

Who Am I to be Called Blessed?

Luke 1:39-55 (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."

Do you like musicals? Personally, I have to admit, and you may think less of me for it, that I am not a fan of musicals. When I was little, the very idea of watching a musical more often than not made me groan and ask if I could do something else. Now that I have matured a little, I tolerate them. I mean, it is true that I don't go out of my way to watch *Phantom of the Opera* or *Les Misérables*, but I can at least appreciate the music now.

Actually, one of my biggest gripes about musicals I've had to take back as I've gotten older. I've always been annoyed that people break out in song in musicals because no one actually does that in real life. Life is not a musical. Then I started to pay attention to music in my life. I started to realize that I sing along with the CDs in my car quite often. I hum tunes, sing verses to songs that are stuck in my head. I even have to admit that I make up songs, especially with my kids.

I know there are many of you who would claim that you are not musical. I think what you really mean is that you don't find yourself singing four part harmony to hymns. You probably do listen to music. You have songs that you sing to. You hum tunes that are stuck in your head like me. We all like music and would admit that life would be a little less joyous without it. We like rhythm. We like rhyme. We like cadence. We like music. It moves with our emotions. It enriches our lives.

It shouldn't be surprising then that Mary bursts into song after she arrives to visit her relative Elizabeth. Just prior in Luke's gospel account the angel Gabriel from heaven came announcing that Mary, a virgin, would conceive and give birth to the Son of God. And if that sounded impossible, the angel also told Mary that Elizabeth, her relative, was going to have a child in her old age when she had never been able to have children before. In fact, she is in her sixth month of pregnancy. Nothing is impossible with God.

So Mary got ready and hurried to Elizabeth's home, a journey that took maybe 5 days or so. Elizabeth would understand. Mary could share her joy with her. When she reached the home and greeted Elizabeth, Mary was overwhelmed by the response. It was almost as if Elizabeth was breaking into song. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed: "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!" (verses 42-45)

Mary breaks out into a musical: "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. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 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. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors." (verses 46-55)

I know this is totally a Bible study question, but if you were to compose a song to God, what would you include in it? What about God and your relationship with him quickens your pulse, makes your heart pump a little faster, and fills you with joy that simply must come out?

Mary and Elizabeth both ask, "Whom am I to be blessed in this way?" Mary realizes that she has done absolutely nothing to deserve to be the one who gives birth to Jesus, to God, her Savior and the Savior of all. She is nothing more than a servant of God, but God has chosen her to bear the Christ Child. The Mighty One has done great things for her. Out of his mercy, he chose her to be the one to give birth to the offspring who would crush the serpent's head. She would be the one to bear the offspring promised to Abraham who would be a blessing to all nations of the whole world. This boy is the hope of her ancestors, of so many believers that came before her, and will be for generations upon generations to come.

There are many times when I step back and reflect upon what God has done for me, and it is humbling. I think about all the ways that I have rebelled against him, when I knew what I was supposed to do and did the exact opposite, how I have actually gone out and put myself in temptation's way. I think of all the things that I have left undone because I didn't want to do it or I wanted to do something else instead. I think of the times when I was arrogant in being right, disregarded what others said and didn't heed their advice because I thought I knew better.

Who am I that the Lord should take notice of me and actually bless me? Who am I that I should be able to rejoice along with Mary at the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that extended all the way back thousands of years ago to Abraham, to Adam and Eve. I guess that would be the first verse of my song to God.

*Lord, why do great things for me?
I am as rotten as can be.
I deserve no pity.
How is it that you bless me?*

Then the list of great things God has done for me grows and builds. How have I seen his might in my life? How has he helped me, come to my aid? I guess for me that verse of song starts with my baptism.

*In the waters you washed me clean.
By your Word it is plainly seen
You had mercy upon me.
That is why I belong to Thee.*

But his aid did not stop here. Although I will not hold a place in history the way that Mary does being the mother of our Lord and Savior, there are so many other promises that God has kept to me. It's another verse of praise.

*You promised to work all for my good.
Despite me being a viper's brood.
You never leave me all alone.
You did for all my sins atone.*

There are so many more verses that can be written. And there will be many more songs about God that people will pen because they can't hold the praises in. In fact, after Mary's song, Zechariah, the husband of Elizabeth and the father of John the Baptist, sang when John was given his name at eight days old and Zechariah was allowed to use his voice once again. The great company of angels sang on Christmas Eve, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14) Simeon proclaimed songs of praise that God was faithful to his promises allowing Simeon to see Jesus, his Savior, with his own eyes.

Who will you sing your song to? How will your soul glorify the Lord? And no, you don't have to write verses like I did, unless you are so inclined. You don't have to break out into a musical. As one hymn put it, "You can tell the love of Jesus; You can say he died for all." (CW 573 Hark! The Voice of Jesus Crying) You can do that just by inviting people to come here to hear what God has done for them, to hear the praises we sing about him. Ask them to come with you on Christmas Eve. That's why we have these extra postcards so that you can invite others to have a reason to sing God's praises that the Savior has come for them; he is Christ the Lord! Your spirit can rejoice in God our Savior as you simply recount with your family as you open presents what the greatest present of all is: the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. You can remind your family that God always keeps his promises, and that includes sending Jesus.

Just as Mary broke into song at the great things God had done for her, so we can sing. There is no reason that we should be so blessed by God, but God keeps his promises to us out of his great mercy. His mercy, his aid, his promises give us the inspiration to glorify his name and rejoice in him as our Savior. Because God has done great things for me by sending me Jesus through the Virgin Mary, I am blessed. Amen.