“But Why Am I So Favored?”
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Luke 1:39-45 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.

The trip from Nazareth to the hill country of Judea was about 100 miles depending upon the route you took. That’s a walking trip of 3-6 days, conditional upon the speed of the walker and how many miles you took each day. We have already established that Mary was a young teenager, and thus she lived at home with her parents. She was engaged to Joseph, but they lived separately until the wedding ceremony.

Think about this trip for Mary to see Elizabeth. In your mind, do you think Mary took that long journey by herself? (Personally, I don’t think so.)

In your mind, do you think Mary told her parents about the appearance and message by Gabriel the angel? (I think so.)

Luke didn’t take the space to share all of the details. Think about fathers and mothers across history and culture. No parent would allow their daughter to walk 100 miles by herself!

Thus, I believe it would be historically accurate to say that Mary’s father arranged for servants to go with her and protect her, or maybe he went with her. I think it is unreasonable to say that Mary made that journey alone.

Yes, she was brave, but from her song, there is evidence that Mary was also wise and had understanding beyond her age. However, we must lean on history, not on a romantic notion that Mary walked by herself.

There is no doubt she got ready quickly and did not delay.

Luke says she entered Zechariah’s home which only means Zechariah was the owner before he married Elizabeth. And then Mary greeted Elizabeth. Mary already knew that her aunt was pregnant because the angel told her. In your mind, how did she greet her aunt? What did she say?
When I was young, the Bardeen family had a huge Bardeen Christmas party, usually on the Sunday before Christmas or the Sunday after, depending upon the calendar. My dad had eight brothers and sisters, and all of them had lots of children, so there were plenty of uncles and aunts and cousins. We had the party at my grandparent’s big home in Hollywood until they died, and then the adult siblings hosted it.

I had a favorite aunt, my dad’s sister: Teresa. We called her “auntie T.” She had a big smile, and was wildly excited about seeing us. She always asked us about school, sports, hobbies, and friends. I felt auntie T loved me. But here’s the best thing! Her hair was always a different color for Christmas – sometimes yellow or black or blue or green or orange or white. On the drive to the party, we talked about what color hair auntie T would have and tried to guess.

I think Mary already knew and liked her aunt Elizabeth. We have no scriptural evidence, but most think she was the sister of Mary’s mother. They probably saw each other in Jerusalem for the Passover and other high holy days. Maybe they had family reunions. Maybe Zechariah and Elizabeth came to Nazareth for visits.

So, how did Mary greet Elizabeth? I think she called her “aunt” or maybe “auntie.” In Hebrew, it’s pronounced “doda.” To make the word “auntie” you add a “swa” as you pronounce the Hebrew word. To do this, you make the sound of the constant first and then the rest of the word. Thus, auntie would be: _doda_. Bob would be _Bob_. I think Mary greeted her aunt by saying “doda.” Mary would be very affectionate to say this to Elizabeth.

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

Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting. I suspect the servants, who helped her on the journey, stayed outside. It was a private moment.

I suspect they hugged and maybe Mary felt her aunt’s stomach, after all, Elizabeth was more than six months.

The baby, later to be called John, leaped. John responded to Mary’s presence. What a remarkable event! It’s like the baby knew Mary. We will hear more about this in a moment.

Then Luke tells us that Elizabeth was filled with God’s Spirit. That means Elizabeth had wisdom and understanding beyond her own abilities.

42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!”
I assume this is still happening right at the front door. Of course, Mary stayed for three months (verse 56) so they had plenty of time to share stories and laugh and cry and encourage each other and give love beyond love because they both understood each other.

I like Luke’s comment that Elizabeth spoke with a loud voice. I am sure Mary’s visit was a surprise for her. She was excited about the moment. Sometimes our voices get loud when that happens.

With great enthusiasm, she offers two blessings. The first one is for Mary. Just like the angel told Mary that she was favored by God, Elizabeth declares that Mary is blessed among women. Mary is the chosen one.

The second blessing is for Jesus, the child, the son Mary will bear. Elizabeth knows the truth about Mary’s pregnancy even though Mary is not showing. It was truth given to her by the Spirit of God.

Then Elizabeth pauses for a moment to consider this visit by Mary.

But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Notice that I have underlined the first phrase because it is the title to my sermon. Elizabeth feels like Mary has favored her, and it’s true. Mary honored Elizabeth by her visit. But further, Elizabeth feels honored that the mother of Jesus should visit. They are both honoring each other.

We don’t have an answer to her question, except to quote what the angel Gabriel said to Mary about an impossible birth. Last Sunday, I told you that it was Gabriel’s illustration of impossibility for Mary, and Mary decided to see her aunt to confirm the reality of another impossible pregnancy.

It’s amazing that Elizabeth knew the identity of the baby inside of Mary just conceived by the overshadowing of Mary by the Holy Spirit. It’s interesting how active the Holy Spirit is in these two birth narratives.

I wish all of us could have the same insight that Jesus is Lord. Sometimes we hear the message of Christmas again and again so many times that we become numb to the true identity of Jesus. He is Lord. He is the Messiah. He is the Savior.

Elizabeth continues.
As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Elizabeth confirms to Mary what John did in her womb when Mary first entered and said, “Doda.” John leaped! He didn’t just wiggle or kick. He moved with the expression of joy.

On December 2, we looked at Zechariah’s story when the angel Gabriel visited him in the temple. The angel describes John in this way: “He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born” (Luke 1:15). The leaping by John as Mary entered and greeted Elizabeth is the fulfillment of that verse.

Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Here’s Elizabeth’s final blessing of Mary.

Let’s review. First, Mary is blessed because God favored her. Second, the child she will bear is blessed. And third (this verse), Mary is blessed again because Mary believes the Lord will fulfill all of the promise made to her.

What are those promises?

Mary will conceive. Mary will give birth to a son. Mary will give birth to Jesus, the Son of God, great and holy, with authority and a kingdom, to reign forever.

All of those promises will come true, and Mary is blessed because in her heart she believes all of it.

After this verse, Mary sings her song. Throughout the history of Christmas music, the opening line – “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” – is one of the most famous moments in solo work. From the Renaissance, the Magnificat has been a place for great composers: Vivaldi, Bach, Rachmaninoff, and recently John Rutter. In 2001, Amy Grant along with Chris Easton wrote “Breath of Heaven” – with Mary speaking about this moment.

I have traveled many moonless nights,
Cold and weary with a babe inside,
And I wonder what I’ve done.
Holy father you have come,
And chosen me now to carry your son.

I am waiting in a silent prayer.
I am frightened by the load I bear.
In a world as cold as stone,
Must I walk this path alone?
Be with me now.
Be with me now.

Breath of heaven,
Hold me together,
Be forever near me,
Breath of heaven.
Breath of heaven,
Lighten my darkness,
Pour over me your holiness,
For you are holy.
Breath of heaven.

Do you wonder as you watch my face,
If a wiser one should have had my place,
But I offer all I am
For the mercy of your plan.
Help me be strong.
Help me be.
Help me.

Breath of heaven,
Hold me together,
Be forever near me,
Breath of heaven.
Breath of heaven,
Lighten my darkness,
Pour over me your holiness,
For you are holy.

Breath of heaven,
Hold me together,
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Luke 1:57-66 NIV
57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.
59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” 61 They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”
62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.