

Fourth Sunday of Advent

JOYOUS GREETINGS

Luke 1:39-45

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

DIAGNOSIS: Refusing To Be Blessed

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Losing Our Voice*

Mary goes to the house of Zechariah after the angel Gabriel told her, "you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus" (1:31). Mary carries this news to Zechariah and Elizabeth, but only one of them is able to converse with her about it. Some months earlier, Zechariah heard his own message from Gabriel. The angel promised Zechariah a son as well, but when he doubted because of their old age, Gabriel made him mute (1:20). At the end of the Advent season, who are we more like? Do we resemble Mary-bursting with news about the coming One, the

“Son of God” (1:36)? It seems that we are more like Zechariah. We are mute, unable to speak about our Savior’s upcoming birth because we’re driven to distraction (in our case by shopping, cooking, decorating, and everything that demands our attention in the countdown to Christmas).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Lacking Faith*

But Zechariah’s problem was more than being distracted. Gabriel was sent by God to bring Zechariah the good news that he and Elizabeth would have a son. His protests about their age revealed a deeper problem. As Gabriel explained, “because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur” (1:20). Zechariah’s silence is a result of his lack of faith. Mary, on the other hand, arrives at Zechariah’s house radiating faith. She believed Gabriel’s words and responded “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (1:38). The distractions of the season might be making us mute about Jesus, but there could be something more to it. Perhaps we’re unable to speak about the coming of our Lord because like Zechariah, we can’t quite believe such incredible news. The suffering and chaos of our world seems far beyond what even God-made-flesh can handle.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *A Lost Blessing*

God will fulfill his word whether Zechariah speaks about it or not, and whether he believes it or not. But there is a consequence for not believing. Elizabeth hints at it when she declared to Mary, “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (v. 45). Luke uses the same word for “blessed” (*makarios*) in the “blessings and woes” in 6:20-26, roughly parallel to Matthew’s Beatitudes. So if Mary is “blessed” (i.e. righteous before God) because of her faith, then woe to Zechariah for his unfaith. Losing one’s voice is a shadow of the ultimate consequence of

failing to believe: the wrath of God and the sinner's permanent state of unrighteousness.

PROGNOSIS: Recognizing the Lord and Rejoicing

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *God Will Not Be Stopped*

Everything Gabriel announced came true. God fulfilled the promise to Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would bear a son. God fulfilled his promise to Mary. She conceived and bore a son, and named him Jesus. As Elizabeth proclaimed when Mary first visited her to share the news, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (v. 42). This blessing is extended to us when we believe that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. Even now, at the end of Advent, we can look ahead to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and trust that through him alone we, too, are blessed and made right before God.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Jumping for Joy*
Elizabeth and her son within her womb recognize God's gracious gift to Mary and to them. "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit," Luke writes (v. 41). Even before his birth, Jesus changed people's lives. The Holy Spirit comes to Elizabeth, John jumps for joy, and Elizabeth marvels, "why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" (v. 43). Mary barely has a chance to share her great news, and already Elizabeth honors Mary's son as "my Lord." Elizabeth's response to Mary shows that her heart is full of faith in the God who brought Jesus to life for the sake of God's people.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Making Our Voices Heard*

Joy permeates this encounter between Mary and Elizabeth. Mary expresses her joy in the consequent verses, vv. 46-55, in a song of praise. Zechariah regains his voice after John is born, as

“his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God” (1:64). It’s time for us to find our voices as well, and to praise God for his Son who is about to be born. The joy we have for what God has done needs to be expressed, and we are the ones to express it. We know who we’re waiting for, the Savior, the Son of God. We have heard the good news, and we are called to believe it and to bless others with the promise that Jesus is coming. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.