

19-24 December 2021 Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

Blessed are you

Read the passage from Luke. It is written below.

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

Bible notes

As Jesus continues to Jerusalem, the disciples are still struggling with what is happening. In this week's Today's Gospel is rich in greeting and blessing. Mary greets Elizabeth, and with joyous and generous reciprocity Elizabeth blesses Mary. Frustratingly or intriguingly (depending upon your perspective), we are not told the content of Mary's greeting. But we are told of its effect. Whatever Mary said conveyed joyous power. It causes the baby Elizabeth is carrying to leap for joy while Elizabeth herself experiences a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth responds to Mary's greeting with three declarations of blessing. She first declares Mary to be blessed, in the same sense that we find later on in the teaching of Jesus, known as the Beatitudes that form part of the Sermon on the Mount. The language of blessing in both instances is spoken over those who are seen to have what is necessary for a faithful, joyful, contented, humble, self-giving, generous life having received and appropriated God's grace.

Elizabeth goes on to declare the baby in Mary's womb to be blessed (v.42). It is apparent in the next verse that Mary's yet-to-be-born baby is uniquely blessed, with Elizabeth identifying him as 'my Lord' – but her practice of blessing a child yet-to-be-born opens up space for a general conversation about a practice of praying for and blessing those not yet born.

Elizabeth's third declaration of blessing is also intriguing. In verse 45, Luke presents Elizabeth saying blessed is she. The blessing moves from the second person ('Blessed are you' in verse 42) to the third person. In so doing, Luke is inviting his readers to respond, like Mary, by faith – believing what the Lord says and so entering into the Lord's blessing.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

- The word 'bless' is used in many situations: 'Ah bless' we might say when a toddler covers themselves in spaghetti sauce while exploring the world of spoons; 'Bless you' said sincerely to the nurse taking a blood sample may bring a calming smile; 'Bless you' may also be an instinctive response to a sneeze; 'The Lord bless you and keep you' said by a grieving family over the body of an elderly parent who has just died is a heartfelt prayer. From the playful to the profound, words of blessing convey deep meaning and carry particular power. Where, when and how should we bless others? And what do we mean when we use the word?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.

First impressions

You could also use the image and following questions to help introduce the theme.



Questions

- If we could see the signs of greeting we exchange, what would that look like?
- How is blessing or being blessed part of your daily life?
- What might you do to bring God's blessing to others?

Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

A prayer of adoration

Lord God,

you are light in our darkness.

What a blessing you are!

You are purpose in our wandering.

What a blessing you are!

You are revealed in the angel's greeting.

What a blessing you are!

You are known in the acceptance of Mary.

What a blessing you are!

You are felt in the care of Joseph.

What a blessing you are!

You are received in the following of the shepherds.

What a blessing you are!

You are given in the gifts of the magi.

What a blessing you are!

You, Lord God, are a blessing today.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

God, who blessed the earth with life and love,

thank you that you greet us in the person of Jesus,

and pour your blessings on us by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Empowered by the same Spirit,

send us out to be signs of greeting and blessing

to a world so in need of your peace,

and people in need of your love.

Help us serve and bless in your name,

and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.