

*Luke 1:39-55 – Blue Christmas – 2016  
New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Shoreview, Minnesota*

Life for her had not been easy. Daily her heart ached with longing to have a child. To mimic the coo's and gurgle's, to listen to the patter of tiny feet, to hug and nurture, to comfort and guide, this is what her heart longed to do. But the Lord had not blessed her and her husband with a little one.

It would have been bad enough to experience such pain in a private way, but in her day and age her barren womb was, painfully, a very public matter. How the women of the village talked about her behind her back, whisperings that often ended in giggles as she passed by. Childbirth was to a woman's honor. And if she had no children, then surely there was something dishonorable in her past...or so they thought. Surely, she thought, the Lord would bless her with a child and take pain away. But now here she was, beyond her child-bearing years. And still her heart ached with longing.

Her husband was a priest in the temple of the Lord. He was a good and righteous man who had a longing in his heart, too, a heart that had also longed for a child. Eventually you reach a sort of place where you live life, and put the sadness on the shelf. And so he faithfully went about his life, observing the laws and regulations of the Lord. But still his heart ached. And together, they were living out the remainder of their lives to the glory of God, waiting on him, and trusting his promises...child or not.

The sadness and heartache of Elizabeth and Zechariah is the kind of thing that many can identify with. And not only for those who have a longing for children. Heartache and sadness can take so many forms: Regret over a failed relationship. Separation from a loved one living in another part of the world or a loved one living in eternal glory. Guilt over past and secret sins. Health challenges, work issues, financial struggles, or just an inexplicable darkness that seems to creep about the corners of the heart and mind – sadness and heartache. The weight can be nearly

unbearable. And in the midst of it all, the promises of the Lord seem so far away. It's easy to begin to question, even challenge, that the Lord knows what he's doing, that he knows what you're going through.

Oh, you ask questions, but there often seems to be so few answers! A well-meaning friend or family member may have said something like, "God allows these things to happen to people that he loves." To which you and many others have responded, "Yeah, I wish he didn't love me so much!"

Elizabeth would utter a similar phrase. She would say to her relative Mary, the mother of Jesus, "**Why am I so favored?**" Only for her, it was not dripping with sarcasm. It was in awe at **what the Lord had accomplished**. You see, even late in life (and I mean *late* in life), the Lord blessed Elizabeth and Zechariah with a child. But more than that, the Lord blessed them with even more than they could have **asked or imagined**. You see, the Lord blessed them with a child who would prepare the way for Jesus, the Savior.

Yes, know this about your Lord: He *does* love you and he *does* keep his promises. So when he promises to **fill your hearts with joy**, when he promises that there is room for all to **find refuge beneath the shadow of [his] wings**, when he promises believers that we **shall be with him in paradise**, when he promises that **nothing can separate [you] from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus**, when he promises that **there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, when he promises that **tomorrow will worry about itself**, and when he promises to **turn your darkness into light, no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ**.

After all, he promised to send his Son to be our Savior, and he made good on that promise. He promised that death would not have an everlasting hold on us, and he rose from the dead to make good on that promise. And he promises to ease aching and saddened hearts with the joy of his promises kept. **All things do work for the good of those who love him**. That is his promise. That is his vow. That is what the name Elizabeth means: "My God is a vow."

May the joy of his promises kept fill you this Christmas season and throughout the year. From the Gospel of Luke 1:

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,<sup>40</sup> where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!<sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>44</sup> As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.<sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"<sup>46</sup> And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,<sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name.<sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.<sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.<sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."*