



PART 2: FLIPPING THE SCRIPT

By David Fields

Luke 1:26-80

I. Zechariah and Mary

Zechariah is, in his own way, an example of complicated faith. And we need to appreciate how in the story – at the end of Luke 1 – when his son John is born, he now uses his lips, not in cynicism, or questioning God, but to praise God.

“He [Zechariah] asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.”

– Luke 1:63-64

a. From the Centre to the Edges

Contrasts in these Parallel Stories:

1. John is the forerunner, preparing people to meet their God – a prophet preparing the way for God’s coming. But John is not the centre of the story.

Jesus is proclaimed as the “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God.”

2. John is said to be “full of the Holy Spirit” from the womb.

Jesus, on the other hand, is conceived by the Holy Spirit.

3. Zechariah is a faithful priest, serving in Jerusalem at the Temple – the epicentre of where God’s presence is said to dwell. When he hears the angel’s announcement, he struggles to believe it. He hesitates with unbelief.

Mary, in contrast, is a young woman, located in the small town of Nazareth, which is seen by many as insignificant, despised, even unclean according to Isaiah 9:1. And yet, she responds to the angel without hesitation – embracing God’s plans, and proclaiming herself as God’s servant.

These differences shed light on the profound way that God’s plans come about through Jesus – they highlight “the joy with which the “little people” will receive divine favour,” as scholar Joel Green puts it (NICNT, 84).

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Luke is “flipping the script,” and wants us to notice the “smallness”, the supposedly “insignificant” places and people, that this is the epicentre of God’s work. Ultimately, it is in through the peasant girl in the backside-of-nowhere-village that God himself comes to the world.

Where do we expect God to be at work? And what would it look like if he did? What if God *still* wants to subvert our expectations; to show how he loves to work in and through and with those the world easily overlooks?

Are you open, like Mary was for the Living God to be doing what only he can do in you? In your small corner of the world? In relative obscurity?

b. The Blessed Virgin Mary

Notice this repetition of Mary as being “blessed.” The angel speaks of her finding “favour” with God, twice. Elizabeth speaks of Mary as being “Blessed”, twice. Mary herself expresses that *“From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me – holy is his name.”* – Luke 1:48b-49

The language of “blessed” or “favoured” in the Bible does not mean what we do by favouritism. Blessing, in the Bible, has to do with God’s grace flowing to, and then out through a person to others. *Being “blessed” is always for others.*

But there is a rightful sense that when Mary acknowledges that “all generations will call me blessed,” there is a sense of high honour God bestows on her.

How do we continue to join with Elizabeth, who says of her little niece: “Blessed are you among women”?

1. Mary, the Mother of God.

Early in Church history Christians referred to Mary with the Greek word: *Theotokos*. It means “The God-Bearer.”

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“For nine months she carried him in her womb. For years she carried him in her arms and in her heart. It was she who nursed him in infancy. It was she who got up when he cried. It was she who changed his diapers. It was she who washed his clothes....It was she who taught him to speak! It was she who taught him to pray the Psalms. It was she who gave him his facial features....Jesus has her nose, her cheekbones, and her eyes.”

– Darrell Johnson, *Awaken Wonder*

Mary is honoured for her unique role as the mother of our Lord. God chose her for that role, and she, in faith, said yes. We honour Mary for that “yes”.

2. Mary, the First Christian Theologian

In her song in Luke 1:46-55, Mary is reflecting on the meaning of the coming Son of God, of Jesus, before anyone else does. She is grabbing up the whole tradition of the Scriptures – every line, in some way is drawn from the Hebrew Bible – and reflecting on what the coming of Jesus means in light of the larger story. She has the privilege, the honour, of being the very first Christian theologian, and we honour her for that role.

3. Mary is a Model Disciple

In this text, Mary teaches us about what kind of posture we too are to take toward the Lord.

“She is the model disciple because she believes the impossible could happen....Mary dared to believe that the Living God could do what had never been done before, and she invites us to do the same.”

– Darrell Johnson, *Awaken Wonder*

She, a virgin, would become pregnant without any human help. Talk about unexpected.

Her response? “I am the Lord’s servant... And then this profound moment of utter abandon to God: “May your word to me be fulfilled.” – Luke 1:38

There's this stepping out in deep trust. So notice...

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i. Mary's Faith Shapes Her Identity

There are levels and layers to questions of our identity. We look at our relationships, our vocations/job. But there is a more fundamental layer: the vertical, spiritual level.

Here's what Mary says, "I am the Lord's servant."

Of course, before she is the Lord's servant, she is simply "The Lord's." Belongs to him. Yes. That's the most foundational of all identities we might recognize. But this does say something about our vocation as well. "Servant." Yes, that is to be true for every Christian person. Mary becomes our model. She shows us what every person who says "Yes" to God is to adopt.

ii. Mary's Faith is Expressed in Abandon

"May your word to me be fulfilled."

This is an expression of surrender to God. Open handedness. Imagine her situation. She's engaged to be married. We know that. She knows what kind of disruption this will bring. But when God says, "here's the plan," she says, "count me in." Which is a model of what faith, at the end of the day, is all about.

Are we – are you – open-handed to whatever God would have for your life? Mary gives her "yes" and leaves us a picture of faith to follow.

What is the next step God is calling you to take? What kind of "yes" do you need to give?

II. Elizabeth and Mary

We read of Mary greeting her aunt Elizabeth and that when she does, Elizabeth is "filled with the Holy Spirit" and makes this incredible, prophetic utterance. She has profound, God-given insight into Jesus' identity.

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“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” God is revealing God’s plans in a supernatural way: in a beautifully unexpected way. Think of it: as one scholar says; “God’s purposes and plans are first revealed in a private meeting between two women on the edge of society” – N.T. Wright, Luke For Everyone

Elizabeth’s experience of the Holy Spirit, and her prophetic words, anticipate what will become true for all God’s people, as we see Peter preaching in Acts 2:

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy....Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy”
– Acts 2:17-18

In his song “Kingdom”, Joshua Leventhal puts the nature of God’s inbreaking Kingdom so well:

“It’s like a seed unseemly in the earth
Like the lost coin of a widow
Who seeks hard ‘cause it’s precious to her
And that seed becomes the mightiest of trees
The true temple God intended
Where even beggars can be priests.”
– Joshua Leventhal, “Kingdom”

The Temple, the place where God’s presence dwells, where his glory rests, it’s no longer a physical building, hid behind a veil. No, Jesus himself is the place where God’s presence is now with us. It’s why some Christians have called Mary “the ark of the new covenant” – for inside of her, she now carries the place where God’s glory is most perfectly displayed.

And now, after Pentecost, through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God’s very presence now resides in us, and among us as his Church. It’s why Paul can say that the Church, that we, us together, we are God’s Temple; the very place where God dwells through his Holy Spirit.

And why we insist that since the coming of Jesus, we are a “priesthood of all believers,” as Peter says it. “Where even beggars can be priests.” **Do you know that that is who you are?**

III. Mary and Her Son, Jesus

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Ultimately, this text elevates Jesus to his rightful place as the world's Saving King.

As Mary sings: *"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;"* (Luke 1:50-51).

Though Mary is referring first to God's work in the past; of the freeing of God's people from slavery in Egypt – she is also pointing forward, though she may not know it yet, to how he will continue to perform mighty deeds with his arms. The mightiest deed of all, freeing us from the bondage to sin and death, with his arms stretched out in love and nailed to the cross. And as the story moves forward, we see how death is overcome, out of love, at long last.

This is the reversal of all reversals. The King of all Kings, whose "kingdom will never end" as the angel says in 1:33, his reign will not be like that of "his father David", will not be won by the point of a sword, but in a twist of the greatest irony, through his body being pierced.

In 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 22, David is disallowed from building the temple because of his violence. But Jesus, the Prince of Peace, can build a place for God's dwelling, in us, because of his way of peace. By his self-giving love on the cross.

the dark shadow of the cross already begins to fall over Luke's narrative. But it's not all darkness.

This Jesus, who will be "pierced for our transgressions" as Isaiah puts it, will also be raised in power. Which connects with Mary's final words of praise: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble."* – Luke 1:52

She's leaning into the theme of vindication – that those who suffer will be, one day in God's just judgment – lifted up. And the resurrection of Jesus will guarantee this.

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God sees. God cares. And God's plan, through Jesus' life, his death, his resurrection, and his gracious reign – that God's justice will fully and finally be realized one day.

Until that day, we keep at the good things God calls us to. Things that seem small, away from the centralized, in the littleness of our own corner of the world; like Mary, giving our “yes” to whatever God has for us.

*“The Kingdom belongs to the least expected
Come all you weary, despised and rejected
The Kingdom belongs to the so-called lost cause
The ones overlooked are the ones your God wants”*
– “Kingdom”, Joshua Leventhal



Open Up

What was the last big task, or request, that you said “yes” to? Why might it have been easier to say no to it? What came of your “yes”?

Dig In

1. Read **Luke 1:18 and 1:34;38**. How does Mary’s response to the angel differ from Zechariah? How does her response become a model for us as disciples of Jesus?
2. Read **Luke 1:26-33**. What does Mary learn about Jesus in this section?
3. What risks is she being asked to take? How might that be a model for faithfulness as we respond to the Lord?
4. In what areas of life do you need to believe that “all things are possible with God”? What keeps you from believing this? How can your group pray into this with you?
5. Read Mary’s song in **Luke 1:46-55**. Which of the attributes of God that Mary celebrates do you appreciate most? Why? Which challenge you most? Why?
6. How does your life reflect God’s care for justice and mercy? How would you like it to reflect that more?

Pray

Give thanks for the faith of Mary that we see in this text and ask God to help us believe and surrender to God’s ways like she does. Pray for those areas where our community needs to experience mercy and justice. Ask for God’s wisdom about creative ways to join his concern for the lowly.