



W H E N T H E L O R D C O M E S N E A R

H E L I F T S U P T H E H U M B L E

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Luke 1:39–56 (NIV) 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. 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 the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” 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. 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. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” ⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

The doorbell rings. You don’t know the person ringing it, so you wonder what they could want? You go to the door and open it. The person standing outside says, “Hi! Are you _____?” After a moment’s hesitation you answer, “Yes, that’s me.” The person continues, “I have great news! You have been chosen as our grand prize winner. We have given you an all-expenses paid trip to Hawaii, and you have also won a million dollars!” How would you react?

How would you have reacted if you were Mary? Remember, Mary was engaged to her fiancé, Joseph, a local carpenter with an excellent reputation. Matthew called him a “righteous man.” He was a good man, a kind man, a man who loved the Lord and followed his commands. So far, so good. I think we’d be happy with the situation. One day Mary had a visitor—a stranger— stop at

her home. This stranger was one of God's angels, a heavenly messenger with some incredible news. Mary was going to have a baby! What? And not just any baby—this child would be the Son of God! He was the one whom the Lord had promised to Abraham, and then to David. What? How would you react? Mary asked a simple question: **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** (Luke 1:34 NIV). The answer? God's power will cover you, and he will do the impossible! How would you react?

Here's Mary's reaction. She simply confessed, **“I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her**” (Luke 1:38 NIV). That's it! Nothing more. We don't hear her run back to her family and announce, “I'm pregnant!” She doesn't share the news of an angel messenger with Joseph. There isn't any Facebook post with an ultrasound picture, or a huge gender-reveal explosion with blue smoke.

There's nothing. There's nothing, because what would happen to a young, engaged woman who “suddenly” becomes pregnant? What would happen to her in a small town where everyone knows everyone else's business? People look down on her and start whispering as she walks by. People avoid her. The stops she made around town helping with the family business come to a grinding halt. No one want to do business with someone like “her.” Joseph, the “righteous man,” knew what should happen. God's law demanded that a woman who became pregnant outside of marriage would be stoned to death, along with the man who had slept with her.

What do you do when your reputation is ruined even though it's not true? What do you do when your fiancé has the opportunity to stone you, or at the very least, to break the engagement? The angel had shared some other impossible news with Mary. **“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month”** (Luke 1:36 NIV). Elizabeth, pregnant? She was too old! It was...impossible. Elizabeth would understand. She was in the middle of impossible. Mary made her plans to leave. **“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea”** (Luke 1:39 NIV).

Mary arrived at Zechariah and Elizabeth's home. How would her relatives react when they found out she was pregnant? Zechariah was a priest. They were both descendants of Aaron. They knew the law. At the very least they should turn her away. Mary took a deep breath and called out, “Elizabeth? Peace to you. It's me, Mary!”

Two miracles happened, miracles that Mary couldn't see. Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb at the sound of Mary's voice. At the same time, the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth and she shouted words from God himself! **“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”** (Luke 1:42–45 NIV).

Elizabeth's reaction was so amazing because she couldn't have known these details. Mary had only said hello. The Holy Spirit gave Elizabeth the gift of being the first to know Mary as the mother of Jesus. She was the first person to know that this child would be the answer to her prayers and the prayers of all Israel. Mary was blessed—the Lord had chosen this descendant of Eve to fulfill his ancient promise to the serpent. **“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his**

heel” (Genesis 3:15 NIV). Elizabeth couldn’t contain her joy, and neither could her six-month old baby. The boy who would be called “John” jumped for joy, punching and kicking because he would prepare the way for his younger relative. Impossible? Yes, but if God could give Elizabeth and Zechariah a baby in their old age, he could certainly make and keep an impossible promise to Mary!

What if...what if the guy who rang the doorbell wasn’t a stranger telling you that you won a contest? What if it was God’s angel messenger? How would you react? How would you react to the news, “Nothing will be impossible for God”? It would probably depend on the day, but I know how I would react. “Really God? NOTHING is impossible? How about the time I prayed for...a puppy at Christmas? I didn’t get one. What about my job promotion? I worked hard and asked you to do it for me, but it didn’t happen. I wanted to pass that test so I studied really hard, prayed for help and failed. What about that relationship? Let me meet the right one at the right time. I waited and watched and prayed and found...no one. How about all those prayers for my friends and family with cancer. Lord, I asked you to do the impossible because you can do the impossible and...nothing! I thought you could do anything, but apparently you can’t!”

That’s how I react, and I think that’s pretty typical. We bring our needs and wants to God. We ask him to do the impossible and he doesn’t. It’s frustrating! It’s agonizing! And, we’re wrong. Did you notice how often our reaction has everything to do with ourselves? I wanted...I asked...I need...I thought... We can be so self-centered and selfish. The angel’s message, “Nothing is impossible for God” isn’t intended to be the magic solution for all of our prayer requests. He’s telling us that he can do anything he plans to do in order to rescue the world. He will carry out those plans perfectly. We might look at his plans and say, “No way!” God says, “Yes way!”

Mary got it. She wasn’t focused on herself. She focused on God and everything he had done for his people across time. When she focused on herself, she had to admit she needed the impossible from God just as much as we do. Listen to her reaction: **“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant”** (Luke 1:46–48 NIV). Mary praised God. Why? Because he was her “Savior.” Yes, Mary needed her Savior as much as we do. She would be called blessed by all generations, and rightly so. She is the only woman who holds the title, “Mother of God.” She would give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. She needed that baby to be born because she had everything else in common with the rest of the world. She was born sinful. She had her own weaknesses. She liked to make sure details were taken care of—every last “i” dotted and “t” crossed. Later on at a wedding, she was concerned because the family had run out of wine for the celebration. She knew God could do the impossible, so she went to her son and told him, “They don’t have any more wine,” hint, hint, nudge, nudge. Her son had to remind her, **“Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet”** (John 2:4 EHV). Mary was a sinner. She needed God her Savior to do the impossible and rescue her, to rescue you and me, to rescue the entire world!

That’s exactly what God her Savior did. Mary gave him all the credit. **“From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name”** (Luke 1:48–49 NIV). The humble don’t lift themselves up. God lifts up the humble! The

one who can do the impossible did this amazing thing for Mary—creating life in her womb and knitting together the humanity of God’s one and only Son. God did it!

If you look back through the rest of Mary’s song, you’ll notice that Mary gives God all the credit for his impossible acts of love. Over and over again she says, “He,” not, “me.” She said, “**His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.**” (Luke 1:50 NIV). Mary went on to sing of the ways God showed his mercy. “**He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble**” (Luke 1:51–52 NIV). Can you think of some of God’s mighty deeds he had shown in the past to bring down the proud and lift up the humble?

How about filling the hungry with good things? Mary wasn’t just singing about food for their stomachs. Moses had said, “**Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD**” (Deuteronomy 8:3 NIV). People hungry for a relationship with God could fill themselves up on his sustaining Word—all of his promises! Those who were rich—who believed they were already good enough and didn’t need God, they would go away empty!

Best of all, Mary sang, “**He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors**” (Luke 1:54–55 NIV). The promise! It was always about the promise, and God had finally kept his promise to Abraham. “**All peoples on earth will be blessed through you!**” (Genesis 12:3 NIV). The blessing had come, the promised offspring of Eve, the descendant of their father Abraham, David’s greater Son. Jesus.

It’s all about Jesus. All those prayers for the impossible were focused on one thing. Ourselves. Mary’s song points us back to where we need to be. Focused on Jesus. He’s the one who lifts up the humble. He takes our imperfect, selfish prayers and brings them to his Father’s throne. Because he took on our weakness and faced every temptation, he knows how hard our lives are. He understands. He loves us. He showed that love not only by humiliating himself to the point of death, he did the impossible when he conquered death. That makes the answer to all of our prayers “Yes!” That doesn’t seem right, does it? We asked for all those things and often didn’t get what we asked for. That’s when Jesus lifts up humble people and with humble prayers and says, “It’s a beautiful request, but I have a bigger plan and a greater purpose. I came to lift up the humble, and when I go to work in your life, it’s going to turn out better than you asked. In fact, it will turn out perfect. I have a place prepared for you where you’ll see the impossible happen every day. I’ll see you there. Soon.”

Jesus came to lift up the humble. To rescue sinners like Mary, like you, like me. He succeeded, and we get to hear about that not only this morning, but again on Christmas Eve, and on Christmas Day, and the second day of Christmas. How do we react to such incredible news? Do you know someone else who is feeling lowly, and humiliated, and unworthy. This is our chance! They might not come on December 19th, but they might come on December 24th because it’s Christmas Eve. Invite them to hear and see all the things that God has done for us in Jesus, and watch what happens when God fills their hungry hearts with good things! Amen.

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn