

Praising God for Jesus

Discussion Guide for Luke 1:39-56

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,
40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby 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 to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Mary’s Song of Praise: The Magnificat

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on 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 for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
51 He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

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

Discussion Guide for Luke 1:39-56

Almost every person I have talked who regularly deals with people as a part of his or her job, be it a teacher, waitress, manager, pastor, receptionist, etc., can tell me stories to illustrate how our society has a problem with entitlement.

The biggest problem with this talk is that it usually refers to some group of people to which we feel we don't belong. The young, the old, the rich, the poor, etc.

The truth is that people of all walks of life and all backgrounds have a problem with the sinful attitude of entitlement. If we examine our own hearts closely enough we will likely find evidence of it there.

The posture of entitlement is that the world owes me something. It is rooted in our failure to trust in God to provide or to be thankful when He does.

Christians should instead realize that the world belongs to God. He owes me nothing, therefore I should expect nothing. When I expect nothing and receive abundance, I then begin to understand grace.

Grace is simply God giving good gifts.

We sort of have a jacked-up view of gift-giving in our culture. Most of our families probably get together and do this thing called a "gift-exchange." I personally hate gift exchanges and have gotten to the point where I try to avoid participating in them.

Now don't get me wrong, I love giving gifts and I definitely love receiving gifts.

But the problem with exchanging is that they are not gifts. It's giving something so that you expect something else in return. That is not a gift, it is a financial transaction. It's just like going to Wal-Mart and making a purchase — only you don't actually get to choose what you purchase.

I believe the inability of our culture to understand gifts affects our ability to understand salvation. I don't receive grace because I gave something to God. I can only receive grace as a true gift. It is something I did not and could never deserve.

Grace is at the core of the story of Jesus' coming. Right in the middle we find several songs of worship and praise to God for the gifts He has given to His kids. Mary and Elizabeth demonstrate a proper response to Jesus with their worship, blessing, gratitude, and magnification of God.

Jesus would later refer to John the Baptist as the greatest prophet to ever live. He would be wildly famous and make a tremendous impact on his culture in preparing hearts for the message and passion of Jesus. My favorite episode in life of John, however, occurs in Luke

1:41 while he is still in his mother's womb!

The text says that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and the unborn child leapt at the sound of Mary's greeting. This perhaps is the most pure and God-given expression of joy found in all of Scripture. It is the response all of us should have to Jesus. Rejoice!

The song of Mary is called the "Magnificat." This is because the first verb is to magnify (megaluno) the Lord. Magaluno literally means "to make great or conspicuous." She then proceeds to give the reasons that God is great, both for her personally and for His dealings with all of His people.

The greatest reason to praise God is for entering the world to rule over it with justice and might. We can be fooled by the humble setting of a baby born to poor family of forced nomads. But what has really happened with the birth of Christ is that God has inaugurated His righteous kingdom on the earth. The social order is about to be turned upside down. The humble will be elevated in stature. The proud will be humbled. The hungry will be fed. The rich will starve.

We often neglect the fact that the coming of Jesus is all about God's justice. He will save sinners, but he will do so by satisfying once and for all the just requirements of God's law.

Discussion Questions

- What is entitlement?
- How has entitlement affected your own attitude in life?
- Why is it so easy to feel entitled and ungrateful?
- Does the consumerism of Christmas encourage true gift-giving or entitlement?
- How does it make you feel when read about John jumping for joy in the womb of Elizabeth?
- How do Mary and Elizabeth praise God?
- What are the reasons that Mary and Elizabeth give for praising God?
- Why are those reasons significant?
- How can the Magnificat help us to push back against the consumer mentality of Christmas and restore the true meaning?
- What are you doing this Christmas to celebrate the coming of Jesus?