

# The Lord Is with You

Bible Background • LUKE 1:39–56

Printed Text • LUKE 1:39–56 | Devotional Reading • 1 SAMUEL 2:1–10

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: SURVEY the themes present in Mary’s song of praise, VALUE Mary’s place in the unfolding story of God’s saving work, and COMMIT to our own roles in furthering God’s kingdom.

## In Focus

Tyrone was an account executive for one of the biggest accounting firms in the country. He praised God for his great success and his climb up the corporate ladder. What separated him from other account executives was his integrity. His reputation added value to his company. Now the company wished to use Tyrone’s name to cheat their vendors out of excess revenues. They offered Tyrone a substantial salary increase, more perks, and a spot in the Who’s Who in the business sector.

He wrestled with the decision. Refusing to go along with the company’s plan would likely damage his career and cost him financially. As a young newlywed with a child on the way, what should he do? Could Tyrone stay committed to his Christian convictions with his social status and such great material rewards at stake?

After fasting and praying with his wife for three days, Tyrone gave his company a response. Although he was committed to excelling in his career and providing for his family, he understood that devotion to God came first. Therefore, he respectfully declined their offer. Instead, he presented an alternative plan to the senior partners, one designed to increase the company’s revenue. The proposal was adopted and eventually successfully implemented.

*How are your values shaped? Compare your prayer life at home and at church.*

## Keep in Mind

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46-47, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Magnify (v. 46)** megaluno (Gk.) — To enlarge, to ascribe greatness to someone

**B. Handmaiden (v. 48)** doule (Gk.) — Female servant or slave

## Say It Correctly

**Magnificat.** mag-NIH-fih-COT.

## KJV

**Luke 1:39** And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;<sup>40</sup> And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

## NLT

**Luke 1:39** A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town<sup>40</sup> where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth.

41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed.

43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?

44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy.

45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

46 Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed.

49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me.

50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him.

51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.

54 He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful.

55 For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever."

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back to her own home.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Mary.** After marrying Joseph, Mary bore several children: James, Joseph, Judas (Jude), Simon, and some daughters. She gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem while she and Joseph were engaged, but not yet married.

**Elisabeth.** The meaning of Elisabeth's name is "Oath of God." Her kinship ties included being the wife of the priest Zacharias, the cousin of Mary, and the mother of John the Baptist. Before the birth of Jesus, Mary spent months with Elisabeth.

**Judea.** Bound by the Jordan River and the Dead Sea on the east across to the Mediterranean Sea on the west, Judea was first used as a name for a Persian province (Ezra 5:8). It later became a Roman province (Matthew 2:1). North of the province were the other Roman provinces of Galilee and Phoenicia.

## Background

Two women, Mary and Elisabeth, whose lives probably seemed very different were joined together in the most spectacular event known to humanity. Both women miraculously conceived. Elisabeth was well past the normal childbearing years. Her relative, Mary, was propelled into motherhood sooner than she anticipated and in a manner she could not have imagined. Both Mary and Elisabeth were joyous over the events taking place in their lives. Both were pleased that God somehow saw fit to use them as part of His divine plan. Motherhood did not fit conveniently into the lifestyle of either woman at the time each conceived. Nevertheless, each woman yielded herself to the will of God. After the angel Gabriel left Mary, she paid a visit to Elisabeth, who was in the final months of pregnancy. Luke tells their story of honoring Mary's baby, Jesus, before His birth because He would become the Savior of the world.

### At-A-Glance

1. Elisabeth Honors God (Luke 1:39-45)
2. Mary Honors God Personally (vv. 46-49)
3. Mary Honors God for Her Community (vv. 50-56)

## In Depth

**1. Elisabeth Honors God (Luke 1:39-45)** Mary's visit to Elisabeth brings together the two events that are first mentioned in Luke's account. The visit gives readers more insight into the relationship between the two women's sons. At the sound of Mary's voice, the baby inside Elisabeth's womb leaps, and Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. The phrase "filled with the Holy Spirit" lets us know that Elisabeth is prophesying in the power of the Holy Spirit as she declares Mary's baby to be her Lord. She gives honor to Jesus before He is even born.

The attention then shifts to Mary, who will give birth to the world's Savior. Once again it affirms that Mary is blessed among women. Elisabeth, John the Baptist's mother, proclaims her unworthiness to be honored by a visit from the mother of the Savior. By leaping in his mother's womb, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, gives testimony to the coming Messiah even before he is born. The angel Gabriel already said that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before birth (v. 15). God owes Elisabeth nothing, yet through His grace, He gives her so much. Elisabeth calls Mary blessed and praises her for her obedience. She gives honor to God for allowing her to take part in His glorious plan.

*Why is it important to celebrate those who are honored by God?*

**2. Mary Honors God Personally (vv. 46–49)** Mary’s song is called “The Magnificat” (vv. 46–55) and it is about how blessed she is. From a worldly perspective, this might not seem like a blessing. She is poor and a woman, two things that may have made her contemporaries think of her as inferior. Mary comes from Nazareth, a town that is poorly thought of in the area. Most importantly, she is pregnant while she is engaged to a respectable man who is not the father of her child. Where are the blessings in such a situation? Because Mary understands, she gives honor to God her Savior. Then, thinking about the news from the angel Gabriel, Mary praises God for choosing her for this blessing, in spite of her humble status. She realizes that her status is not a disadvantage in the sight of the Lord.

*How can we focus on God’s blessing despite the circumstances around us?*

**3. Mary Honors God for Her Community (vv. 50–56)** Mary trusts the Lord to show mercy to His people because she knows that the Scripture details how God blessed His people in the past. This hope is based on the knowledge of how God worked before. God kept His promise to give Israel the Messiah and as a result is keeping the covenant to restore justice, blessing, and His presence among His people. Based upon how He blessed His people, Mary knows that He will continue to do so in the future. As we look closely at the things that Mary sings about concerning how God acts, we see that when Jesus comes to the earth, He brings about a moral revolution regarding pride. Pride (v. 51) has no place in the Christian life because our standard is Jesus Christ. When we see ourselves compared to Him, we realize how far we are from how God desires us to be. Then, we see a social revolution (v. 52). Jesus brings an end to the labels and titles that people think elevate them. In the sight of our Lord, the lowest person is just as important as the person with money and power. Jesus also brings an economic revolution, seen when the first Christians come together and share their wealth, the rich with the poor, such that everyone has what they needed (Acts 2:44-45). We live in a very materialistic and greedy society, but God is merciful and remembers His promises (vv. 54–55). Mary’s song reminds us that, because of Jesus, Christians should have a different set of values than those of the world.

*How does Mary’s song encourage us to honor God and help our community?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. What specific blessings does Mary thank God for (Luke 1:46–49)?
2. What sort of people does God bless (vv. 50–53)?
3. What attributes of God does Mary recite (vv. 50–55)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. How can we honor God and bless others during the Christmas season instead of focusing on ourselves?
2. How have you seen God at work in your family to fulfill His promises and advance His will?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Mary’s Magnificat declares that the birth of Jesus Christ dethrones the powerful, humbles the proud, and brings provision to the poor. The hungry are fed while the wealthy are left empty at the coming of Jesus. Often we do not talk about this great reversal that Jesus brings when we think about Christmas. We can easily get caught up in the commercialization and secularization of Jesus’ birth that permeates our culture. Children think of Santa Claus, presents, and vacations. Adults think of shopping, big meals, and decorations. We may think about special worship services where we sing Christmas carols about a baby. But when was the last time we talked about Christmas as the coming of God’s justice to the earth? Today’s lesson reminds us that Jesus was not born to bring presents and holiday cheer. He came to bring justice, righteousness, and the reign of God to the earth. Those who are great must humble themselves before Jesus; those who are least find their hope of provision and exaltation in Him. We are called to share God’s peace and goodwill during the holiday season, but we are also called to share His truth and justice for the oppressed.

*How will you honor God’s call to justice and care for the poor this Christmas?*

## Application for Activation

When we study God’s Word, we are reminded of His promises. Our faith is shown in the way we obey God. Let’s take a closer look at how we express honor for God in our actions. It can often be easier to honor God with special worship services, repeating Christian sayings, or being kind to those who are kind to us. But Mary and Elisabeth surrender and obey God when He places them in unexpected positions. They proclaim God’s faithfulness and devote themselves to nurturing their children who are called by God to unexpected lives. What has God called you to do to honor Him that may take you out of your comfort zone or differ from the expectations of others or yourself? Will you serve someone less fortunate? Care for a child in your extended family? Speak about the cause of the poor? Give a gift to someone who isn’t expecting one from you? Mary’s obedience amid her unexpected situation gives honor to God! In the upcoming week, follow Mary’s lead and honor God in the way you obey Him despite your circumstances.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Luke 1:39–56

**And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah;**

Mary loses no time in paying a visit to her relative, Elisabeth. She reacted when she learns from the angel that God also blessed Elisabeth (Luke 1:36). Mary is an ordinary girl of flesh and blood who has been chosen for a gigantic and unique task. Her visit to Elisabeth is to someone who has also been miraculously blessed. She is able to find encouragement and understanding. In Elisabeth’s sixth month (v. 36), the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary. Her visit with Elisabeth lasts for approximately three months, just before the birth of John (vv. 56–57). Therefore, Mary must have left her home to go to visit Elisabeth almost immediately after the angel’s visit. This immediacy is reflected in the wording that “Mary arose ...and went ... with haste.” The expression “the hill country ... into a city of Judah” does not locate the home of Elisabeth with any precision, but it shows that she is living in a rural area. Like many priestly families, Zacharias and Elizabeth live outside Jerusalem.

**40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. 41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:**

When Mary arrives at Elisabeth’s home, not only does she find that Elisabeth is miraculously pregnant as the angel said but that Elisabeth knows, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Mary is going to be the mother of the Messiah (vv. 41–44). The moment that Mary greets Elisabeth, the baby leaps (Gk. skirtao, skeer-TAH-oh, to jump for joy) in his mother’s womb. It is a natural phenomenon for an unborn child to make frequent movements, but John’s movement this time is extraordinary. Elisabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and interprets the movement of her baby as an expression of joy.

**42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.**

The Greek word translated “spake out” (anaphoneo, ah-na-fo-NEH-oh) means “to raise the voice” or “to call out.” Elisabeth raises her voice with a great cry of excitement. She greets Mary as blessed among women and names the same blessing for Mary’s child. “Blessed” here in Greek is eulogeo (yew-low- GEH-oh), which means to bless or speak well of. “Fruit of thy womb” refers to the baby inside Mary but also indicates the full humanity of Jesus. We confess that Jesus is fully divine and fully human, and this text reminds us that Christ truly comes into the world in a way that completely identifies with us.

**43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

The use of the title “my Lord” suggests that Elisabeth recognizes, through the Holy Spirit, that Mary’s child will be the Messiah (see 2:25– 30; Psalm 110:1). She acknowledges that a much greater honor has been granted to Mary than to her. In humility of heart, she expresses her amazement and her privilege at being visited by the mother of her Lord. Elisabeth accepts, in grateful worship, God’s gift to her. When she reconnects with Mary, to whom a greater gift has been given, she does not become jealous. She humbles herself and gives honor to Mary as the vessel God chooses and honors Jesus, recognizing that He is the long-awaited Messiah and Lord. Elisabeth’s humility is also instructive. Her humble attitude opens the gates to true joy.

**44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.**

The Greek word idou (ee-DOO, “lo”) often announces an unexpected and extraordinary event. Elisabeth explains to Mary that at her greeting, her own baby exulted for joy in her womb. The exultation of her baby is the sign from the Holy Spirit that enables her to recognize Mary for who she is.

**45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.**

Elisabeth further blesses (Gk. makarios, mah- KAR-ee-occe, “blessed,” “happy”) Mary. She tells Mary that the Lord blesses her faith. The Greek word for the word “for” is hoti (HOE-tee) and can be understood in two ways. Mary is either blessed because through her faith she believes God’s promises will come true, or simply blessed because God’s promises will come true. First, hoti can mean “that” as an object of “believed.” In that case, it is to be translated as “Blessed is she that believed that there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.” This makes the statement an indication of Mary’s faith. Second, hoti can be rendered as “because.” In that case, it is to be translated as “Blessed is she that believed because there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.” Thus, the statement is an explanation of the happiness of Mary. Elisabeth affirms that the fulfillment will certainly happen. Mary believes and goes on believing the message from the Lord. She bores the immense honor and the immeasurable burden without losing faith. She remains humble and committed to the Lord. True faith gives happiness, and there is no true happiness without faith.

**46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, 47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.**

Mary’s song is commonly referred to as “The Magnificat.” It has several striking features. First, it is filled with Old Testament concepts and phrases, plus it seems to have been modeled on Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2:1– 10). Second, the song reveals Mary’s deep piety and knowledge of the Old Testament; a familiarity with the Scriptures is not unusual for that time. Third, in its essence, the song reveals a God who vindicates the downtrodden and ministers to the hungry (cf. 1 Samuel 2:5), makes the poor sit with the nobles (v. 8), judges

those who arrogantly oppose God (vv. 3, 7, 10; cf. Luke 1:51, 53), and topples the nobles from their places of power (Luke 1:52).

Mary's song can be divided into four parts. Verses 46–48 praise God for what He has done for Mary, a theme that continues into the first part of the next section. Verses 49–50 mention God's power, holiness, and mercy. Verses 51–53 show God's sovereign action in reversing certain social conditions. Finally, verses 54–56 recall God's mercy to Israel.

Mary responds to Elisabeth's Spirit-inspired utterances in a song. The word "magnify" (Gk. megaluno, meh-gah-LOO-no) literally means "to enlarge." Here it ascribes greatness to God. To magnify means to make something appear larger than what it already is in order to have a better and proper perception of it. Yet God cannot appear larger because He is already bigger than we can ever imagine. We often have a picture of God that is too small and contrived, so we need to magnify Him so we can have a bigger and better picture of Him. The song is an expression of praise for what God has done for Mary. It opens with the declaration of her intention to magnify God in song (v. 46), which parallels the affirmation that she finds joy in God who, enabling her in a miraculous way to become pregnant with the child of messianic hopes, now intervenes as Savior (v. 47). This happy state exists because God regards the afflicted state of His servant (v. 48). It is not that it indicates Mary has some personal and individual affliction; her affliction is simply that of God's people awaiting His saving intervention on their behalf. The Messiah has long been a symbol of liberation, freedom, and salvation to the Israelites (Isaiah 9:6). Israel believed that the coming of the Savior meant God was saving them from oppression.

This Savior bestows grace on Mary, and she responds with humility. She restates that she is only a "handmaiden" (Gk. doule, DOO-lay) of the Lord, as she said to the angel (v. 38). Mary is one of the lowest and most powerless people in that world, yet God uses her to bring salvation to all. Mary realizes that the grace God gives her is more than she deserves, and so she praises the Lord with a humble heart. Mary proclaims God and His glorious mercy to humanity. She proclaims the salvation of God, that comes through the promised Messiah, her Savior. The greatness of the work of God is that it is a universal blessing to all; Jesus comes so all people will be blessed. God blesses all because He is mighty and holy. He does a mighty work in the life of Mary that affects all people everywhere for all time. The King has come and will bring salvation.

**49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.**

Mary proclaims God's power. She is in awe of "he that is mighty," the One whose great power has touched her life. The Greek word translated "great things" (megaleios, meh-gah-LAY-oce) recalls "magnify" (v. 46) as both share a root word meaning great or large. Mary proclaims God's holiness because God is to be set apart from all others. His very nature, His very being, is different. In this context, God's holy (Gk. hagios, HA-gee-oce) name has overtones of power and may be defined as His transcendent mightiness. Verse 50 is strongly reminiscent of Psalm 103:17, as Mary proclaims God's mercy. This act of God's mercy is for "generation upon generation", that is forever. God's mercy is His active faithfulness to His covenant with Israel, or more specifically, with those who follow Him. God has done mighty works through history for His followers and continues to do so even now.

**51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. 53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.**

Mary proceeds from adoration to celebration. She speaks about the future and proclaims what the Messiah's coming will accomplish. She prophetically speaks merging past and future, as though the child yet to be born has already lived and done His mighty work in the world. She recognizes the strength of God's "arm" which, in old days, wrought such mighty things for Israel. Mary shows that God will reverse the order of things on earth. In times past and now more fully with the coming of the Messiah, the Lord will scatter the proud "in the imagination of their hearts." The Greek word dianoia (dee-ah-NOY-ah), translated "imagination," ordinarily

refers to the “mind” as a distinct aspect of self, apart from the “heart” (Gk. kardia, kar-DEE-ah). Here, however, the heart and mind work together to puff up the proud. The Lord will dethrone the mighty and exalt the humble. The mighty are those who sit in positions of power, authority, and influence over others. Those who are rich only in the things of this world will be stripped of all their earthly goods and sent away empty. And those who have nothing of this world but who put their trust in God will receive all the good things that God will provide.

**54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; 55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. 56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.**

Mary recognizes that the salvation her Son will bring is rooted in God’s covenant with Abraham. Mary recalls what God has done both for the nation and its patriarchs. She mentions two specific times God provided for His people. First, God remembered His mercy, which Israel desperately needed. In Mary’s day, God’s people were oppressed by the Romans. They were desperate in their need and search for deliverance, so desperate that many were turning to false messiahs to escape their predicament. Some were even finding their security in the Roman state and in humanistic answers instead of God. It was at such a time Mary proclaims the Lord remembered His mercy. Second, and more importantly, God remembered His promise of the Messiah made to Israel. The promise has now been fulfilled. God sent the Messiah, the Savior of the world.



## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

John the Baptist Born to Elizabeth  
(Luke 1:57-66)

### **TUESDAY**

Zechariah Blesses God for John's Ministry  
(Luke 1:67-79)

### **WEDNESDAY**

Young Woman's Pregnancy Is Sign of Immanuel  
(Isaiah 7:10-17)

### **THURSDAY**

Virgin Conception Announced to Mary  
(Luke 1:26-33)

### **FRIDAY**

Mary Accepts Miracle of Pregnancy  
(Luke 1:34-38)

### **SATURDAY**

Joseph Obediently Honors Mary's Role  
(Matthew 1:18-25)

### **SUNDAY**

Blessed Mothers of the Faithful  
(Luke 1:39-56)