



LUKE

YOU CAN BE CERTAIN...

Connect group questions

Luke 1:39-56 Certain... that God's eternal promises were being fulfilled

1. The image of Mary can vary quite a lot from the original! What motivates those who have 'added' on to the Bible's version of Mary? What motivates those who have 'taken away' from the Bible's version of Mary? What is the result in each case?

The words of the Spirit Read Luke 1:39-45

2. How did Elizabeth know what was happening to Mary?
3. What was the story with Elizabeth's baby leaping? (See Malachi 4:2)
4. How would Elizabeth's exclamation have impacted Mary?
5. By extrapolation, what is the assurance for *us* who believe the Lord will fulfil his promises to us?

The song of Mary - a song about God's mercy Read Luke 1: 46-56

6. Read again from the sermon, how Mark explained or described 'mercy'.

God's mercy to Mary

7. Mary was very aware of God's mercy to her and that she was only in this favoured and blessed position because the "Mighty One has done great things for me". In what ways are you aware of God's mercy to *you*? What ought to be our response to remembering God's great mercy to us?

God's mercy to those who fear him

8. What is this 'fear'? (Refer to the sermon)
9. Discuss this line from Mark's message:
Stand in awe of God and acknowledge your need of his mercy and you will receive _____.
Stand before God and declare that you don't need his mercy and you will receive _____.
10. What does the Bible say about those who say 'there is no god' and about those who rise up against God and his Messiah? (See Psalms 14:1 and 2:4). Is there a time and place for Christians to be more straight-talking with those who oppose the Christian message?
11. v53 - who are the hungry God feeds (see also Matt 5:6, John 6:35)? How does God send the rich away - empty?
12. Someone tells you how they've made it in the world, and they assume that both you and God will be impressed. How do you begin to reply?

God's mercy to Abraham and his descendants

13. v54 - what were the promises to Abraham and his descendants that Jesus' coming fulfils?

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1. Where would you be if God had not been merciful to you?
 2. How would you be placed if you had to earn your way to God and plead your own case?
 3. Why are we tempted to look for significance in our worldly achievements?
 4. How can we ensure we remain humble and hungry?

Please pray that we'll remember our dependence on God's mercy and seek to praise God as did Mary! Pray that the Lord would confront us with our tendency toward self-sufficiency; that he would humble us and give us a nagging hunger for him!

Date: 24th February 2019
Services: 730, 930 Tewartin and Peregian (via video)
Series: Luke: you can be certain
Title: ... that God's eternal promises were being fulfilled (Part 1)
Passage: Luke 1:39-56
Outline: **The words of the Spirit**
The song of Mary
Mercy to Mary
Mercy to those who fear him
Mercy to Abraham and his descendants

I was greatly inspired by a sermon on this passage by Alistair Begg. Some phrases and sentences have been drawn from his message.

INTRODUCTION

- Over time, historic pieces of artwork get touched up and altered, and then have to be restored...
 - Sometimes, **later** artists have added stuff in that just weren't in the original artist's intention... so for those restoring it's a tricky challenge : they have to carefully figure out what has been **added** to the **original**... and **remove** it...
 - And then **sometimes**... when fixing up the painting... too *much* is taken off... and the painting ends up nowhere **near** the original because those thinking they're **helping** have actually gone and modified the original to such a degree that the painting bears almost **no resemblance** to the **original!** //
 - We see that **metaphorically** in relation to the image of Mary...
 - Over time, things have been **added** to the image of Mary - such that Mary has become a **god-like** person - a **dispenser** of **blessing** - **answerer** of **prayers** - taken up **bodily** into **heaven**...
 - Sometimes of course we *prefer* our illusions - but we need to get back to the **real story** in our **Bibles**...
 - And then there are **others** of course instead of *adding* to the Mary story have wanted to *take away* - they've **scraped off** as it were some of the **paint** - the **virgin birth** is just **hurled** away...
 - ...all done in the interest of making faith **easier**... // *Has* it made it easier?
 - No, in the end, it doesn't make faith **easier**, it actually **destroys** faith... and if you don't believe in the virgin birth - and therefore in the **incarnation** - you can't **possibly** - or **shouldn't** at least - hold **any** office in the **church**... //
 - The only way to recover the **true** picture of Mary is to give serious attention to the **Bible**... and that is what we're doing this morning - and that is why it is good for you to have the passage open in front of you (p 831 in the Peregian Bibles) so that you can make sure that what I'm saying is actually in the text.
 - So **here** is where we are heading this morning...
1. **The words of the Spirit** - vv39-45
 2. **The song of Mary** - vv46-56
- So...

1. THE WORDS OF THE SPIRIT

- Why *that* heading for these verses...?
- Well - let's see what is happening here...
- On one level this is a very **human** story... cousins are comparing notes on their pregnancy....
- Mary is **excited** for Elizabeth - **Gabriel** had told her she's expecting...
- ...so she makes the journey to **see** her... about 70 miles in a straight line - further by road - that's **quite a trip** for a young girl... travelling on her **own**...
- Now normally in that culture, it would be the **younger** person - **Mary** - honouring the **older** person **Elizabeth** with respect and the praise due to an older person... but see what happens here...

- Have a look with me in v42 - *in a loud voice, Elizabeth exclaimed: (To the much younger Mary)... "Blessed are **you** among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my **Lord** should come to **me**?"*
- What is going **on** here? How did Elizabeth who lived in the remote country of **Judea** **know** Mary was pregnant...? and that the child she would bear would be significant?
- Elizabeth has a **knowledge** of things that she clearly didn't just work out by **herself**!
- Mary hadn't **texted** her you can be sure - but she knows all **about** Mary and what is about to happen to her... and her words are in complete **agreement** with the **earlier** words of **Gabriel**!
- How **come**? //
- Well, have a look with me at the verse I **didn't** read - **v41** - *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was **filled with the Holy Spirit**.*
- She was **filled with the Holy Spirit** and **THEN** she spoke - with a **loud voice**..
- So this knowledge was **entirely** given to her by the **Holy Spirit** - they were the **words** of God's **Spirit**! The word of **God**!
- But that's not all we see in v41 - Elizabeth's **baby leaped** in her **womb**...!
- Well you might say - well that's not unusual Mark, if Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant... babies at that stage kick all the **time**...
- But there's something **specific** I think we're meant to see about the **timing** - otherwise - why would this even be **mentioned**? It's not here just to tell us about a baby kicking! (Not like the end of the news where they whack in a human interest story...!)
- Do you recall two weeks ago when we read that John will be filled with the Spirit before birth?
- Is **this** the moment when that happened?
- Especially when we read the prophecy of Malachi 4:2 - on the screen - the Lord is announcing through Malachi the coming of the day of the Lord - and he says - *for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness (that's classic metaphor for the Messiah)... will rise with healing in its rays. **And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.***
- And 400 years later - after years of hearing nothing from God - and years of waiting and watching - John leaps in Elizabeth's womb... leaps for **joy**!! - it's the **same verb used**!
- ...because the long awaited day of the Lord is coming... Mary is **carrying** the Lord... he's on his way...!
- And the unborn **forerunner** is **filled with the Holy Spirit** - and his mother Elizabeth knows **exactly** what is happening because she's filled with the Holy Spirit and the **Spirit reveals** it to her!! //
- Think about what this meant for **Mary**
- There must have been days Mary said to herself - was I **dreaming** when I heard from the angel?? Is it **real**?
- And here by God's **kindness** - is a wonderful **reinforcement** for Mary... Elizabeth's words are entirely **consistent** with **Gabriel's** words...
- "You're **blessed** among women Mary - the child you bear Mary is **blessed**... in fact Mary - the child you bear is **MY LORD**...!! And **my** baby leapt for joy in the presence of **your** baby!!"
- **Mind blowing!** //
- Now we need to get to Mary's **song** - but one last thing - v45 - Elizabeth's last word - *Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!*
- Mary only had the **word** of God to go on.... In her case - the word of God through **Gabriel**...
- What do **YOU** have to go on?
- Only the **word** of **God** - the Word of God here in the **Bible**...

- Do you **believe** what you have here in your hand?
- Do you **trust** what is revealed here about Jesus – about **forgiveness** – about **salvation**?
- Do you **trust** that all God’s promises – about the new **heavens and the new earth** and the **end of evil** and the **reign of righteousness**... will be **fulfilled**?
- **Blessed are you!!** - you who believe that God will fulfil his **promises**... **Blessed are you!!!**
- So the words of the **Holy Spirit**,
- Second:

2. THE SONG OF MARY

- Over familiarity with this song can rob us of the **joy** of seeing it’s profound **significance**...
- If you grew up as an **Anglican**, you would have **said** this or **sung** this at Evening Prayer or Evensong every week... perhaps to the point where your mouth said or sung the words while **you** were thinking about what was for **dinner**!
- So we want to unpack the meaning of this...
- It is a song about God’s **mercy**
- Now “mercy” is a word often used in church but not understood...
- One preacher said “If **grace** is for people who are **guilty**... **mercy** is for people who are **miserable**...”
- Putting both words together – God’s mercy is his love towards those who are in **misery** as a result of their **sin** and **grief**!
- God’s mercy is expressive of God’s unending **commitment** to his people
- He committed himself by covenant or solemn agreement to Israel... and his mercy guarantees he will never give up on them – he refuses to wash his hands of them even when they deny his love!!
- So Mary sings of God’s love....

1. First – Mary’s song is about God’s mercy to her!!

- Mary stood in need of **mercy**... because she was a **sinner** like all the **rest**... which is why she calls God her **Saviour** in v46...
- She was a poor, lowly, anonymous maiden... yet now was “highly **favoured**” according to **Gabriel** and “greatly blessed” according to Elizabeth!
- That was God’s **mercy**!
- She was only **too** aware that she deserved **none** of this, but that it was God’s great **work** v49 – “*the Mighty One has done great things for me...*”
- Note that Mary knew we’d be having a sermon on this this morning... well maybe not specifically us this morning – but she says v48 *all generations will call be blessed*
- Mercy = God’s **favour** on the **undeserving**...! And Mary in her humility **knew** it and **praised God** for it... //
- Are you aware of God’s mercy to **YOU** this morning?
- No – you’re not about to bear the Son of God... but if you’re a Christian – you are **son** or **daughter** of **God**!!!... by his **mercy**... you’ve been chosen, rescued, adopted, ... made right with God...!
- I hope you regularly sing of God’s mercy to you!

2. It’s a song about God’s mercy to those who fear him

- Have a look with me at v50 – *his mercy extends to those who fear him from generation to generation*...
- What **is** this fear? It’s an **awareness** that you need his **mercy**!
- It is a fear which expresses itself in **awe** of God... and because you recognise God’s **might** and his **holiness**... you **KNOW** you need his **mercy**!

- We've explored this before... but it means you stand before God as it were with your mouth **open** and your tongue **silent**...
- ...and you know that **without** his mercy you're **dead**!
- People who say God is awesome... but then live life doing their own thing and ignoring God are at the very least walking **contradictions** or at **worst**, flat out **liars**!
- So listen **carefully** – here is how it works...
- Stand in **awe** of God and acknowledge you need his **mercy**... and you will receive... // HIS **MERCY!**
- Stand before God with a list of all your **proud achievements** and how you've lived such a good life and don't need his mercy – and you will receive... // NO **MERCY!**
- You see that in V51b – *scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts...*
- You know those who are proud towards God don't you? The Bible has no time for them... *The **fool** says in their heart there is no god!* Psalm 14:1
- Many want God to explain **himself** to them... or like to think of God like **this** or like **that**...
- They speak complete **nonsense** of course...
- God is not threatened by the **sceptic**... or the **scientist** who struts around the lecture theatre saying "there is no god..."
- You know what God does with the **philosophers** or even **theologians** who get a charge out of **attacking God** and **questioning** the **Bible** and **ridiculing** the **church** saying 'this isn't true' or 'that didn't happen'... "the Bible is made up"... get the chaplains out of schools...
- God looks from the heavens and **laughs** – Psalm 2:4!! He **laughs**!
- Yes, God **scatters** the **proud**... and v52 – he brings **down** the rulers...
- Remember King Nebuchadnezzar who stood on his balcony like we all do with **our** empires whether they are **financial** empires or **social** empires or even **church** empires and he said (like we are tempted to say) – I've done a **great job** – look what I have **built** –
- ...and then we see Nebuchadnezzar eating **grass** like a cow...
- What is going on? **God scatters the proud** and **brings down the rulers**... and
- *53 he has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty*
- This is not about a **feeding program**.... Mary sings of those hungry for **God**... as did the Son she bore talk of those who **hunger** and **thirst** for righteousness... if you're **hungry** for the things of **God** – he'll **fill you!**
- And the **rich**? – those who **aren't** hungry for God?
- Note that God doesn't take **away** the riches from them to send them away **empty**... he just allows them to become **richer** and **richer** and **richer**; and the **richer** they become the more they understand their **emptiness**....!!
- **Staggering** message!
- This may just describe some here this morning... you're **proud** of what you've **done** – I've done this and that and then I did the next thing... when I send my resume around people are **impressed**... just had a workplace review and everyone could tell I was **wonderful** and frankly – you know – **I am!**!! And I'm no longer on the **4th** floor, I'm on the **19th** and I have one of those cards and I can go **everywhere** in this building now... and you know what? – the **stock** options are **fantastic**...

I have **power** and **influence** – I've **made** it – I'm **someone**.. and I'm **proud** of it...

- But **friend** – Jesus Christ is not impressed by **ANY** of that... he **scatters** the **proud**... brings **down** the **rulers**... sends the rich people away... // **empty!**
- What am I meant to do... is God the mighty warrior **unkind**? NO – he is **absolutely merciful**..

- And if you fall on your **face** and acknowledge that **God is God** and there is no other... and that everything you **have** and are **belongs** to **him**... if you **humble** yourself... and are **hungry** enough to seek **God**... and then he will **lift you up** in your **humility** and **feed** you in your **hunger**!!
 - ...**that's his specialty**!!
 - Lady in Wesley hospital last Sunday – dying. “How can I be sure...”
 - Parable of Pharisee and tax collector – Luke 18 – what God wants is not a list of our achievements but a frank acknowledgement of our failures... and when we come and say “God have mercy on me a sinner” ... he says “OK – I will have mercy... you are forgiven – you’re **right** with me **now**” //
 - Did you come here **proud** // or **humble** today?
 - Will you **leave** here, **proud** // or **humble**?
 - For the Lord **scatters** the **proud** and sends the **rich** away... // **empty**...
 - But he shows **mercy** to those who fear him... to those who in **humility**, **ask** for mercy... //
- 3. It's a song of God's mercy to Abraham and his descendants**
- Now – I'm going to run out of time here... but look with me at v54 – *He has helped his servant Israel – that is the **nation** of Israel remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors*
 - And I want to do is point out that what God promised to **Abraham** 2,000 years prior to Jesus... and then to **Israel** time and time again even as he put up with their rebellion... **HERE** now in his great **mercy**... are those promises coming to **fruition** in the pregnancies of **Elizabeth** and **Mary** and the birth of **John** and **Jesus**!
 - **All** God's dealing with Israel... his **forbearance** with them... though they **rejected** him... his **promise** that one in the line of **David** would **come** – a **servant** – a **redeemer** – a **messiah** – a **rescuer**... in **Mary's pregnancy** – **THIS is that moment**...!!
 - God has **remembered** to be **merciful**... to **Israel**... and to **Gentiles** like **you** and **me**... by the **means** of this **little girl Mary** in her **pregnancy**...
 - ...so that we **too** might know God's **great love** and **wonderful mercy**... //
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- Where does all this leave us this morning?
 - If it were not for God's **mercy**, we would be in extreme **difficulty**.
 - If we had to **earn** our own way and **state** our own **case** and **build** our own **bridge** to God as it were – we would be **destined** to **futility** and would be **lost**.
 - But in God's **wisest love**, he sent his Son who would come and **rescue** us...
 - No **wonder** Mary sang – *My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God... my Saviour.*
 - May the Lord confront us with our tendency to find our significance in **power** or **passions** or **possessions**...
 - May the Lord **humble** us... and fill us with a nagging hunger which can **only** be filled by him...
 - ...and by his **might**, and by his **mercy** and by his **grace**... may we be found among those who have stood in awe of him... and said – “Lord have **mercy** on me, a **sinner**”
- ...because if **that** is what you have done...// – you can be absolutely **confident**... that his mercy has been extended even to **YOU**!!