

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
December 11, 2016

Lesson Text: The Promise Affirmed
Lesson Title: Luke 1:39-56

Introduction

To attempt to fully explain what happened when God sent Jesus into the world, would be like trying to compress all of history into one day, or all music into one note. It is virtually impossible. But one way we get a glimpse into the truth of the Christmas story is to study how individuals responded to God's promise of the coming Messiah. The actions and reactions of so many different individuals is part of the majesty of the Christmas story.

Adam and Eve were part of the Christmas promise when God promised to crush Satan's head through the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15). Abraham was a vital part in the fulfillment of God's promise to send Messiah. It was through his seed and his descendants Jesus Christ was born (Matthew 1:1-2). Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Micah predicted hundreds of years before our Lord's birth that He would be born of a virgin and born in Bethlehem (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2).

The unexpected and miraculous pregnancies of Elisabeth and Mary meant the promise of Messiah was about to be fulfilled. These two godly women were obviously overwhelmed by the depth of God's love and grace in choosing them to be a part of Messiah's birth. Luke records their faith, humility, and praise in our lesson text.

Elisabeth's Praise and the Promise (Luke 1:39-45)

Verse 39-40

"And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

In response to the news from the angel Gabriel that her cousin Elisabeth had "conceived a son in her old age" (Luke 1:36), Mary "went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda" (Luke 1:39) to visit "Elisabeth." Elisabeth, six months passed the great announcement to her husband, Zacharias, that the life in her womb was the forerunner of the Messiah, was in the quietness of her humble priestly home not expecting a visit from anyone.

Mary "entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth" (Luke 1:40). Mary and Elisabeth were cousins. Since Elisabeth was a descendant of the

priestly line of Aaron, Mary must have been related to Elisabeth through her mother, who would have also been a descendant of Aaron. But the conversation on this occasion would not be about family ties. It would be about something much more wonderful. The coming of the promised Messiah.

Verse 41-42

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

As Mary was telling Elisabeth the good news she was carrying the Messiah, Elisabeth’s son, John the Baptist, “leaped in her womb” (Luke 1:41,44). Some are inclined to dismiss such an event as just the natural movement of the baby in a mother’s womb. What is happening is a significant meeting of two mothers. As the Holy Seed within the womb of Mary (Jesus Christ) was brought close to the unborn forerunner (John the Baptist) there was a spiritual connection and spiritual consciousness that connected like two magnets.

When “the babe leaped” for joy in Elisabeth’s womb, she “was filled with the Holy Ghost” (Luke 1:41) which presents the amazing change which had taken place in her life. A sad barren wife of a priest is now the glad expectant mother of the forerunner of Christ!

“Blessed is the fruit of thy womb” (Luke 1:42) indicates Elisabeth’s praise is not limited to Mary. She immediately recognizes why Mary is blessed. It is because of Jesus Christ, the babe in her womb. The word “blessed” (Luke 1:42) as used in reference to the babe in Mary’s womb means Mary stands out from all other women not just because she is Mary, but because of the “fruit of her womb” (Luke 1:42). “Fruit” (Luke 1:42) is a word emphasizing life. Through the “fruit” of Mary’s womb all humanity can now find life.

Elisabeth is in the presence of the Lord and she knows it. Her six-month-old unborn babe knows he is in the presence of the Lord and Mary knows she is in the presence of the Lord. The Holy Ghost is there to verify the presence of the Lord. The Lord Himself was there, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Verse 43

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

Elisabeth’s praise progresses in the form of a question, “And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” This is a profound

expression of Elizabeth's confidence that Mary's Child would be the long hoped for Messiah, the one whom even David called "Lord" (Luke 20:44).

Elizabeth's grasp of the situation was extraordinary, considering the atmosphere of mystery that overshadowed all these events (Luke 2:19). She greeted Mary not with skepticism but with joy. She understood the response of the child in her own womb. She seemed to comprehend the immense importance of the Child who Mary was carrying. All of this must be attributed to the illuminating work of the Spirit (Luke 1:41).

Verse 44

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

Elisabeth's praise continues as she describes the events of what happened when she heard Mary's voice. Elisabeth makes it clear "the babe leaped" and his leaping was a result of his "joy" over Mary's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 45

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

Elisabeth offers an additional word of praise when she said, "And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). The emphasis on this aspect of Elisabeth's praise is "believing." Because Mary believed what God was doing, she was "blessed." Because Mary believed, "there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45).

Mary's Praise and the Promise (Luke 1:46-56)

Verse 46-47

And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

The words "soul" and "spirit" are synonymous and speak of the inner person. Mary is referring to her whole inner being. "Magnify" does not mean Mary is going to make the Lord larger in size. It means she is praising and adoring Him for Who He is (Psalm 34:3; 69:30).

Mary "rejoiced" in God as her Saviour which has reference to the spiritual joy she is experiencing for her part in God's redemptive plan. She responds to God's plan and promises by worshipping Him personally and publicly. Mary's

expression of what she feels in her heart is joy (Luke 1:46-47). She mentions what God has done specifically for her as an individual (Luke 1:48-49). He “regarded her lowliness,” did great things for her, and gave her an enduring reputation for blessedness (Luke 1:48).

Verse 48-49

“For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.”

“For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” means the Lord regarded her lowliness and humility. The only people who can truly be used of the Lord are people like Mary who acknowledge their “low estate.” The Lord also did “great things for her,” and gave her an enduring reputation for blessedness “from all generations.” Mary is overwhelmed by the fact the Lord would use her in His great promise and plan of salvation.

Think about the four glorious words, “For he...to me.” God is a “mighty” God. No one who knew the God of the Old Testament would question Mary’s statement, “For he...to me.” The prophet Jeremiah said, “...*the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name, Great in counsel, and mighty in work*” (Jeremiah 32:18b-19a). The words “to me” indicate Mary is thinking about this “mighty God” and what He has done for her.

Verse 50

“And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.”

Mary not only magnified God’s mighty power in verse 49, she also magnified His “mercy.” “And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation” speaks of the ongoing faithfulness of God to save sinners in every generation. The “mercy” of God was not limited to Mary’s generation. God had been merciful prior to Mary’s day and she believes He will be merciful in generations to come. You and I today can worship and praise the Lord because of the “mercy” of God to sinful man.

Christmas was a promise fulfilled and it is a promise still being fulfilled every time a sinner trusts Christ for salvation. Mary, as a descendant of Abraham, is now reaping the benefits of a promise that was made to her forefathers many centuries before she was born. Each of us who know Christ as Savior are reaping the benefits of those same promises.

Verse 51

“He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

Praise for the fulfilled promise of Messiah is more than emotions. Mary has a good knowledge of the history of Israel. “He hath shewed strength...put down the mighty from their seats...exalted them of low degree...holpen his servant Israel” (verses 51-53) are all phrases and statements of God’s aid to individuals and the nation of Israel in the past. Do not dismiss the possibility that Mary’s statements also refer to the present as well as the past. It is possible she may have been thinking about what God was presently doing. “Shewed strength with his arm” could also refer to the way in which God was sending His Son into the world! That is as strong or stronger than God giving Abraham and Sarah a son, His parting of the Red Sea, or dividing the Jordan River (Genesis 21, Exodus 14, Joshua 3). God is sending His Son through the womb of a virgin! That is strength!

“He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” could possibly refer to the manner in which God sent His Son into the world. Christ would not be born in a king’s palace but rather among the lowly. That would “scatter” the proud in their “imagination” or “way of thinking!” Man is always looking for God to do things our way or in keeping with our thinking. God is not limited to our way of thinking (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Verse 52

“He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.”

When Mary said, “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree,” it is possible she was thinking of the Pharaoh’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s of the Old Testament in comparison with people like Joseph, Esther, and others. Also, Mary could be thinking of the future and how Jesus, although humbled to come into this world, would one day be exalted back to the right hand of God (Philippians 2:6-9). Either way, God takes His own who are weak and gives them power.

Verse 53

“He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

“He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away” is Mary quoting from Psalm 107:9, “*For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*” No doubt hundreds of thoughts were flooding Mary’s mind and heart concerning how the Lord had provided food and water for His children Israel. The long journey from Egypt to Canaan and

the long journey from Babylon to Judah are just two notable events in which God provided for His own. Mary possesses biblical knowledge which is the basis of true faith, worship and praise.

Verse 54-55

“He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.”

“Holpen” means “laid hold on to help.” When Israel fell on hard times, God took hold of her to help. Israel had never been in more difficult times politically and spiritually than at this moment in history. Mary believes God is helping her in fulfilling His promise to send Messiah. God is speaking and working now in ways never before seen. Mary is a part of His divine work and as a result she offers her heart felt worship.

“In remembrance of his mercy” is a statement indicating when God remembers his promises, He takes actions. The word “remembrance” does not mean God forgets. It means God keeps His promises at exactly the right time.

“Throughout the Old Testament, God is frequently described as “remembering” His covenant with His people and acting to save them (Genesis 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Exodus 2:24; 6:5; Psalm 105:8, 42). The reference to “his servant Israel indicates what God has done will benefit not only Mary, but the entire nation.” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2011-2012).

“As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed for ever” connects what God is doing in the life of Mary with the promises of God to Abraham. The promises God made to Abraham and his descendants are forever according to Genesis 17:7, “*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*” Keep in mind in Mary’s day, the promises made to Abraham were a long time in coming. But God is keeping His promises. Things are happening “according to God’s Promise” and Mary is affirming the promises as she worships.

Verse 56

“And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months, apparently until John was born. She then “returned to her own house.” There would be much to talk about once she returned. The words “her own house” indicates she was still living at her home and was not yet married to Joseph.

Conclusion

Although Elisabeth and Mary did not fully understand the details of how God would use them or their sons to fulfill His promise of the Messiah, they were humbled to be a part of God's redemptive plan.

Christmas for Elisabeth and Mary was not about trees, snow, presents, or the singing of certain songs. They are having Christmas for all the right reasons. They are having Christmas "according to God's Promise!" Their Christmas is based on the Word of God. What is the basis of your Christmas?

Amen.