

## Expectant Mothers' Faith

Who's coming to Christmas Eve services?" asked Jacinta, walking into the kitchen.

"Jamal!" exclaimed Ebony.

"Praise God!" Jacinta said, nabbing the remaining home-cooked oatmeal cookies from the Christmas platter.

Ebony had just ended a call with their middle sister, Chellise, who was in town with her husband, Jamal, and their two children. The three sisters had long prayed for Jamal's salvation. Jamal had repeatedly expressed disinterest in "the whole Christian thing." Still, Chellise and her sisters had tried to get him focused on Christ and not the "Christians" that Jamal felt were hypocrites.

Jamal had experienced some hard times, namely the death of a very close friend, employment challenges, and a strained relationship with his mother. Chellise told her sisters when she started noticing that Jamal's reaction to the things of God began to seem less hostile.

"Keep praying!" she had told Ebony and Jacinta. And they had. So, when Chellise said that Jamal wanted to go to Christmas Eve services with the family tonight, Ebony and Jacinta were hopeful and excited.

"What's the excitement about?" asked Ebony's husband as he came into the kitchen.

"Jamal is coming to services tonight!" exclaimed Ebony. "Hopefully he will soon give his life to the Lord."

"Yes, and amen!" said Terrell. "Well, let's go."

"Wait!" Terrell said, turning his head back to the kitchen counter. "Weren't there some oatmeal cookies left?"

**1. Why is hope and faith important to you?**

**2. Why should joy be an expression of a believer's faith in Christ?**

**3. Why does God want us to share the hope we have in Jesus?**

**LESSON FOCUS:** Joyfully share your hope and faith with each other.

## Mary's Humble Response

*Luke 1:36-38, KJV*

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

*Luke 1:36-38, NIV*

<sup>36</sup>“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.

<sup>37</sup>For no word from God will ever fail.”

<sup>38</sup>“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:26-38 documents the announcement of Jesus’ virginal conception to Mary. Verses 26-27 provide the historical context, while verses 28-31 record the angel Gabriel’s greeting to Mary. Jesus’ greatness is foretold in verses 32-33, and Mary’s miraculous pregnancy is explained in verses 34-35. Elizabeth’s pregnancy is declared in verses 36-37, followed by Mary’s humble response in verse 38.

Although Mary had not asked Gabriel for a sign of some kind, he pointed toward evidence that God’s power was already at work. The angel mentioned that Elizabeth, Mary’s “relative” (vs. 36) or “cousin” (KJV), who had long been barren, was in the “sixth month” of her pregnancy. Gabriel assured Mary that what he said to her would come to pass, for nothing was “impossible” (vs. 37, KJV) with God. Human promises sometimes fail, especially when people lack the resources or inclination to keep them. God, however, always fulfills His “word” (NIV).

Many disturbing questions might have been running through Mary’s mind. Nevertheless, she did not argue with Gabriel. Instead, Mary humbly submitted to God when He gave her a responsibility. Indeed, the adolescent referred to herself as the “Lord’s servant” (vs. 38)

and affirmed that He would fulfill what He had declared. After that, Gabriel “departed” (KJV) from Mary.

The Greek noun rendered “handmaid” (vs. 38, KJV) or “servant” (NIV) comes from a verb that means “to function as a slave.” The primary idea is to be subject to the will of another. To the Greeks, achieving one’s potential for excellence was the foremost duty of every person. This self-centered mindset is far removed from Mary’s attitude. She saw herself in humble service to the Lord’s will.

**4.** *What did the angel reveal to Mary about Elizabeth?*

**5.** *How did Mary respond to what the angel disclosed?*

## Mary’s Visit to Elizabeth

*Luke 1:39-45, 56, KJV*

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

*Luke 1:39-45, 56, NIV*

<sup>39</sup>At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup>where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup>In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup>But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup>As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>Blessed is she who has believed that

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

<sup>56</sup>Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

After Gabriel departed, Mary prepared and quickly traveled from Nazareth to an unnamed town in the "hill country of Judea" (Luke 1:39), where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived. Tradition says it was the village of Ein Karem near Jerusalem. That trip would have been a journey of perhaps 70 to 100 miles. While Scripture only mentions Mary making the trip, it is more likely she went in the safety of a caravan.

It may be that Mary went to stay with Elizabeth to be secluded from nosy friends and neighbors who would soon see her pregnancy, or to see if Gabriel's message was indeed true. She also could have gone to receive encouragement and support from Elizabeth, whom Mary "greeted" (vs. 40) when she entered the elderly couple's home.

Verse 41 says that at the sound of "Mary's greeting," Elizabeth's "baby" made a sudden motion in her "womb." This reminds us of verse 15, where Gabriel announced to Zechariah that even before John was born, he would be "filled with the Holy Spirit." The idea is that this unborn child was in some manner sensitive to the prompting of the Spirit. In turn, the Spirit would empower John to bear witness to the advent of the Messiah. Likewise, verse 41 reveals that Elizabeth was "filled with the Holy Spirit." This truth implies that when Elizabeth spoke about the Christ child, she was enabled to do so by the Spirit of God.

Elizabeth exclaimed that both Mary and the offspring in her womb were "blessed" (vs. 42). By this Elizabeth meant that Mary was uniquely privileged to be the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth asked why Mary, the "mother of my Lord" (vs. 43), decided to visit her older relative. Elizabeth

conveyed an attitude of humility, as well as surprise in being visited by Mary, then told Mary that her baby joyfully moved around the instant his mother heard Mary's voice (vs. 44). The key point in Elizabeth's remarks is the faith of Mary.

Since Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Mary arrived, another "three months" (vs. 56) would be close to Elizabeth giving birth to her son. Mary may have returned right after John's birth, or she felt it was the appropriate time to return to her hometown and be with Joseph.

Not only did Mary accept God's will for her, but she also rejoiced in it (vs. 46). Verses 46-55 are traditionally known as the Magnificat, which in Latin means "my soul magnifies."

Mary represents people of faith throughout history who have looked to the Lord as their ultimate source of deliverance. Such hope is not in vain, for God has manifested power with His mighty arm.

**6.** *What did Mary do after the angel departed?*

**7.** *What happened when Mary greeted Elizabeth?*



*Ein Karem in the "hill county of Judea" (Luke 1:39), the traditional home of Elizabeth and Zechariah.*

*Photo: Gilabrand*

**8.** *How did Elizabeth respond to the news that Mary was pregnant?*

**9.** *What likely prompted Mary to leave Elizabeth's home after "about three months" (vs. 56)?*

## Christmas Joy!

Paul told the Roman believers to “be joyful in hope” (Rom. 12:12), and he told the Corinthians that “these three remain: faith, hope and love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Paul exhorted Christians everywhere to be true followers of Jesus by reflecting the joy, the hope, and the faith that they have in their Lord and Savior, so the community of believers might radiate the love of Christ in a dark and fallen world.

Sharing the true joy of Christmas is evident when that joy comes from our hope and faith in Jesus. Therefore, celebrating the Lord’s birth with our fellow believers in Christ radiates the resplendent glory that emanates from God’s love for us by sending His Son to rescue us from sin, death, and evil. Indeed, such an act of love cannot help but cause us to rejoice!

One of the best ways to express our joy in Christ during Christmas is when Christians sing praises together to Jesus. “Faith is salted and peppered through everything at Christmas,” said Christian singer Amy Grant. “And I love at least one night by the Christmas tree to sing and feel the quiet holiness of that time that’s set apart to celebrate love, friendship, and God’s gift of the Christ child.” Verbalizing our hope and faith in Jesus with Christmas songs and with other believers vitalizes the joy our Lord has promised us.

Moreover, when we gather in prayer to celebrate Christmas, such words of hope and faith help comfort, strengthen, and guide each of our souls. Therefore, at such moments we should rejoice with our sisters and brothers in Christ, for His Spirit dwells in us, binding us together with Him and one another.

**10.** *What makes Christmas especially joyous?*

**11.** *Why is the joy of Jesus more deeply felt when it is shared with other believers?*

**12.** *How can you express your hope and faith in Jesus more joyously this Christmas?*

## Be Joyful!

When Mary visited Elizabeth, she was greeted with joy, particularly by Elizabeth's still unborn son. Elizabeth's joyous greeting confirmed Mary's hope in giving birth to the Christ child. Such hope and faith in Jesus we can also joyfully share with others, particularly this Christmas.

► *Write a prayer letter to your heavenly Father, thanking Him for sending His Son to our world to be born of a woman despite His divine majesty. Express your hope and faith in Jesus, while asking God to guide you during Christmas day to share the joy you have in Christ with other believers, so together you will truly rejoice in knowing Jesus as your Lord and Savior.*

### KEY VERSES

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women. —Luke 1:41-42a, KJV

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women." —Luke 1:41-42a, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of December 25 through December 31

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 1:18-25—Christ the Savior Is Born.
- Tue.** Luke 1:46-55—Mary's Exultant Faith.
- Wed.** Deuteronomy 18:9-14—Reject Abhorrent Imitations of Faith.
- Thu.** Matthew 28:16-20—Make Disciples in Faith.
- Fri.** Isaiah 49:1-6—God's Salvation for All the Earth.
- Sat.** Isaiah 60:1-6—Arise, Shine, Your Light Has Come.
- Sun.** Matthew 2:1-12—Worship the King of the Jews.