



“The Visit”
Luke 1:39-56

Idea: God connects His people in a common hope.

Intro: The coming of King Jesus changed everything. It changed the course of human history, and it changed the trajectory of our lives individually. Over the last two days, billions of people around the globe paused to reflect, remember, and revel in the glorious coming of King Jesus. We look back on that great day and think about the blessings it has brought to us.

The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem ushered in the kingdom of God. It was, no doubt, an upside-down kingdom. Jesus was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus (Octavian). He was the first Caesar to be called “Augustus,” a title given to him by the Roman Senate. It means “holy” or “revered.” Up to this point in Roman history, the title had been reserved exclusively for the gods. By assigning this title to Octavian the Roman Senate moved the empire toward emperor worship. Around the time Luke was writing his Gospel, some of the Greek cities in Asia Minor adopted Octavian’s birthday (September 23) as the first day of the New Year, hailing him as “savior.” In fact, an inscription at Halicarnassus calls him “savior of the world.” Onto this backdrop, Luke projects the coming of the King, contrasting the real Savior over and against the false savior.

For two millennia, Christians have rejoiced in the blessings that Jesus’ coming has brought to the world. We look back with 20/20 vision and can see how the prophecies were fulfilled, people’s lives transformed, and history changed. It was the opposite for Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary. They heard from God’s messenger how the Savior King would enter the world and usher in God’s kingdom, but they were looking forward to what would become a new world. They believed what God had revealed to them about the coming King and His forerunner. They believed God was bringing salvation to His people. This had been the hope of the people of Israel for generations. God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation through whom the nations would be blessed (Gen 12:2-3). This hope was finding its fulfillment in the son Mary would bring into the world.

After Gabriel had informed Mary of how her life was going to change and how the Lord had done something similar in Elizabeth’s life, she immediately wanted to visit her cousin. She wanted to hear the story and rejoice with her. These two women had been graced by God. Let’s look at the visit in this passage.

Read Luke 1:39-56.

Inquiry: We read in these verses about two women and two pregnancies. On the surface there is nothing astounding about that. Similar scenes play out all the time. It happens in our families and in our church. In this scene, however, there is something much different happening. Both Elizabeth and Mary have experienced the

miraculous in their pregnancies. Elizabeth was an older woman, and she had been “*barren*,” unable to become pregnant. Everyone knew it. God had worked a miracle in her womb and allowed Zechariah and her to conceive a son. Mary, on the other hand, was a young virgin. She was in her early teenage years. She was not married and had not known Joseph, her soon-to-be husband. The Holy Spirit had worked an even greater miracle in her womb. Conception had taken place in the womb of a virgin.

In response to Gabriel’s news, Mary rushed to visit Elizabeth. It is 80-100 miles from Nazareth to Judah. It would take three or four days to make the trip. Her haste indicates eagerness. They shared a bond that was much tighter than they had ever shared as cousins. They were soul-sisters in the divine plot to bring salvation to sinners. Through their birthing pain, labor of love, and mothering the world would receive its greatest blessing.

The moment Mary entered Elizabeth’s home and greeted her; baby John leaped with joy in the womb. This movement was much more than a prenatal kick or turn. It was an upward vault. The term used by Luke (σκιρτάω) is used to describe the skipping or leaping of sheep in the field. Three months before John the Baptist’s birth, he gives his first prophecy. He is overcome with joy. At this point in the gestational cycle, John is about nine inches long and weighs a pound and a half. He looked like a miniature newborn baby boy. His skin was translucent. He had fingerprints and toe prints. Sometimes he opened his eyes for brief periods and gazed into the liquid darkness of the womb. He was both a spiritual and an emotional being with the capacity to be filled with the Holy Spirit. For that reason, as His unborn King enters the room, John leaps with joy.

Elizabeth too is filled with the Holy Spirit at the sound of Mary’s voice. Her soul is elevated. Rather than greeting Mary in the familiar way as her cousin, she greets her as “*the mother of my Lord*.” She vocalized her recognition that Jesus was the Messiah. “*My Lord*” is a conscious allusion to the opening line of Psalm 110, a messianic psalm. Surely, Mary received Elizabeth’s words as an affirmation of God’s calling on her life. Mary did not have to open her mouth to tell Elizabeth the incredible story of what had happened to her during the previous few days. Elizabeth knew and celebrated with her. She knew Mary was to be blessed or praised (εὐλογέω) because she believed God and submitted herself to His plan (vs. 42). She also recognized that the son Mary carried was to be praised because He was no ordinary baby. Her faith would bring happiness and blessing (μακάριος) (vs. 45).

In response to Elizabeth’s affirmation, Mary sings a song of confession. This song is usually referred to as *The Magnificat*, taken from the Latin translation of verse 46. Mary sings the rich truths about God and the hope He gives to mankind. She is overwhelmed by God’s goodness and rejoices in God because He had acted favorably on His humble servant. This is how God acts toward the broken and the lowly. As such, Mary sees herself as blessed (vs. 48-49). She understands, also, that all generations will refer to her as blessed. She will not be considered blessed because of anything she did but because of what God did for her and through her. The Lord comes to the aid of the humble and scatters the proud. His Kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. He works on behalf of His covenant people in response to His covenant faithfulness. Mary acknowledges her involvement and submits to God’s great plan of redemption.

Mary’s visit with Elizabeth and Zechariah reminds us that God is working not just in our lives but others too. There are times when we need to remember this reality. This is especially true when the Lord moves our hearts to step out in a new direction. Fear can grip our hearts and impede what God wants to do in and through us. It is then that we need to hear how God is working in and directing others. We need encouragement and an example to follow. This visit instructs us in the necessity of the community of faith (the church). If we want to see our faith in Christ grow, we need to be in community with other believers. Thankfully, in the church God connects His people in a common hope. It is in this community we find two essential elements for growth.

In the community of faith, we find:

1. An Affirmed Faith

The story of the visitation is a real-life account of how God sovereignly and graciously cares for His children. Mary has heard from God and exercised faith on what she heard. She quickly traveled to Judah to be with her relatives who had experienced something very similar. There in the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary was celebrated and strengthened by Elizabeth. She affirmed Mary's faith in God and His plan for her life.

Now, we do not know what might have happened in Mary's life had she not gone to visit Elizabeth. We do know that God is sovereign and was sovereignly working in her. In as much, He sovereignly directed Mary to Elizabeth's home (1:36). I believe the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to pen these words because we need to be reminded that we need our faith affirmed by others. As the writer of Hebrews says, we need encouragement from one another (Heb 10:25). The Christian faith is not an isolated faith. Mary's journey was not an isolated journey. God had placed others on the path with her. He had connected them in a common hope. Together they shared an affirmed faith.

As a church family we gather for worship and meet in small groups weekly because we need our faith affirmed. We need to be encouraged, challenged, and at times rebuked by our brothers and sisters. When you sense the Lord might be moving you in a new direction or opening a new door. How do you know if it is the Lord's will? What helps you to take that first step of faith and obedience? The answer is the wisdom and affirmation of the church. We find in the church other examples of faithfulness. We read the stories of their lives. We watch God move and work through them. As we observe their journey, we are helped in ours.

The visit reveals to us that in the community of faith, we find an affirmed faith. We also find a second essential element in our spiritual growth.

2. A Mutual Faith

Mary hurried to be with Zechariah and Elizabeth because they believed and had experienced similar callings on their lives. They shared a mutual faith. No one else in Nazareth, Galilee, or Judah understood what had happened in her life. Most people would not believe she was still a virgin while being pregnant. Most would not understand or believe the words of Gabriel. They would think she is crazy because nothing good comes out of Nazareth (John 1:46).

In Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary found people who believed the same things she believed. She needed the reinforcement of their mutual faith. As great of a faith as she had, it was still entirely possible for her faith to falter without the fellowship of Zechariah and Elizabeth. In the same way, as believers and followers of Christ, we too need to be with people with whom we share a mutual faith. We must place ourselves deep within the fellowship of the church. It is in this fellowship that we share the experience of new life in Jesus. We share in the experience of living holy lives in a sin-stained world. And we share in the hope of Jesus' second coming.

Illustration: I love to set around a campfire or the firepit in my backyard on a cold night. There is something soothing about the crackling of burning logs. Have you ever noticed what happens to the log that rolls off the pile? It begins to cool off. It moves from being enflamed to just smoldering. And if it is far enough from the flames of the other logs for a long enough period, it will cease burning. Why? How does that happen? The log stops burning because it no longer shares in the mutual heat of the other logs. In the same way, Christians enjoy and benefit from the mutual faith we share together. It helps generate more faith and obedience in our lives, which results in lives that grow spiritually and honor the Lord. The visit reveals to us that in the community of faith, we find a mutual faith.

Conclusion: Mary's visit with Elizabeth and Zechariah reminds us that God is working not just in your life; He is working in the lives of the people around you too. It reminds us that an isolated faith is not a Christian faith.

We find no lone ranger Christians in the Bible. Instead, we find believers who are walking in community with other believers, and it is good to be reminded of this reality. This is especially true when the Lord moves our hearts to step out in a new direction. Fear can grip our hearts and impede what God wants to do in and through us. It is then that we need to hear how God is working in and directing others. We need encouragement and an example to follow.

We are days away from beginning a new year. What is on the horizon in 2022 for you and your family? How is the Lord directing your steps? How are you going about taking those steps? Are you planning to go at it alone or in community with other believers? Is it a job promotion, the purchase of a house, having another child, or something else? Regardless of the situation, please do not walk that road alone. Invite other brothers and sisters to join you on the journey. You need the encouragement, wisdom, and challenge.

Some of you in 2022 need to recommit yourself to the community of faith. You should not be satisfied with surface level relationships in the church. You should not be satisfied with gathering with the church every four to six weeks. You will never develop the relationships God wants you to enjoy by showing up so infrequently. I encourage you to lean in and build your life among this community of faith.

This community begins in relationship with Jesus. If you have never confessed your sin to Jesus and trusted Him as your Lord and Savior, this is the first step for you today. You need to receive the news of Jesus' visit.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Have you received forgiveness in Christ? What would keep you from embracing the truth and believing on Jesus today?

As John was filled with the Spirit and leaped with joy in the womb when Jesus entered, let's allow the Holy Spirit to fill us as we walk in community together for His glory.