus taught us: “thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Elizabeth:

Jesus?

Host:

Yes, you know, Mary and Joseph's son?

Elizabeth:

Oh, you mean Yeshua?! Yes. That is exactly it. Mary and I realized that the LORD was breaking into human affairs in a mighty way. And when that happens, things get shaken up in amazing ways. We realized that if the LORD was involved with these two children we were bearing, then the world was not going to be the same.

Host:

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Mary gave expression to that in her song, didn't she?

Elizabeth:

Well, we both were singing, let me tell you. I remembered Hannah's song:

“My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in the LORD,
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.

“There is no Holy One like the Lord,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.”

And then Mary joined in:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.”

We just went back and forth, making Hannah's song our own, her proclamations our own, her witness to the LORD's justice and mercy our own. Like this, for instance: one of my favorite lines in Hannah's song is this:

*“The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.”*

Just think about what that says about the LORD, what God's priorities and vision for the world are!

*“He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap.”*

The LORD is on the side of everyone that the rich and powerful put down or shove aside or discard in the world!

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Host:

Yes! Mary sings this:

"He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Elizabeth:

Do you see, this wasn't something totally new, this wasn't a change in the LORD, this is what the LORD has *always* been about, but the rich and powerful and war-happy rulers all glory and revel in dominating people, thinking *that* is strength and glory and valor. Not to the LORD, not to those who want to walk in God's ways. No, if you want to walk in God's ways, do the LORD's will, be the people of God, the sheep of God's pasture, then you have to see that justice reigns, live with mercy, share things, if you have more than you need, share it with those who have greater need. Most rich people don't need all they have, right? The LORD put us here to watch out for one another, to share burdens, to make the way easier for one another. But we get it all backwards. My son, Yo'an, and Yeshua, they both worked to bring this message home to people. The LORD doesn't care about all our sacrifices of animals and plants, God wants the sacrifice of our hearts and minds, to do justice, love mercy and kindness, to be humble of heart and to love one another. Nothing more, and certainly nothing less.

Host:

Wow! These are powerful words and a powerful testimony. I have a new appreciation of how important you and Mary must have been in helping John and Jesus, or, as you say, Yo'an and Yeshua, shape their

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movement, a movement that changed history, and as you have been talking, it seems to me that at this point in human history, we need to return to these central truths that you just outlined. And I think you are reminding us how important women have been in all of this. So, any last words you'd like to share with us?

Elizabeth:

Here's the thing to keep in mind: time after time in our history, when the LORD wants to do something terrific, something momentous, women have been at the center of it. Sarah's birth of Isaac, Miriam at the Red Sea leading the Israelites in worship and song, Hannah devoting Samuel to serve as a prophetic leader, Mary giving birth to Yeshua and teaching him about God's justice and mercy and love, Mary Magdalene and Joanna and all the women who traveled with Yeshua and the others, who proclaimed the resurrection of Yeshua – all these were at critical turning points in our history. These were all moments of God's will being done, on earth as in heaven, like you pointed out. Think what could happen in the world if women and men would quit fighting against each other, or if men would just reach out to women as equals and both seek to do the will of God together in our world. Just think of what could happen!

Host:

Indeed. It may be happening again. We just might be at another crucial moment in human history. Thank you for joining us today.

Elizabeth:

Thank you for having me.

(Both Host and Elizabeth stand and exit.)