

**Focal Text**

**Luke 1:39-56;  
Hebrews 13:15-16**

**Background**

**Luke 1:26-38, 57-66**

# lesson Christmas

## When Your Heart Is Full

### MAIN IDEA

Being Spirit-filled means we will have unusual spiritual insight into God's truth and a beautiful fruit of joy within us.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Do I have the joy of salvation? Is the Spirit's fruit, particularly joy, manifest in me, in my interaction with others, and in my worship?

### TEACHING AIM

To encourage adults to understand that as Spirit-filled Christians we recognize that true worship is not about us, but all about God and His greatness



## Bible Comments

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### Understanding the Context

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Merry Christmas! Thank you for reading this lesson detailing the days before the birth of Christ through Elizabeth's and Mary's eyes. It is an exciting time as we journey together to years past, and we find ourselves nine short months away from the birth of Christ.

Have you ever had a message given to you by divine revelation that you just had to share with someone? If so, how did you share that revelation? Did you make it about you, or did you make it all about God? Did you walk in His truth and share with the world the message you carried and the joy that you found being a vessel for God?

Well in today's lesson that is exactly what happened. Today, we will learn about the innate joy of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and how God can use your joy to bring joy to someone else. In today's lesson, we will learn about Mary's confirmation that she was to be the mother of the Savior of the world through her cousin Elizabeth. Today, we will learn about the miracles in both their wombs. One the forerunner of God, and the other the Savior of the world, God Himself, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Today, we will learn that God's glory is to be shared and magnified again, and again until the entire world sees Christ as it's Risen Savior. This lesson is rooted in the praise of David in Psalms 34:3, when David said, "Let us exalt His name together!"

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### Interpreting the Scriptures

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#### Having Your Spirit Filled With Joy (1:39-41)

**1:39.** "Now at this time Mary set out and went in a hurry to the hill country," the text implies that after the Angel confirmed Mary would carry the Christ, and her formerly barren cousin Elizabeth was six months pregnant; Mary immediately left for Elizabeth's house.

Many theologians argue the point of when did Mary fully accept that she would be the mother of the Savior? During their conversation, Mary questions the angel, and ultimately says “May it be done to me according to your word” does not serve as total commitment to the Angel’s plan. Hence the haste of Mary to go see Elizabeth. The text implies that she left the same day.

What specific city Mary traveled to is not known. Some have supposed it to be Jerusalem, others Hebron; but all is conjecture. Hebron, before called Kirjatharba (Joshua 14:15), is likely, for that was a city in the mountainous part of Judah, one of the cities of refuge, and belonging to the priests (Joshua 20:7); but whether it was so or not cannot be certainly determined. But as Zechariah was a Priest, we do know it was probably a Levitical city. In the Hebrew Bible, the Levitical cities were 48 cities in ancient Israel set aside for the tribe of Levi, who were not allocated their own territorial land when the Israelites entered the Promised Land.

**1:40.** The phrase, “And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth,” can be misleading. Typically, it would be natural for Mary to greet Elizabeth. However, because Zechariah did not initially believe the angel who confirmed that his wife would carry a prophet, Zechariah was struck by God, and he was unable to speak until John’s birth. Hence, he may have been unaware of the visit until after John’s birth.

**1:41.** The phrase, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting,” gives us a preview of the setting of this supernatural miracle and it starts a chain reaction of praiseworthy moments in God. Elizabeth had not seen Mary; she had only heard Mary. We understand that faith does not come by sight. Faith comes by hearing, and by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

The phrase, “The baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,” signifies that the baby within Elizabeth’s womb was listening. This was a supernatural moment. This was a God moment. This “leaping of the babe” suggests that hearing the voice of Mary, who was now pregnant with the Messiah, gives the first notice of His conception.

**Point to Ponder**—The Scriptures lead us to believe at the time of the Angel’s announcement Mary was not pregnant because the Angel spoke of a coming move of God in Mary’s life. However, upon the arrival at Elizabeth’s house Elizabeth confirms that Mary is carrying the Savior of the world when she says, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” This signifies that this “Overshadowing” may have come between the time she left her house to the time Mary arrived at Elizabeth’s.

### What Makes the Magnificat Special (1:42)

Of the four gospels, only Luke has the written words of Mary’s Magnificat.

Commentators have typically divided Luke 1:46-55 into four stanzas containing (46-48, 49-50, 51-52, 53-55). The Magnificat is in many places very similar in thought and phrase to the Canticle of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10). It is named after the first word of its first line in Latin (“Magnificat anima mea Dominum,” or “My soul magnifies the Lord”).

The Magnificat is the last canticle of the Old and the first of the New Testament. Also, it carries an echo of the lyrical poetry of the Old Testament, especially of the song of praise of Hannah the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 2:1-10). It is a poetic praise for the inestimable favor bestowed by God on the Virgin, for the mercies shown to Israel, and for the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and to the patriarchs.

### Stanza 1—Proper Praise for a Holy God (1:43-48)

**1:43-46.** This movement of the Holy Spirit within Elizabeth caused her to utter a humble praise unto God that many New Testament believer’s say today—“How has it happened that the mother of my Lord would come to me?” Like many of us to whom God has revealed Himself, we question our place in His kingdom and we wonder about the awesome favor God showed to us in His visitation.

The phrase, “Mother of my Lord,” is a praise that bypasses Mary and focuses on Christ. Much like Christ’s conversation when He asked Peter “Who do men say that I am” and Peter’s reply “You are the Christ, the son of God.” Christ confirmed that this was spiritually discerned. In this moment, we see

the same with Elizabeth as she had no forewarning that Mary was pregnant with Christ. Elizabeth in these words acknowledged both the incarnation of Christ, and the union of the Divine and human nature in the one person of the Mediator; she acknowledges Christ her Lord, and Mary to be His mother.

Elizabeth also verbally acknowledged the exact moment that she became filled with the spirit of God. She acknowledged that the moment she heard Mary's voice the baby leaped.

The phrase, "The baby leaped in my womb," conveys not just the physical leap of the child but a spiritual leap in understanding the connection between John and Jesus in the womb.

The term, "for joy," showed John the Baptist's reaction in the womb was to praise God. All of us at the beginning of our conversion had a mindset to praise God. For He alone is worthy to be praised.

**1:46-48.** In the first stanza, Mary praised God for what He had done for her. From the moment we are introduced to Mary we see a quiet, contemplative, almost afraid child of God. However, in this moment we see that her fear is gone. Her self-doubt is gone. And her insecurity is gone. What we see is a woman of God that stood boldly on her feet and testified of God's goodness and His grace. This brings up the question—What is it within us that we discount the report of a heavenly angel but accept the confirmations of fallen humanity? When Gideon was to fight the battle for his people the angel had given him confirmation, however, to solidify his faith God instructed Gideon to listen to his enemy in the camp and to allow their conversation to give him confidence in the Lord's plan (Judges 7:9-15).

## **Stanza 2—Recognizing His Power Through His Name (1:49-50)**

The second stanza glorified God for His power, holiness, and mercy. Here are more reasons future generations would call Mary blessed. The Mighty One had done great things for her (Psalms 24:8; Zephaniah 3:17). Furthermore, His name (i.e., His person) is holy. God is holy or different from humans in that He is high above all others, especially in His moral and ethical perfection (Psalms 99:3; Psalms 103:1; Psalms 111:9; Isaiah 57:15).

### Stanza 3—The Compassionate God (1:51-52)

The third stanza reflected on God's power in reversing certain social conditions. His favor to Israel was especially in view. God had dealt with Mary as He had dealt with His people (Psalms 118:16). God had reversed their conditions politically (Luke 1:52) and socially (Luke 1:53). Jesus' appearance and messianic reign would continue these divine works on a universal scale.

### Stanza 4—The Merciful God (1:53-55)

The last stanza recalled God's mercy to Israel and to Mary (Isaiah 41:8-9). He had been consistently faithful to His covenant promises with His people having tempered judgment with mercy (Micah 7:20). God's past faithfulness gives hope for the future.

**1:56.** As Elizabeth was six months pregnant when Mary arrived this phrase, "Mary stayed with her three months" leads us to believe that Mary stayed until John was born.

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### Focusing on the Meaning

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What a time we had walking through this lesson! It is such a blessing to hear and experience how these two women of God shared in the awesome work God was doing in their lives. To see their excitement for each other's miracle encased within their wombs is such a blessing.

Elizabeth, the wife of a priest who was unable to conceive, only to become a mother in her old age to the greatest prophet that ever lived. Mary, a young and innocent girl, who had never known a man, but was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and selected to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

Both of these women were blessed by God to walk in their respective roles, but we do not worship either of them. We worship Christ, and Christ alone. For He alone is worthy to be praised (Deuteronomy 10:21). From the rising of the sun, to the going down of the same, our God is worthy to be praised (Psalms 113:3).

# Teaching Plans

## DISCOVERY PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Begin by asking members to recall some of the miraculous birth stories in the Old Testament. Each of these stories tell of a special time in the lives of special women who were selected by God to give birth to significant people who would have a great impact on His special plan for the redemption of humankind. Invite some to share their favorite Old Testament birth story and why this is their favorite.
2. Share with members, *Our study for today will focus on two such stories in the lives of two special women in the New Testament including Mary who had the greatest birth story of all. Our study will lead us to a new degree of appreciation for these two stories and will lead us to examine our own birth stories that have given each one of us the opportunity to be part of God's redemptive plan for humankind.*

### Guide Bible Study

3. Ask members to imagine they are reporters with the Jerusalem Times. Their assignment by the paper is to conduct interviews with Elizabeth and Mary to help their readers better understand what was happening in the lives of these two special ladies. Read Luke 1:39-46, and then give time for members to write some questions.
4. Ask members to begin sharing their questions and ask the class to provide answers that might be given by Mary and Elizabeth. Some examples include the following:
  - a. Elizabeth, why were you so joyful when you found out you were to have a child? (I had suffered embarrassment and humiliation because I had not been able to have a child like the other women.)

- b. Mary, what concerns did you have when you found out you were going to have a child? (Unmarried women were not supposed to have babies. I could have been scorned by society and even killed for my supposed sin.)
  - c. Elizabeth, why was Mary's visitation such a time of joy for you? (I was filled with the Holy Spirit and was led to see that I was in the presence of the mother and her unborn baby who would become the Savior of the world.)
  - d. Mary, why were you filled with such joy at what Elizabeth had to say? (I was affirmed that what I had been told by the angel was true. I was indeed to be the mother of the Messiah.)
  - e. Elizabeth, what was the significance of your baby's movement in your womb? (I realized I was to give birth to the herald who would prepare the way for our Lord.)
  - f. Mary, was this the first time you truly believed you were to give birth to the Savior of the world? (No, but Elizabeth's proclamation removed all doubt in my mind.)
5. Allow sufficient time for members to complete this activity before calling attention to the remaining verses in our focal passage, which presents Mary's song of praise. Enlist someone to read this song. Before it is read, ask members to listen for the following:
- a. Mary's complete understanding of what was happening to her.
  - b. Mary's summary of the way God had worked with Israel throughout history.
  - c. Mary's assurance that God's redemptive plan for Israel would soon be complete.

## Encourage Application

6. Ask members to recall the time of joy they experienced when they became a Christian. Also ask them about the joy they saw in their loved



ones' eyes when you told of your conversion. Ask members to write a song of praise this week expressing this joy and thanksgiving for God's call in their lives to participate in God's redemptive plan for humankind.

7. Close with a time of prayer thanking God for the birth of our Savior and for our new birth in the Lord.

## DISCUSSION PLAN

### Connect With Life

1. Begin by asking members to recall some of the times they have received encouragement from others or from their times of worship. Ask members to share from their experience why this time of encouragement was so important to them.
2. All of us need words of encouragement from time to time, and this was especially true in the lives of Elizabeth and Mary. Let's see how these words of encouragement were so important to them and discover what we can learn from their experience.

### Guide Bible Study

3. Before reading Luke 1:39-46a ask members to listen for the way Elizabeth and Mary were encouraged at this critical time in their lives. Their responses should include the following:
  - a. Mary decided to make a visit to her cousin, Elizabeth (1:39). She was following God's guidance in her life to make this visit at this time.
  - b. Mary gave Elizabeth words of greeting, which God turned into words of encouragement (1:40).
  - c. Some miraculous things happened to Elizabeth when she heard Mary's words of greeting (1:41). Elizabeth's baby leaped within her, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

- d. Elizabeth then gave Mary some extremely encouraging words (1:42-46a). Mary needed these affirming words that her pregnancy was indeed of God. She had no reason to doubt or worry about what would happen to her in the days ahead. Elizabeth also needed this experience of encouragement to know that her pregnancy was evidence God had blessed her in a special way as well.
4. Then enlist someone to read Luke 1:46b-56, Mary's song of praise, and ask members to listen for affirmation that this experience of encouragement had given her the faith to trust in God as she went through this time in her life.

### Encourage Application

5. Ask members to draw truths from this song that can be applied to their lives as they go through times of struggle. For example:
  - a. We must remember to praise God for all that happens in our lives.
  - b. We can remember God's call in our lives and recommit ourselves to fulfilling that call.
  - c. We should spend time reflecting on all of God's blessings in our lives.
  - d. We must remember to trust God and remember He is in control of all that is happening in the world.
  - e. We must remember to stay committed to God's ministry to others through our lives.
  - f. We must remain focused on God's plan of redemption for the world and how He can use us in this plan.

(A copy of this assignment is available in "Teaching Resource Items" for this study at [www.gc2press.org](http://www.gc2press.org).)

6. Close with a time of prayer after reading Luke 1:46b-47.

## Prayer for this Study

### Jesus Restores Me

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, ‘Woman, here is your son,’ and to the disciple, ‘Here is your mother.’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home” (John 19:26-27, NIV).

Father,

I enter Your throne room bowing my heart before You, singing praises to You, the God of my salvation. My heart is overwhelmed with gratitude when I consider how the world was in desperate need of a Savior and in Your great mercy and love You sent Your only Son Jesus, as a ransom to forgive us of our sins, restoring our relationship with You, a Holy and Just God.

My heart is humbled Lord, when I contemplate what Jesus endured by going to the Cross because of His amazing and relentless love for me. My soul is grieved and silenced when I read in Your Holy Word how Jesus willingly suffered beatings, scourging, vile hatred, and humiliation at the hands of evil men, and was finally led to Golgotha in agony as He faced the gruesome act of crucifixion, taking my place, wearing my crown of thorns, bearing my shame and sin, to forgive me and redeem me. I am grateful Jesus faithfully and steadfastly remained on the Cross in obedience to You, Oh God, even though His revilers challenged Him to come down and display His power, just as in the wilderness, Satan had tempted Him to wear His crown of glory without going to the Cross. My heart is overcome with thankfulness at how Jesus faithfully hung on the Cross, facing Your full wrath as He took on the sin of the world, experiencing the excruciating pain of separation from You, His loving Father, until He cried out, “It is finished.”

Lord, I read in Your Holy Word how Jesus’ lifeless body lay in a sealed tomb guarded by soldiers. I am sure His disciples and followers felt

defeated and thought the situation was hopeless. I am eternally thankful this was not the end of the story. By Your mighty power, You raised Jesus from death to life. Jesus conquered and won the victory over sin and the grave, and Satan was defeated. Lord, with a powerful earthquake, You sent an angel to roll away the stone and break the seal, revealing an empty tomb that is still empty today. "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay" (Matthew 28:6, NIV).

Lord, I am sure Jesus was saddened by the betrayal and abandonment of His closest friends whom He loved dearly. Peter wept bitterly over his sin of denial, seeking forgiveness, and John, who I am sure felt sorrow over deserting Jesus, made his way to the Cross to be near Him. My heart is comforted in knowing how Jesus, even while hanging on the Cross, tenderly restored and forgave John by giving John the responsibility of caring for His mother, and after His resurrection also restored Peter and the other disciples appearing to them many times. Lord, when my fearful or prideful heart causes me to stumble and fall, I am very thankful that because of Jesus' atoning work on the Cross, You are waiting for me with open arms to come back to You in surrendered humility, as You forgive me and welcome me back into fellowship with You. Help me to be diligent, be on the lookout, and pray continually as You give me strength to remain faithful in the face of temptations and trials. Thank You that I can trust You will transform for good what Satan plans for evil in my life.

The Cross was terrible, but it is a beautiful reminder of Jesus' sacrificial love for me. Thank You that You never leave me or forsake me, even through my failures and weaknesses, but You beckon me to come to You as You forgive me, restore me, transform me, and teach me, helping me become bold through the power of the Holy Spirit living in me. Remind me, Oh God, that I am not alone, and when I am weak, You are strong, and You faithfully love me and guide me in Your paths of righteousness.

In the strong name of Jesus,

Amen

*DLB*