



Mary's Commitment to Joy

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

Luke 1:39-56, ESV

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How Mary Found Her Joy

For nine or ten days Mary had carried in her heart the most astounding secret: She was pregnant, and the child was to be the long-awaited messianic king, Israel's deliverer. Yet she had been afraid to share the news, for if the wrong person heard, Herod could have had her killed; or, if her loved ones didn't believe her, the religious leaders might have condemned her and had her put to death. Perhaps she herself was afraid to trust that it was true.

But when Elizabeth prophesied over Mary and announced that she was blessed, Mary finally was able to trust that God really was at work. She believed that, despite the inherent danger in carrying the Messiah; despite the reality that her hopes and dreams had been turned upside down; and despite the fact that she didn't fully understand, God would work through her and her child. In her acceptance of this amazing truth, Mary finally shouted out her song of joy. Can you hear the tone of her song in its opening words? "My soul magnifies the Lord! My spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"

Joy, unlike happiness, can come to us independent of our circumstances. It comes not from changing our circumstances but from viewing them through the eyes of faith. The apostles, after being beaten by the Council, rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Paul penned his well-known "epistle of joy" – the Letter to the Philippians – even as he sat in a Roman prison awaiting news as to whether he would be executed for his faith. In the letter he wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always!" Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica, who themselves had been persecuted for their faith, "Rejoice always," and then told them how this was possible when he continued, "Pray without ceasing" and "give thanks in all circumstances."

Mary, despite dangers, fears, risks, and upended dreams, "magnified the Lord and rejoiced in God." She did this with the help of Elizabeth and with her own willingness to trust that God was working in and through her to accomplish his purposes.

Joy is a choice we make when we look at our present circumstances through the eyes of faith, trusting that God is at work and that he will never leave us nor abandon us. And it is often found with the help of another who reassures us that God is with us.

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