

TEXT – Luke 1:39-55

Introduction: Let's forget about our busy, hectic lives for a few minutes as we get ready for Christmas. Let's forget about the stress and heartache we may be feeling, some of which we have brought upon ourselves and some of which God has allowed to come into our lives. Let's just ponder for a moment the amazing miracle that God performed in the little town of Bethlehem a little over 2,000 years ago. Let's think about the people the Lord involved in this awesome miracle. With the inspired gospel writer Luke as our guide we want to focus specifically on two faithful, God-fearing women who were waiting for God to fulfill his promise and send the Messiah. Let's listen and take to heart the Word of God that reveals to us not only what these two women were experiencing but also what caused them to rejoice as they prepared their hearts to welcome the Savior of all sinners, their Savior too. Let's also follow the example of these two faith-filled believers as we prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus our Savior and King. REJOICE WITH ELIZABETH AND MARY – 1) Elizabeth rejoiced in how blessed Mary was, and 2) Mary rejoiced in the great things God had done.

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

- Why did Mary go to see Elizabeth? Elizabeth we are told was a relative of Mary. Since Elizabeth was much older perhaps she was Mary's aunt or possibly a cousin. After the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior of the world, Mary needed someone to talk to concerning this miraculous pregnancy. Who was she going to talk to about the fact that she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit who conceived in her the Savior of the world? Joseph was not someone Mary could really talk to. How could he believe that something like this had happened, that is, until the angel told him in a dream? Mary heard that her relative Elizabeth who was beyond child-bearing years was also miraculously pregnant. Elizabeth's child, John the Baptist would have a significant role in God's plan of salvation preparing the way for Jesus. Mary hurried to Elizabeth's house, which was some seventy or perhaps eighty miles away. These two God-fearing women could certainly lean on each other and support one another as they tried to grasp what was happening in their wombs. When we are experiencing some difficult times we know that we can go to God and he will strengthen, support and help us. But we also need that human element, through which God definitely works. We need Christian spouses or Christian friends to really lean on, and we need to be available for those who are in need. That's why this church exists to strengthen one another in our faith. Paul in Galatians reminds us, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ is to love our neighbors as ourselves. What better way to love a fellow Christian than to offer our Christian comfort and counsel. We want to carry each other's burdens.

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

- As Mary arrived at Elizabeth's house it was Mary's greeting that brought about another miracle. Mary's greeting caused the unborn child in Elizabeth's womb to leap, to give a sudden movement. The angel Gabriel had told Zechariah that the Holy Spirit would enter John already in Elizabeth's womb. This sudden leap at Mary's greeting, prompted by the Holy Spirit, was John's way of acknowledging the Savior for whom he would dedicate his life to prepare the way. It was this miracle, this leaping in her womb that prompted Elizabeth herself to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that she prophesied not quietly but with a great shout. Elizabeth prophesied about the mother of her Lord and how blessed she was. Mary was blessed not because of any worthiness in her, not because she was special in any way, except that she was chosen by God to be the one who would give birth to the Savior. Mary was no more blessed than we are. Elizabeth inspired by the Holy Spirit says that she was blessed because she believed what the Lord had said about her miraculous pregnancy. Mary was blessed as a sinner who put her faith in Jesus. She later calls the child in her womb her Savior. Mary was given a special service to the Lord to carry Jesus for nine months, give birth to him, and then with Joseph her husband, raise the Savior in their home. But we are just as special to God as Mary was. By God's grace alone through the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel we know Jesus as our Savior who lived and died for us to save us from our sins. With Mary we have journeyed to the cross to witness what our sins did to Jesus. We also through the eyes of faith have seen our Savior's resurrection from the dead. We believe what the Lord said and what he accomplished through Mary – that in her was Immanuel, God with us. Now we have our whole life to serve our Savior, to ponder what God has given us in the Christ-child as Mary did.

Transition: We rejoice with Elizabeth and Mary. Elizabeth rejoiced in how blessed Mary was to carry the Savior in her womb. And with Mary we too are blessed to know the baby Jesus born to the virgin Mary as our Savior. We also rejoice as Mary did in the great things God has done.

⁴⁶ And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. ⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

- Mary responds to Elizabeth's prophecy with her own words of praise. These words are called the Magnificat which is the Latin for the first word of the sentence that we translate magnify or glorify. Mary's soul and spirit, her inmost being glorified and rejoiced in God her Savior. Mary had good reason to glorify the Lord and rejoice in God her Savior as do we. She magnified God in her inmost being because he considered her lowly, humble status. Mary was not a queen or a princess. She was a lowly, Jewish maiden of Nazareth. But for no special reason God chose Mary to be the mother of his Son conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. She was blessed as Elizabeth had said to be the mother of the Lord. We regularly confess how blessed Mary was when we confess that Jesus was "born of the virgin Mary." We consider Mary blessed as she herself states because of what God, the Mighty One, had done in her. This isn't about Mary at all, never was. This was always about God. It was the work of God that placed Jesus in Mary's womb, a miracle we still cannot truly fathom. For this we praise God's name as holy not Mary's name. We praise God's name as holy because it is holy. We also praise God's name as holy because by his power he has made us holy. God made us holy by redeeming us from our sin and all its unholy consequences by sending his Son to bear all of sin's guilt and punishment on the cross. Isaiah wrote, "Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him." Mary reminds us that this mighty and holy God extends his mercy, his forgiveness in Christ to generation after generation. He extends his mercy to all those who fear him in faith. We are responsible to impress upon the next generation in a most profound way that there is nothing more important – not our possessions, not a spouse, not children, not a career, nothing more important than glorifying and praising the Lord for giving us Mary's Son, our Savior Jesus.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.

- God should be praised and glorified for his mighty deeds in arranging the course of history and fulfilling his promise to bring Jesus into the world. Mary mentions what God does to unbelievers who oppose God's grace in Christ. She reminds us that the unbelieving mind is proud and arrogant. Unbelievers don't need God. They certainly don't need his grace, his undeserved love in Christ because they think their sins are no big deal. The very powerful in our world with everything this world desires at their finger tips actually see God as a rival, but the Lord will ultimately bring them down from their lofty throne of self-worth. The rich, that is, those who think they are righteous and holy enough to earn their own way to heaven will go away from God empty-handed without any blessings. But believers that Mary speaks about, herself included, are humble, knowing they have nothing to bring before God except their sins. Believers hunger and thirst for righteousness, Christ's righteousness. They come empty-handed but through faith in Jesus they leave with every spiritual and eternal blessing through Jesus. Mary in her own way presents for us the story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. The Pharisee came before God with his good deeds, praising himself as being so much better than others, especially that despicable tax-collector. The Pharisee left God's presence with nothing from God. He left bearing the guilt of all his sins and God's eternal punishment. The tax-collector brought nothing except his sins and confessed them before God. He beat his breast and said, "God have mercy on me a sinner." Jesus says that this tax collector went home justified before God, forgiven of all his sins.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

- Mary closes her words of praise with the certainty of God's promises fulfilled. After 2,000 years of waiting for God's promise to Abraham to be fulfilled it finally happened in Mary's womb. God's promise to Abraham was, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." God's blessing to the world came in the form of a little baby born to Mary. This baby would bless sinners with peace as the Prince of Peace. But the peace Jesus came to bring was not a worldly peace. It was a spiritual peace, a peace that announced to sinners that they could actually be members of God's holy family now and forever through faith in this Savior. The angels at Jesus' birth announced, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." Jesus' peace is a peace no one else can give. Isaiah wrote, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Conclusion: Rejoice with Elizabeth and Mary. Rejoice with Elizabeth in how blessed all believers are through Mary's baby, our Savior Jesus. Rejoice with Mary in the great things God has done by keeping his promise to Abraham and sending the Christ-child to forgive all our sins. In the next week try to avoid all the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. Play down as much as possible the secular commercialism that we have come to expect and associate with the Christmas celebration. And simply rejoice in your hearts for God's gift of a Savior as Mary exclaimed, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Amen.