

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 13:45

### Introduction

As I began reading read this morning's Gospel reading I found myself wondering what sort of things have made me respond with the kind of spontaneous joy we hear from Mary and her cousin Elizabeth.

I am always delighted to hear good news but the joy expressed here is the sort that makes you leap about and dance, to sing and throw off your inhibitions. Joy that comes from momentous and life changing news. Last night on Strictly we saw joy expressed in tears. Joy has a powerful effect on us

We are invited into the joy of two women, one celebrating the promise of a child she had given up expecting to carry, the other rejoicing at the promise of a baby far earlier than she had thought possible, and there is someone else here as well rejoicing with them. We are told: *"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit"* it was God's presence within her that prompted her to say: *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."*

It is God's presence in these women that has made them pregnant and he joins with them in joy at the astonishing things that are happening to them which have greater implications than simply the birth of two children. It is their recognition of the implications that increase their joy. This is not a simple domestic event they are celebrating it has national, even global implications – for all time.

This is all about Jesus, who had only just been conceived and not yet born who makes the baby leap in Elizabeth's womb for joy and has made Mary giddy with excitement and hope. The song that Mary sings is far deeper than a simple song of joy. It

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talks of God's plans for the world, it speaks of justice, of the humbling of powerful rulers and the raising up of the lowly.

Luke, in his writings focuses on justice and as we have seen this year as we have read through Luke's Gospel his message is so often to the rulers of Israel, both religious and secular, who had completely missed the point of Jesus' mission, who had ignored the new kingdom he had come to establish and who had turned away from the promise of salvation he proclaimed.

Here at the very beginning of his Good News Luke proclaims the whole point of Jesus' birth, ministry and death. This seemingly insignificant child who would be born to a young unimportant woman living in a scruffy village in the middle east was the result of a promise made by God thousands of years before. This is the culmination of his promise in the garden of Eden that a child would be born who would conquer evil and overthrow the power the devil held over human lives.

This promise of salvation had been repeated through the ages. The people of Israel were waiting for it to be fulfilled. They were looking for a Messiah, a Saviour. They thought he would be a military leader as King David had been and would overthrow the rule of the Roman Empire. In fact God has something far more powerful and lasting in mind. His plans would be fulfilled through his people Israel but they would affect the whole of human life forever more.

In order to do this God would have to win a victory over the power brokers, the forces of evil which people like Mary and Elizabeth knew all too well living as they did in the dark days of Herod the Great, whose casual brutality was backed up by the threat of Rome. Mary and Elizabeth, like so many Jews at their time, searched the scriptures, soaked themselves in the psalms and prophetic writings which spoke of mercy, hope, fulfilment, reversal, revolution, victory over evil, and of God coming to the rescue at last.

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All of this is poured into the song she cannot help but sing. Every line comes from scripture and it is very similar in many ways to the song of joy Hannah sang when told that she would bear the child Samuel and which celebrated all that God was going to do through him. Now these two mothers-to-be celebrate together what God is going to do through their Sons John and Jesus.

So what can we learn from these two women, their relationship with God and what he chose to do in their lives.

Elizabeth

Luke tells us of her:

*there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.* Her husband was a priest and she came from the priestly tribe. However, when Zechariah was told that she would have a baby he simply didn't believe it. His response was 'how can this be?' he responded with unbelieving confusion and as a result was left unable to speak until John was born. Elizabeth believed. She not only knew she was pregnant she knew it was God who had caused this to happen and God spoke through her to Mary to encourage and reassure her that God's words had come true. She had faith in God and he honoured that faith.

Mary, on the other hand was young, she had the whole of her life ahead of her. She had hopes and dreams and was looking forward to marriage with Joseph. She hadn't suffered disappointment and the unfulfilled longing for a child. She had found favour with God because of her simple faith and trust in him and because of her obedience to him.

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When she was presented with the astonishing news she responded not disbelievingly but practically, 'How can this be?' I am a virgin – how will I have a baby? How will this happen

The things we see in Mary's response to this astonishing event Are:

- She listened to God
- She trusted God
- She believed God
- She obeyed God
- She was afraid but she knew God would help her
- She thanked and praised God for his goodness

She was willing to be part of this astonishing event that God had promised – the coming of a saviour who would establish God's kingdom of love and justice on earth.

I have often wondered what would have happened if Mary had said 'No' ?