

Luke 1 (Part 2)

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Title: Why we should praise God!

I have no desire to sing on stage at church. It dawned on me many years ago that Christians will do lots of singing to God in heaven, so I might as well get used to it! Like I suppose many people, I find some church songs are too repetitive but it's not my place to say anything. I'd argue a perfect God does NOT have a big ego who needs to hear us sing to honor Him. What God desires is we use our lives to honor Him! Singing praises to Him gets our focus on Him and it benefits us to sing Him praises! I doubt any heavenly rewards exist based on how many songs we sing at a church service! I do believe God desires we gather as a group of believers to seek and worship Him, so we can collectively focus on Him.

With that out of my system, the text here focuses on people's reactions to God's miracles and praise for what God's doing. I can just hear some of you saying, I would praise God too, if I got miracles! One of the things that always amazed me is Jesus said we'll see greater things than all the miracles Jesus did! I would argue He was referring to the fact Christians lead others to Him and salvation occurs in the lives of ordinary people (John 14:12-14). If you can't think of a reason to praise Him, start with the fact you are saved. I'm just saying that just as the people we read about in this text focus on how God's working in their lives, so we too should humble ourselves to praise Him for the ways He is working in our lives. If you say I already sing weekly at church, think of this text as a reminder of why we do it. Even when our minds wander in church, reminding ourselves God desires when we use our lives to honor Him! It is one of the things He desires of us as we use our lives for His glory. Okay, time for specifics!

In this text, the focus is on the birth of John the Baptist and lots of praise to the fact God is keeping His unconditional promise to send the Messiah into our world to do what Israel did not do collectively be a witness for God and live as He desires! Also in this text Mary got her announcement about the Messiah and the angel mentioned her relative Elizabeth, who's much older and will be John the Baptist's mother later in the chapter! Mary did what anyone would do if an angel said something to them and mentioned someone they knew. It's about 75 miles for Mary to travel to see Elizabeth! When Mary got there, that immediately led to Elizabeth praising Mary for visiting and being the mother of the Lord! After she got finished, to use a modern cliché, Mary told Elizabeth "Hold my beer", as Mary gave a longer praise for being chosen by humbling herself and being grateful for how God used her! If that's not enough praise, the scene switches to John the Baptist's birth. Earlier in Luke 1, an angel struck John's father dumb for his lack of faith. John's father at his birth wrote on a tablet, "His name is John"! (I recall my daughter at a young age sharing that with me!) John the Baptist's father could speak again at that exact moment John is born and finished the "praise fest" of this section of the chapter!

There is my text summary in a paragraph. OK John, I've never had miracles like that in my life, why is it that I should praise God like they did? We get that it is what we do in church, but why should I want to humble myself like they did? Remember my motto of "He's God, we're not, deal with it!" To realize God's in charge of all things should be our motivation to humble ourselves both when we gather with a bunch of other believers or simply praying alone. God knows our imperfections and our sins. I realize it is not an excuse to sin and confess it later! He wants us to be a good witness for Him. That's why He wants us to live as He desires, as that leads others to Him and encourages others to live as God desires! In other words, God's in charge, deal with it!

Keep in mind I left off in the middle of Chapter 1. The last lesson focused on the facts an angel told the father of John the Baptist that despite the fact he and his wife (Elizabeth) are "over the hill", she'll soon have a son (they had no children). Once she got pregnant, six months later the same angel visited Mary a good 75 miles away (hope I got that right) and told her (she's probably 13 to 15) despite the fact she's a virgin, God will perform a miracle on her and the angel mentioned the John the Baptist miracle! That leads to the "praise fest" which is the second half of this chapter! All the text of praising God isn't just to show that this group was grateful. It reminds us to humble ourselves and thank Him for all the work He's doing in our lives, (at the least, He provided for our eternal salvation)! We should praise Him not only for what He has done, but also for what He will do in our lives. He does not need to hear it, but to praise Him draws us closer to Him, which is what He desires!

With all that said, the text here opens with Mary at Elizabeth's home. The first words she said to Mary wasn't how are you, or nice of you to visit, but God inspired Elizabeth by with baby kicking, for a four-verse praise to God for Jesus. It's not known if Mary was pregnant yet. Remember Elizabeth was part of a family of priests and married a priest. All Elizabeth knew at that moment was she wanted to praise Mary as being the mother of her Lord! I should add nowhere in the bible is Mary ever referred to as the mother of God, nor is she to be worshipped as a deity. Mary and her soon to be husband Joseph, had at least five children after Jesus was born! (See Matthew 13:55.)

Mary was standing there listening to this greeting. Remember Mary is a young teenager, and Elizabeth is old enough to be her grandmother. Instead of saying, "what's your deal" or even an amen, Mary had her own "Praise God" moment. Hers last 11 verses. I give her and probably her mom credit for raising Mary with good biblical knowledge. She grasped the significance of being the Messiah's mother. That does not mean we should pray to Mary or see her as deity. Still, these verses teach us how humble she is and overwhelmed by this honor! She became an example for us. Just as God chose us for an eternal relationship, so God picked Mary this "nobody from an insignificant place". Bottom line, she's praising God for keeping His promise of sending a Messiah to Israel (10 Verses) and for only one verse on how God's used Mary for that promise. In short, honor God and do it humbly.

The text says Mary stayed there for three more months and my guess is she stayed 'till delivery time. I suspect she was starting to show and wanted to head back. Meanwhile, the text stays on that "John the Baptist" scene as the next section is his actual birth. The reason is to emphasize the miracle of his birth and the fact John was called by God to be the forerunner of Jesus. John's father Zechariah is "front and center" to give the final chorus of the praise fest! He receives another miracle as when he was asked to name the baby, he stated his name is John. Anyway, the word spread around that area of that miracle. I must admit, I wonder how long John lived with his parents given their age. In Chapter 2 it tells of John living in the wilderness. I'm sure John was told of his calling and the Jesus story, but we don't know if those two meet prior to Jesus beginning his ministry.

What is told is Zechariah (John's father) going into praise mode that's as long as Mary's. I assume most of us know the birth story well, but most of us rarely think about the praises in this chapter. There are more verses praising God in this section of over 40 verses than there are verses describing events that I assume most of us know well. Remember that Zechariah was a priest, so I assume he knows scriptures well! I have to admit I wonder how Luke got all this information. Maybe he interviewed Mary or say, one of John's disciples. Either way, these praise versus are recorded for us to study! Zechariah focused on thanking God for working through the nation of Israel and keeping His promises to that nation. He's also given a few prophetic verses about his son and how God will use him greatly. Bottom line, all the key adults in this chapter praise God and speak minimally about themselves. They are thankful for the things God is doing in our world, which obviously is a clue for us!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.