Exploring wonder of Xmas story – through eyes of Luke – writer of 3rd gospel. His aim: be convincing (1:4) – present us with evidence - so we are certain about what we’ve heard.

**v26** In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy

* 6 mo later in story – Zech /said a word!

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee

* Same angel – v similar mission – tell an unlikely woman she’s going to have a v special baby. 2 women – 2 visitations - 2 witnesses.
  + Elizabeth: unlikely b/c /old: “very old”.
  + Mary: unlikely b/c she’s from Nazareth, a town in Galilee – and a virgin. Come to that. Hang out on Nazareth for a minute.
* Map - people mocked Jesus’ followers[[1]](#endnote-1) -> uneducated Galileans.
  + Galilee – North – rough – unsophisticated place. Peasants, fishermen[[2]](#endnote-2).
    - Judeans – south – looked down on them. Brexit?
  + Galileans: looked down on ppl from Nazareth.
* Nothingy little village – max 400ppl – blink & miss it kinda place.
  + /even mentioned in OT[[3]](#endnote-3). Real tho: dig 2006 - published 2015 – remains of C1[[4]](#endnote-4)
  + Rough ppl: John 1 – meet character: Nathaniel: friend tells him he’s found the long-awaited Messiah: name is Jesus – from Nazareth. Nathaniel: yeah right Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?[[5]](#endnote-5)
    - Largely prejudice coming from a guy who lived in nearby Cana – an equally nothingy village – like s/o from Tunstall saying Middleport is a rubbish place to live. but nonetheless – reflects reality: unlikely place for Messiah.
  + J’s only recorded words in Naz: synagogue[[6]](#endnote-6) – Luke 4: The Spirit of the Lord is on me – anointed me – preach good news – freedom – heal blind – set oppressed free – proclaim year of Lord’s favour.
    - /often read next bit: Response: celebration?
    - No: Drove him out of town - tried to throw him off a cliff[[7]](#endnote-7). Tells you all need to know.
* Matthew observes: **Matthew 2:23** [Jesus] lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.
  + Problem: Nowhere in OT -> Messiah from Nazareth. What does Matthew mean? “called a Nazarene”?
    - Maybe[[8]](#endnote-8): likely: “Nazarene” – slang – poor person – yokel – perhaps even chav[[9]](#endnote-9).
    - Prophets together: give impression of Messiah – as someone humanly speaking – very ordinary – someone who would be insulted b/c of heritage - /grand regal leader – suffering servant.
  + If J was born in UK today - /Westminster - /Cambridge –> Stoke. /Trentham > Cobridge – Shelton – Meir.
    - Let me say: ever been insulted b/c poor - /fit in – had to do stuff /proud of to feed family – felt the condescending eyes of others: J would not be there.
    - He’d be there in the Foodbank – there in the addiction clinic – there in the nightshelter.
    - *God of the poor – friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray!*
* Vitally important in understanding who J is:
  + Remember when Jesus rode into Jerusalem – on a donkey: crowds cheering. When ppl asked “who is this?” **Matthew 21:11** This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. One of us! Our King[[10]](#endnote-10)! /that pompous toff in the palace.
  + So: Angel -> rough town in a rough district: matters:
    - /conquering warrior
    - Suffering servant: **Is 53:3** He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
  + If you hold the poor in low esteem today, you hold Jesus in low esteem too. For he became poor.

So, Angel turns up one day – Mary: scared - like Zechariah.

* Angel: Calms her: Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God.
  + /destroy!
  + BTW: Reading her memories here, through Luke’s pen – interview.

Tells her 5 things:

* #1 You will conceive and give birth to a son
  + That must have been a surprise to her. Prob /expecting.
* #2 You are to call him Jesus.
  + Greek translation of Hebrew “Joshua” - “God saves” - /uncommon name at time. What is uncommon is being told by an angel…
* #3 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.
  + That’s when it starts to get really scary. A great person - /any old great person: the Son of the “Most High God” – title used many times in OT[[11]](#endnote-11).
  + In her head: what does that mean “Son of God”?
* #4 The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.
  + This son; throne. Kings have thrones. Going to give birth to a king!
    - Throughout OT – esp 2Sam 7 – idea that there’s a King coming – a son of David – who will be greater and better than David in every way.
  + Her son: Son of God & long-awaited King.
* #5 He will reign over Jacob’s descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end
  + Kingdoms rise and fall. 350 years ago Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch: global superpowers![[12]](#endnote-12)
  + OT prophecy: kingdom >>> David’s – last forever – not just a generation or two.
    - David’s son Solomon came and went – disappointing – clearly /referring to him – things went quickly downhill from there.
  + So expectation that one day – greater King coming.
    - Eternal kingdom.
    - Angel: this baby – you’re going to give birth to Mary.
* Can you imagine all thoughts rushing through Mary’s mind?
  + Immediate thoughts are:
    - /theological implications of Messiah’s arrival – fulfilment of prophecy – hopes and dreams of entire nation resting on her & child.
    - Very naturally – immediate concern: down to earth: **v34**: like, how? Knows where babies come from – and her and Joseph…
* Notice: /doubting truth of it
  + Zechariah: **v18:** /believe – how can I be sure?
  + Mary: /doubt: just asking how.
* **v35** The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.
  + How? God will do it. /Human action - /natural conception.
    - HS will overshadow – same word used in Transfiguration – Luke 9:34 – or perhaps think back to Genesis 1:2 – creative Sp – hovering over surface of waters.
    - HS will bring life – that’s what he does – and b/c he is Holy – the child born will not just be an ordinary child – but a Holy child.
    - And as if you need more proof Mary – go and see elderly Elizabeth – she’s 6mo pregnant.
* Can you imagine – racing through her mind?
  + Deeply conservative culture. Obeyed OT law: sex was for marriage - /before.
  + How explain to my parents? Devastated.
  + Friends & neighbours think? /believe me – avoid?
  + What about poor J? Everyone will assume it’s him. Looks really bad. Affect his business?
  + Wedding plans cancelled?
* I am the Lord’s servant.
  + Humble faith – for all the problems she will face now – putting herself into hands of God.
  + But “I am God’s servant” – trusts him. Lesson there for us all – complexities of life – trust him – /know how this will work out - I know he loves me: trust.

Really only 1 person on planet earth who will believe Mary at that point: Elizabeth – so that’s where she goes.

* As enters house – calls out a greeting: - /what think about prophetic words – careful but can be genuine:
  + All Mary has done is say hello – and two prophetic actions occur:
  + Unborn baby – John – remember **v15** filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born – does about all an unborn baby can do in terms of prophetic ministry – and gives Elizabeth a big kick!
    - Like: this is the one: say something!
  + Elizabeth is filled w HS at that moment[[13]](#endnote-13): pronounces blessing over Mary[[14]](#endnote-14): bearing in mind /know anything about Mary’s encounter w angel – just her young, unmarried great-niece (?) 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?
    - Prophetic word!
  + Ends with these words - /help thinking may have had an eye on her dumbstruck husband at this moment: Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her! As opposed to you Zechariah!
  + Big world out there: foolish if you believe – trust in Jesus.
    - So much happier – peace – security – rest – believe – trust what he has promised to you.

Mention Mary’s song – Homegroups:

* Luke’s put it in here - /sure she burst into song in front of Elizabeth. To my mind, more likely she wrote it in the 3mo stay – took a bit of getting used to!
* Observation: 10 verses. Each is a quote or ref from OT. In context. Holds together. V clever. Shows us this teenage girl[[15]](#endnote-15) knew her Bible – spiritually mature believer.
* Big theme of her song: humility:
  + **v46** ‘My soul glorifies the Lord **v47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour why??? **v48** for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
  + Mary is rejoicing b/c the God of Heaven – the Almighty – chosen her – of all ppl – ordinary – poor young woman from a hick town[[16]](#endnote-16) in a rough part of an occupied nation.
    - Chosen her to give birth to the Son of God – mind-blowing.
  + **v51** he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts… **v52** He … has lifted up the humble.
* Point: our God – came to earth - /live in a palace - /win wars
  + Gave up everything – humbled himself – came to live among humble ppl – humble circumstances – to win hearts.
  + Instead of us trying to find out way to him – he came to us.
  + Went down – down – down – all the way to a cruel wooden cross – the ultimate humiliation – bearing the sin of ppl like us.
* **John 19:19** Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.
  + Here is your king: Jesus “the saviour” from Nazareth. Not much of a king.
    - But for those with eyes to see: This is our God! Our Jesus! The wonder of the incarnation: Emmanuel: God with us.
    - I wonder if your soul glorifies the Lord today? Does your spirit rejoice in God your saviour?
* **Acts 24:5** – v early followers of J were called Nazarenes by some ppl. Others called them Xns[[17]](#endnote-17).
  + In West, word Xn won out[[18]](#endnote-18). Go to ME: common word for Xn is Nazrani -> Nazarene.
  + My qn: are you Nazrani today? Are you going to align yourself w God-man from Nazareth?
* Are you going to strive in this life to better yourself – pursue wealth and suck up to the rich and powerful?
  + Or do as the Nazarene did - who lowered himself – made himself nothing – gave himself to serve others?[[19]](#endnote-19)

*Pr:*

* *Thx – Jesus: precious son of God -> cross – ultimate humiliation – shame. Only way to save us. Help us to humble ourselves:* 
  + *Stand alongside insulted & downtrodden – care for poor among us*
  + *Recognise our own spiritual poverty. Thx: all you left behind to come to rescue us.*
* *Help us worship you above all - trust you above all like Mary did.*

Sing: I Stand Amazed In The Presence (P729)

**Benediction: 2Peter 3:18** (May you) grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and forever! Amen.

**Resources**

**Hendriksen, William**. *Luke*. Banner of Truth, 1978

**Mead, Peter**. *Pleased To Dwell: A Biblical Introduction to the Incarnation.* Christian Focus, 2014.

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| --- | --- |
| **Mary’s Song**  **Luke 1v46** ‘My soul glorifies the Lord  **v47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  **v48** for he has been mindful  of the humble state of his servant.  From now on all generations will call me blessed,  **v49** for the Mighty One has done great things for me –  holy is his name.  **v50** His mercy extends to those who fear him,  from generation to generation.  **v51** He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;  he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.  **v52** He has brought down rulers from their thrones  but has lifted up the humble.  **v53** He has filled the hungry with good things  but has sent the rich away empty.  **v54** He has helped his servant Israel,  remembering to be merciful  **v55** to Abraham and his descendants for ever,  just as he promised our ancestors.’ | **Hannah’s prayer**  **1Samuel 2v1** ‘My heart rejoices in the Lord;  in the Lord my horn is lifted high.  My mouth boasts over my enemies,  for I delight in your deliverance.  **v2** ‘There is no one holy like the Lord;  there is no one besides you;  there is no Rock like our God.  **v3** ‘Do not keep talking so proudly  or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  for the Lord is a God who knows,  and by him deeds are weighed.  **v4** ‘The bows of the warriors are broken,  but those who stumbled are armed with strength.  **v5** Those who were full hire themselves out for food,  but those who were hungry are hungry no more.  She who was barren has borne seven children,  but she who has had many sons pines away.  **v6** ‘The Lord brings death and makes alive;  he brings down to the grave and raises up.  **v7** The Lord sends poverty and wealth;  he humbles and he exalts.  **v8** He raises the poor from the dust  and lifts the needy from the ash heap;  he seats them with princes  and makes them inherit a throne of honour.  ‘For the foundations of the earth are the Lord’s;  on them he has set the world.  **v9** He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,  but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.  ‘It is not by strength that one prevails;  **v10**  those who oppose the Lord will be broken.  The Most High will thunder from heaven;  the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.  ‘He will give strength to his king  and exalt the horn of his anointed.’ |

**Discussion Questions: Mary’s Song**

*There’s probably too much to do here in one session. So do make sure there’s time to worship and to pray for each other.*

1. Read Luke 1:46-56. We don’t know whether this is a poem or a song, or exactly when Mary wrote it, but she was deeply inspired by Hannah’s song in 1Samuel 2. Compare Mary’s song to Hannah’s. What similarities can you find? I’ve supplied a sheet with both printed if you want to use it. See previous page.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mary’s Song** | **Hannah’s song** |
| **v47** my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour | **v1** My heart rejoices in the Lord |
| **v49** the Mighty One has done great things for me | **v2** there is no one besides you;  there is no Rock like our God |
| **v51** he has scattered those who are proud | **v3** Do not keep talking so proudly |
| **v52** He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. | **v8** He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honour. |
| **v53** He has filled the hungry with good things | **v5** those who were hungry are hungry no more |

Why do you think Mary drew inspiration from Hannah? Both Mary and Hannah were humble servants of God and were unexpectedly blessed with a baby!

1. Mary also drew inspiration from all kinds of other Old Testament scriptures. Take a look at these: Habakkuk 3:18; Psalm 138:6; Psalm 103:17; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 98:3; Psalm 132:11. What does all this tell us about Mary? She was a godly, knowledgeable, clever young woman. How many of us could compose a poem like this, based almost entirely on scripture? How many of our teens could? Maybe take the opportunity to pray for our teens!
2. Mary starts her song by taking about joy: “my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”. One definition of joy is “happiness + contentment”. Do you agree? Do you think our culture pursues joy or happiness at Christmastime? Happiness is quickly obtained; chocolate, sex, TV, a good book. I think our culture largely pursues happiness at Christmastime: presents, feasting etc. Maybe there’s elements of joy too though. Joy is deeper than happiness; it’s not so affected by immediate circumstances. As someone said: joy is like ballast in the bottom of a boat: it brings stability. Mary’s joy is enough to carry her through the stormy waters ahead: all the gossip, conflict with family, friends.
3. Look at v46-49 What causes Mary to experience joy? Her testimony of God’s blessing on her life. Her salvation: “God my saviour”. Look how personal it is – count the personal pronouns. She is struggling to get her head round the Lord’s work in her life. What causes you to experience joy? Go round the room and ask people to name something that causes them to rejoice in God.
4. Read v49-51. What attributes of God does Mary draw attention to? His might, holiness, mercy. How does reflecting on God’s attributes affect the way we worship? Helps us not to be self-centred. Makes our worship deeper and more profound. Gives us courage to ask boldly and to face whatever problems we might have, knowing he is strong.
5. Read v52-53. What contrasts does Mary make? How do these reflect her feelings about God and about herself? It’s all about God’s greatness and her lack of it! Mary was a prime example of God lifting up a humble person. That is what he does for people who humble themselves and receive his gift of grace. Read James 4:10. How do you respond to that? For most of us, it’s not the natural direction of our hearts – our culture elevates self above all else - we need constant reminders to elevate others, and especially the Lord in our minds.
6. Read v54-55. God promised Abraham that “all peoples on earth would be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3) Mary recognises that the Messiah’s coming is the ultimate fulfilment of that promise. What has God promised you in the scriptures? Which is most precious to you?

Close in prayer, giving your group members the opportunity to voice sentence prayers of thanksgiving and praise for the attributes of God we discussed today. Consider having different people in your group pray aloud the statements in Mary’s song. Pray that the joy of Christ would remain in us and be full this week.

**Discussion Questions: Mary’s Song**

1. Read Luke 1:46-56. We don’t know whether this is a poem or a song, or exactly when Mary wrote it, but she was deeply inspired by Hannah’s song in 1Samuel 2. Compare Mary’s song to Hannah’s. What similarities can you find?
2. Why do you think Mary drew inspiration from Hannah?
3. Mary also drew inspiration from all kinds of other Old Testament scriptures. Take a look at these: Habakkuk 3:18; Psalm 138:6; Psalm 103:17; Psalm 98:1; Psalm 98:3; Psalm 132:11. What does all this tell us about Mary?
4. Mary starts her song by taking about joy: “my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”. One definition of joy is “happiness + contentment”. Do you agree? Do you think our culture pursues joy or happiness at Christmastime?
5. Look at v46-49 What causes Mary to experience joy? What causes you to experience joy?
6. Read v49-51. What attributes of God does Mary draw attention to? How does reflecting on God’s attributes affect the way we worship?
7. Read v52-53. What contrasts does Mary make? How do these reflect her feelings about God and about herself? Read James 4:10. How do you respond to that?
8. Read v54-55. God promised Abraham that “all peoples on earth would be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3) Mary recognises that the Messiah’s coming is the ultimate fulfilment of that promise. What has God promised you in the scriptures? Which is most precious to you?

Close in prayer

1. The Pharisees mocked Nicodemus, who was sticking up for Jesus, accusing him of being “from Galilee”. (John 7:52) See also Acts 4:13 – they found it hard to believe these men were capable of that. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/unearthing-world-jesus-180957515/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Or in the list of sixty-three villages of Galilee mentioned in the Hebrew Talmud or the forty-five mentioned by first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who knew the area well. <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1469/why-nazareth> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/has-the-childhood-home-of-jesus-been-found/> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. John 1:46 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Luke 4:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Luke 4:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. People have long-associated it with the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1 – a branch will come out of Jesse. “Netzar” is the Hebrew word for branch or shoot. However convenient that might sound, it’s not as obvious in the original language as it first looks. And Is 53:2 is a different word entirely. It’s possible, but not certain. What is very unlikely is that it might mean “nazirite”: Jesus did not lead an ascetic lifestyle associated with the Nazirites; indeed he was (unfairly) accused of being a glutton and a drunkard! [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Beale & Carson. Commentary on the NT use of the OT. p10-11 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Similarly, when the blind man in Luke 18 heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, his courage is lifted and he cries out to him for help: surely here is someone on my wavelength. Or in Matthew 26:71, you can imagine the servant girl spitting out the words in contempt: “he was with that Jesus of Nazareth”. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Deuteronomy 32:8; 2Samuel 22:14; Psalm 7:17 etc + Hebrews 7:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.quora.com/Who-were-the-most-powerful-countries-in-the-world-at-different-points-in-history> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Ha, someone should tell Todd Bentley that you can fill someone with the Holy Spirit by kicking them. But you have to be a baby! ☺ [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Is it possible Elizabeth knew about Mary’s encounter with the angel by more conventional means? I think not: there was no postal service as we know it. Letters would have been expensive and time-consuming to send; Mary was poor, probably illiterate (as a peasant woman); and she’d left pretty much straight after the angel did (v38). Why go to the effort of writing if you’re coming yourself in a few days? [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.gotquestions.org/how-old-was-Mary.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/hick-town> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Acts 11:26 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene_(title)#%22Nazarenes%22_for_Christians_in_Greek> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Philippians 2:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)