

Blessings Are for Sharing!

CHRISTMAS TRUTHS

Luke 1:39-56

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Bethany Church

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Nicky Gumbel is the featured speaker in our ALPHA course. Nicky is a priest in the Church of England; and before that, he practiced law in Great Britain. He tells the story about the birth of his first child. Pippa, his wife, gave him a list of names to call. At the top of his list was his mother-in-law. After he notified her, he moved on to his mother, but the phone was busy. He called the next name and the phone was busy. When he called the next name, he was congratulated. They already had all the details. In fact, the reason he was getting busy signals was the news was spreading. Even his mother had talked to his mother-in-law. People love to share good news.

Not all good news gets around, however. Sometimes we are a little guarded. Pregnancy does not always end in childbirth. Perhaps, that fear or just the distance is why the news had not reached Mary about her older cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was far past the time of childbirth when God enabled her to conceive and carry a baby. She was six months into her pregnancy when the angel Gabriel visited youthful Mary. Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive a child who would reign over God's people forever. Since Mary was a virgin, was pledged to Joseph and did not know when he would take

her as his wife, she wondered aloud how she could conceive. Gabriel told her that God would overshadow her with his Spirit so that the baby would be conceived and as a result people would call him the son of God. Then Gabriel gave her more news. I think it was just to encourage her. I think God wanted her to know that He had the power to accomplish this, so Gabriel told her about Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary knew that was improbable, even impossible.

Now if you were Mary, what would you do? You're young, single, chaste and poor. Your family is not well known or respected. You've just been told that you are going to mother a child who will be called "son of God," that he will rule your people forever, that you're to name him, which incidentally is the father's prerogative, "salvation," which is the meaning of *Jesus*, and that conception will occur in you miraculously. Have I left out anything? Yes, I have. Who is she going to tell this to? Who would you tell? Do you think you also might have trouble believing? Would it be helpful to see another miracle? Do you think you might want some validation?

The Bible says that Mary hurried to Elizabeth, literally she "went with speed." I'm not sure how you go with speed anywhere in those days. I don't think Mary's family could afford a horse. I suspect that the Bible is not talking about the rate of travel. Most likely Mary behaved like Nicky Gumbel's mother-in-law, who moved like lightning with her good news. Mary probably sped through a bunch of tasks and then left abruptly for her cousin's town. When you arrived, what would you be looking for? How about an expanded abdomen on your elderly cousin? When Mary arrived, the anticipation was too much. The Bible said that she entered her cousin's home and greeted her. Mary did not tarry at the door. There was no knock on the door and call like "Yoo-hoo, is anybody

home?” Mary went right in and then called to Elizabeth. I did that once. The husband was blind, and the woman was hard of hearing. I thought they would have difficulty hearing my knock, so I stuck my head in the door to call to them. Immediately, I blushed, quickly backed outside and profusely apologized. Today, I would not follow Mary’s pattern regardless of my excitement. Mary, however, was young and excited. She was looking for that six-month abdomen. She never imagined what followed. Listen to Luke’s account.

At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. What an honor this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me! When you came in and greeted me, my baby jumped for joy the instant I heard your voice! You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said." (Luke 1:41-45, NLT)

Think about that moment. Mary was hoping to see an expanded abdomen. She saw that, but it wasn’t what she saw, it was what she heard that lit her on fire. Can you imagine her spine tingling? Have you ever felt the rush of being loved? It is as if you are wrapped in a warm blanket and protected from everything cold and hostile. Sometimes, it is so overwhelming that you just have to express gratitude and love. You can do nothing else. Mary didn’t know who to tell, what to tell or how to tell anyone about Gabriel’s news and the pregnancy he prophesied. Now, her own cousin Elizabeth was prophesying the same thing. Moreover, Elizabeth affirmed her. She said, “You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.” How did Mary believe? She acted on the message. She went to see her cousin.

What are you doing as a result of God's promises? Are you aware of what has been promised you? Can it be said of you, "You are blessed, because you believed that the Lord would do what he said"?

As Elizabeth spoke, the Holy Spirit came upon Mary. A rush of divine love enveloped her youthful body. She was overshadowed by the power of the Most High God. This probably was the moment that Jesus was conceived. Every word of prophecy until this moment spoke of a future child. This was a holy moment. What an awesome thought! Our savior may have been conceived in the body of a teenage girl as she sung or spoke a song to God, to her pregnant cousin and (through the pen of Luke to) the entire world. Listen to her words. They have been set to countless tunes.

Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and now generation after generation will call me blessed. For he, the Mighty One, is holy, and he has done great things for me. His mercy goes on from generation to generation, to all who fear him. His mighty arm does tremendous things! How he scatters the proud and haughty ones! He has taken princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. And how he has helped his servant Israel! He has not forgotten his promise to be merciful. For he promised our ancestors – Abraham and his children – to be merciful to them forever. (Luke 1:46-55, NLT)

Can you imagine the emotion coursing through this teenage girl? Have you ever felt lowly? Worse yet, have you ever believed you are lowly? It's a lie. It's a terrible, terrible lie. You are not lowly. You were made in the image of the Most High and you are the focus of his promises and blessing. You are his beloved, the focus of his passion. Do you believe that? Do you believe that the Lord will do what he said to you in the Scriptures?

Mary realized that this gift was not hers to hoard. Her blessing was not for her alone. She was blessed because God loved his people Israel. God would love his people through Mary. She was blessed to be a blessing. That's why every generation would call her blessed. Indeed, she was sharing in the blessing Abraham received. Blessings are for sharing.

Sometimes, blessings carry pain. I'm not thinking merely of the pangs Mary experienced in a Bethlehem stable. When Simeon prophesied over baby Jesus when he was dedicated in Jerusalem, he told Mary, "The deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul" (Luke 2:35, NLT). Certainly that happened when Mary saw this blessing maligned, rejected and crucified. Those who have suffered loss of a child understand the heartbreak. The crucifixion of Christ did not negate the blessing of Mary or the favor of God. If anything, it increased it. Despite the heartbreak, her blessing was not mixed. It was all gift. It was all love. It was all to be shared.

What has God given you? What blessings have been poured into your life? They are meant for sharing. They are not meant to hoard. Those who hoard have a spirit of poverty. They are deceived about their condition, and they constantly hunger and strive for more. Those who share recognize their blessing. They know the joy of being satisfied and generous.

As a father, I have opportunity to be generous with my children. When I find them sharing, when I see them sacrificing or even hurting in their help of others, I am moved to be more generous with them. I want to affirm them. However, if they hoard or act selfishly, I become restrained because I don't want to affirm or reinforce their

destructive attitudes and actions. Your heavenly father longs to be generous with you. God's love for you is unique and complete, but you are not his sole love. God's heart is great enough to encompass all of his creation and especially humanity. God wants to channel his love and blessings through you to the other children he loves and to all creation. He loves you. Occasionally, his blessings will bring heartbreak; but it will never be anything but blessing and gift. Believe the Christmas truth that blessings are for sharing, and your Father will be unrestrained in his dealings with you.

Have you recognized your blessings? Have you given your Father in heaven thanks? Are you sharing those blessings? Are you hoarding some? May God remove our spirit of poverty; for the richest woman to ever live was a peasant, and she gave the world more than the greatest philanthropist. All generations call her blessed. What will they say of you?