



## RESOURCES TO ENHANCE YOUR STUDY

# OF MANY GENERATIONS: MARY, ELIZABETH, AND LYDIA

by Diane Jacobson

### BIBLE STUDY RESOURCE: SESSION 1

#### **Dramatic Reading of Luke 1:5–45**

**Narrator:** Luke begins, after the introduction to the most excellent Theophilus, with an annunciation by the angel Gabriel to a priest named Zechariah.

In the days of King Herod of Judea, 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. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.

Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 13 But the angel said to him,

**Angel Gabriel:** Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

**Narrator:** Zechariah said to the angel,

**Zechariah:** How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.”

**Narrator:** The angel replied,

**Angel Gabriel:** I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.

**Narrator:** So Zechariah becomes mute, Elizabeth conceives, and we pick up the story in verse which begins what might be identified as Mary’s call to discipleship.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said,

**Angel Gabriel:** Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.

**Narrator:** But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her,

**Angel Gabriel:** Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

**Narrator:** Mary said to the angel,

**Mary:** How can this be, since I am a virgin?”

**Narrator:** The angel said to her,

**Angel Gabriel:** The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.

**Narrator:** Then Mary said,

**Mary:** Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.

**Narrator:** Then the angel departed from her. 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,

**Elizabeth:** 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 fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

**Narrator:** But here we want to interrupt the story. We will get to what Mary says in our next session.

### **Hannah's Song and Mary's Song: A Litany**

**1 Samuel 2:1–10** (Hannah – Group 1) and Luke 1:46–55  
(Mary – Group 2)

**Hannah:** My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God.

**Mary:** My soul magnifies the LORD, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

**Hannah:** My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory.

**Mary:** For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

**Hannah:** There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

**Mary:** For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

**Hannah:** Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

**Mary:** His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

**Hannah:** The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.

**Mary:** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

**Hannah:** Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

**Mary:** He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.

**Hannah:** He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.

**Mary:** He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

**Hannah:** For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his messiah.

**Mary:** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, Abraham and to his descendants forever.

## Two Poetically Balanced Looks at the NRSV of Mary's Song

**Luke 1:46** And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

**47** and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

**48** for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

**49** for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

**50** His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

**51** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

**52** He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

**53** he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

**54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

**55** according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Renumbered to help see the rhythm of the poetry:

**1** My soul magnifies the LORD,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

**2** for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

**3** for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

**4** His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

**5** He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

**6** He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;

**7** he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

**8** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

**9** according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

BIBLICAL TEXT: ACTS 16:13-15	YOUR REFLECTIONS
<p><b>11</b> We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis</p>	
<p><b>12</b> and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days.</p>	
<p><b>13</b> On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there.</p>	
<p><b>14</b> A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul.</p>	
<p><b>15</b> When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.</p>	

- I. Know the General Themes and Purpose of the Book  
Genesis: God's Promise of progeny and land; Blessing; Election; Strife; Providence)
- II. Set the story in context. Know the plot and put story in the context of the larger plot. Connect details with what comes before and after. Note use of similar words in seemingly unconnected events. Note objects such as clothing, water, etc.
- III. Describe the major movement/structure of the story (type-scene; forms)
  - A. Outline story. Note which events are crucial or peripheral.
  - B. Identify other stories with similar structure,
  - C. Notice what happens at the beginning, end, and middle of the story.
  - D. Notice repeated words or phrases and descriptive details—also puns, irony, symbolism, or dramatic connections.
  - E. Attend to issues of causality and conflict. Why do events happen and where are the major conflicts?
- IV. Identify major & minor characters (round/full-fledged, or stock/flat; or type/agent; multi-dimensional, stereotyped, one dimensional)
  - A. Notice who has name.
  - B. Notice who has voice. How does speech function? Who talks to whom?  
(All Hebrew narrative is drawn toward dialog.)
  - C. Notice who is both the subject and object of action.
  - D. What do you know about characters and how do you know? Do you know from the narrator, from the character, or from another character's speech or action?
  - E. What don't you know?
  - F. With whom do you sympathize, empathize, have antipathy for? Why?
- V. What is the narrator's point of view? How do you know?
- VI. In what setting is the text?
  - A. Attend to spatial settings. (inside/outside; sacred space; liminal space such as doors)
  - B. Attend to temporal setting such as time of day or a festival. Time can be chronological or typological, locative or durative, or even intentionally out of time.
  - C. Attend to social settings such as banquets, gates, or wells.
- VII. Notice important themes such as the role of violence, power, election, or righteousness.
- VIII. Where is God in the text? Do we know God's point of view concerning the action and characters? How? Where is the theological/moral force?

Sources: Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, N.Y.: Basic, 1981.

Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994.

Powell, Mark Allen. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

