

JOYFUL NOISES

WEEKLY THEME:

UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

BASED ON:

Ephesians 4:1–16

LESSON AIM:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

KNOW: Explore characteristics of a life worthy of Christ's calling in building up the Body of Christ.

FEEL: Celebrate our gifts that help build up the Body of Christ.

DO: State an interpretation of having "one faith, one baptism, one God of all" as it relates to the building up of the Body of Christ.

TARGET

Believers are encouraged to walk worthy of their calling; each believer has a special gift to edify the singular body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16).

TOOLS

Student magazines, Bibles, pencils, an online Spiritual Gifts Inventory for preteens, Score Grid, and How to Use Your Gifts guidelines

OPEN THE LESSON

Ask your Jammers the following questions:

1. How are words used to hurt others? How are they used to build them up?
2. Which do you think works better: A group of people who all think the same way and have the same gifts, or one that has similar thoughts and a variety of talents? Explain.
3. Why do you think a group needs a leader?

REALITY CHECK

Joyful Noises

Lynette's family seemed to always be on the move. Each time she went to a new school and a new church, she had to find new friends. As she approached the new church, she heard lots of noise in the gym. Upon entering, Lynette saw a group in a huddle. The door slammed and everyone turned to her.

"Hi," she said shyly. "I'm Lynette."

"Welcome!" a friendly voice called out. "We were just assigning duties for the Winter Celebration next week. Can you help?"

Lynette responded, "Tell me what you need. I'm pretty sure I can do it."

First, she made door and stage signs. They weren't bold and vibrant enough. Next, she helped the decorating team. Everything she put up, they took down because it clashed with the setup. Pastor came in to see how everything was going. Lynette sat sadly on the side while everyone else was busy working and talking about the celebration.

"Work too much for you?" Pastor asked her with a concerned look on his face.

"Not really," she replied. "Every way I tried to help has been rejected. They're nice to me, but my ideas don't seem to fit."

"What are you good at? What has God given you to use to help people? He supplies us all differently so together, we can get a job done," Pastor remarked.

Lynette began to hum to herself and then she sang out loud. Everyone stopped. A few of them gathered closer to hear the beautiful sound. Pastor and everyone who was listening asked if Lynette would sing a solo at the celebration. Lynette felt good about being with the group and really being able to help. Now she understood why she had been sent.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Lynette was reluctant to join the group?
2. The group received her with open arms. Why wasn't it working out at first?
3. How did Pastor's words make a difference in how things were going?
4. Do you think Lynette understood why things worked out? Explain.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES IN MY HEART

Recite this verse: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4–5, NIV).

WORD!

Use "Target" to help you teach this lesson as the students reenact the lesson after reading it aloud.

SIDEBAR

Unity in the Body of Christ

God has graced Christians with spiritual gifts to be used for His purposes. As believers grow in Christ, they are expected to give of themselves in order for the Body of Christ to work as one.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

How to Carry out Your Calling

Jammers will understand what it takes to use their God-given gifts to work together in the Body of Christ.

G—Give of your talents when called upon.

I—Initiate the process by offering your talents where they can be used.

F—Find out what gifts God has given you.

T—Tell the Body of Christ you are willing to use what God gave you.

GOT IT!

A. We Are One

Jammers will use "Word!" to help them with this activity. Have them fill in the words "one" or "Christ" to complete each statement.

1. "There is **one** body and **one** Spirit, just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called;

one Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (verses 4–6).

2. "So **Christ** himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of **Christ** may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of **Christ**" (verses 11–13).

B. What is My Calling?

Use the pre-printed Spiritual Gifts Inventory to help students see where their talents are. To keep the pace moving, read each one aloud and have the students mark their answers. Next, have them chart their scores on the score grid to reveal their greatest talents.

JAM SESSION

Living Together

Jammers will recognize and appreciate the diversity of gifts among Christians. When we look to what God gifted us with, we are able to offer a gift that is useful to the Body. The experience becomes fulfilling and meaningful to all the members of the Body of Christ.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION JAM ON IT!

Believers Have Talents

Jammers will use the "How to Use Your Talents" sheet from the Spiritual Gifts Inventory and pick an activity listed under their top three gifts. After performing the activity, they should write a brief reflection about the results and how they feel. Encourage them to return next week to share one of the events with the class.

NOTES

Unity in the Body of Christ

Bible Background • EPHESIANS 4:1–16

Printed Text • EPHESIANS 4:1–16 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 12:3–8

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE characteristics of a life worthy of Christ's calling in building up the body of Christ; CELEBRATE our gifts that help build up the body of Christ; and UNDERSTAND the meaning of the statement "... one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" as it relates to building up the body of Christ.

In Focus

Aaron said a quick prayer of thanksgiving to God that he was able to walk away from Deacon Foster without an argument. Deacon Foster was a fine deacon, but as he advanced in age, his temperament was becoming more disagreeable. Aaron still had great respect for him, but Aaron and many of the younger members of the church sought some changes in the ministries of the church, including its business practices. Some members were frustrated because they wanted to use their gifts within the church in a more meaningful way.

Aaron laughed to himself, "I'm 42 years old, but 'Deac' still looks at me as one of the young folks in the church."

Deacon Foster saw no need for changes. The church had operated just fine for 137 years, and would continue to do so. That's when Aaron prayed. There was a time when he would have exploded all over the elderly deacon for being so shortsighted. "By the grace of God," he thought, "I am maturing in Christ."

How can Aaron and the other younger church members use their spiritual gifts to help build up their church? Although each church has its problems, what are some of the ways you can use your gifts to build up your church? Paul helps us in today's lesson to find some answers.

Keep in Mind

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4–5, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Ephesians 4:1** I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The People, Places, and Times

Gifts. Spiritual gifts are the skills and abilities given to all believers by the Father through His Spirit. These gifts are for the purpose of enabling Christians to carry out His plan. Jesus promised His disciples that they also would receive the gift of the Spirit, who would guide them (Mark 13:11; Luke 11:13). His promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–47). The Spirit was given to every believer. Paul's epistles (letters to the churches) reveal that this continued in all the churches. Every believer receives gifting from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the body of believers, not just for

individual benefit or pleasure. The greatest gift, which Paul said every believer should possess, is love (1 Corinthians 12:31–13:1).

Background

In previous portions of his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul laid the foundation concerning Christ and His Church. Now, he switches his focus to a more practical purpose, setting out guidelines for his readers concerning Christian conduct. But first, he decides to give them an overview of the church's place in the world. Paul called for the Ephesians to be true to who they are called to be in Christ and noted several truths for them to embrace: (1)

it's their responsibility to be one in the body; (2) the call for unity does not mean that they should strive for a type of dull sameness; (3) the church is a living organism, made up of living beings who are expected to grow according to their use of the gifts Christ has given them; (4) Christ desires that the church reach maturity and that the people of the church be prepared to exercise their gifts; and (5) as the church grows, its members should take on the nature and character of its head, Christ Jesus.

At-A-Glance

1. The Church's Calling to Unity (Ephesians 4:1–6)
2. The Church's Gifts (vv. 7–12)
3. The Road to Maturity (vv. 13–16)

In Depth

1. The Church's Calling to Unity (Ephesians 4:1–6)

Paul considered himself a prisoner for the Lord as well as one who belonged to the Lord. Always positioning himself as the example, he issued a plea to the Ephesian Christians to walk worthy of their “vocation,” or to live in a manner that is consistent with their high calling from God (v. 1). The Christian's call is the divine summons that was answered at the time of conversion. Our calling is not a hobby or a pastime. It is our life's achievement—our job.

The word “walk” is a literal translation of a Hebrew idiom for everyday conduct. The word “worthy” makes the connection between God's plan for us and our acceptance of that plan, as demonstrated in the way we live. Paul had previously cautioned against boasting concerning good works. Now, he advises them to live out their calling with humility. He did not want them to become arrogant about their

godly living. They were also to exercise patience toward the faults and failings of others and among those with different personality types and temperaments. We are to genuinely have patience for one another with love. The reason for possessing these qualities—“lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing”—is for unity within the body of Christ (v. 2). When Christ established the Church, He abolished the greatest dividing line within humanity—the barrier that separated Jews and Gentiles.

Now it was the responsibility of the early church members to try with all earnestness to avoid creating human divisions among God's people. Arguments and dissension threaten to destroy the “bond of peace” within the body of Christ. There is but one Spirit in the church; nothing can destroy that unity. However, bickering and quarrels can destroy the peace that binds the members of the body of Christ. A healthy formula for keeping the unity is threefold: unity in those things that are essential to the faith, liberty in those matters that are nonessential or not absolute, and love in all circumstances.

In spite of the vast number of Christian churches worldwide, there is only one body of believers. The same Spirit who dwells in every believer also dwells in the body of Christ. There is but one hope in which every believer has placed his or her trust. Our one Lord is the Savior who shed His blood for our sins. We all share a common faith in that one Lord and Savior. There is one baptism by which we profess our faith in Christ. The one God and Father is supreme above all.

2. The Church's Gifts (vv. 7–12)

The unity of the church must be balanced by its odd twin, diversity. Unity is often confused with uniformity. The Christian Church is communal; every member makes a contribution. Each member of the body of

Christ has been given grace, or a particular gift or role to fulfill. No two members are alike. No member should try to imitate the other's gifts. In other letters, Paul outlines the necessity for giving equal value to the gifts of every believer. By His grace, He has given these gifts as He sees fit. The risen Lord bestowed these gifts by first sending His most excellent gift, the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4:8, Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 as a prophecy that the Messiah would ascend to heaven, conquer His foes, and lead them captive. As a reward for His victory, He would receive gifts for humankind.

In Ephesians 4:9, Paul wanted to show that the prophecy could have referred only to Christ. If Jesus ascended into heaven, He must have first come down from heaven. Paul and others understood "lower parts of the earth" to mean that Christ descended into hell. The Gospel of Luke, however, indicates that His spirit went to heaven when He died (Luke 23:43, 46). The prophecy of Psalm 68:18 was fulfilled by the birth, death, and burial of Jesus. The ascended Christ is the giver of all gifts and the source of all blessings. He fills all things. In giving us gifts, Christ has a specific purpose in sight. All of God's saints are to be equipped with the gifts necessary to discharge their duties in the world.

In Ephesians 4:10, Paul proceeds to explain the nature of some of these gifts of grace. Apostles were those persons directly commissioned by the Lord to preach the Word and plant churches. They were those who had seen the risen Christ. Prophets were the mouthpieces for God. They received revelations directly from the Lord, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, and passed them on to the church. Evangelists are those who preach the Good News. They have been divinely equipped to go out into the world and lead persons to Christ. Pastors are those who serve as God's under-shepherds, caring for the sheep of His flock. It is their responsibility to guide and feed the

flock. The New Testament gives the impression of a number of pastors at a local church instead of one (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–2).

Teachers are persons divinely gifted to teach and explain the Bible and what it means. A Bible teacher endeavors to connect God's Word into everyday life. The purpose of all these gifts is for leaders to enable "the perfecting (or equipping) of the saints" so that all are prepared "for the work of the ministry" and, ultimately, "for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). These gifts should always be used to empower others to do even greater deeds for the sake of the kingdom.

3. The Road to Maturity (vv. 13–16)

At this point, Paul may have anticipated the question, "How long will this process of growing continue?" In verse 13, Paul explains that this will go on "Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Little can prepare the mind for the unity that exists in the afterlife. As long as we live, no matter how hard we try, we will have innumerable differences. This will continue until we are able to see Him as He truly is and to know as we are known. At that time the "unity of the faith" will occur. Until then, there will be room for growth. When we obtain full knowledge, we enter the state of "perfect man." The word "perfect," used in the King James Version, is translated as "complete." Our Christian journey is done when we come to the place of full knowledge of Christ and unity of our faith.

Verses 14–15 describe the growth process in the body of Christ. As we continue toward spiritual maturity, some things will become apparent. We are no longer like "children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (v. 14). As we grow to be more like Him, we grow in our knowledge of Him. Our understanding is solid and sure. No one can then

persuade us to change our beliefs. All disciples are called upon to grow. Discipleship is a process. It is not a course of study from which we will earn a diploma and never revisit again. There is always room for growth, for training, for new understanding, and for enlightenment. As we grow in Christ, so do our challenges. The longer we live, if we are achieving spiritual maturity, we learn to lean on Him more, trusting more fully in His promises and His providence. When we encounter brothers and sisters who have gone astray in their thinking and beliefs, we are commanded to speak “the truth in love,” helping each other to grow toward the head, which is Christ Jesus. He is both the goal of our growth and the source of our growth. As the church receives its life from Him who supplies all of our needs, quite naturally, growth comes from Him, too. But Paul adds that the church grows “toward” Christ as we as individuals grow “in” Christ.

Search the Scriptures

1. What did Paul “beseech” the Ephesian Christians to do (Ephesians 4:1)?
2. What reasons does Paul give them for exhibiting characteristics such as lowliness and meekness (v. 3)?
3. What are the seven things we are to share as one (vv. 4–6)?
4. How is the body of Christ put together through Christ (v. 16)?

Discuss the Meaning

Some Christians tend to forget that their talents and abilities are spiritual gifts from God. In what ways do believers begin to take credit for themselves? Include yourself.

Liberating Lesson

There is a real danger among Christians to look at ourselves as having “arrived” in regard to our spiritual growth. We can never fully know God in this life; therefore, Christian discipleship

is not a course of study to be completed. It is a process that causes us to change and grow continuously if we yield ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are never too old to learn in matters concerning the kingdom. The oldest, most seasoned Christian can still learn about God’s love from a newborn baby. A true sign of Christian maturity is in knowing there is still more to be known.

Application for Activation

Are there ways that you stunt your own spiritual growth because you are not willing to lend yourself to new challenges that are presented to you? Do you ever think, “I’m too old to be learning how to do that now,” or “I’ve lived long enough to know what I’m talking about”? Think about an area of your life where you may be inhibiting your spiritual development, thereby building a wedge between you and the Father.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Stature. **STACH**-er.
Sleight. **slite**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

One Lord
(Zechariah 14:6–11)

TUESDAY

One Faith
(Philippians 1:27–30)

WEDNESDAY

One in Christ Jesus
(Galatians 3:23–29)

THURSDAY

One God
(Exodus 20:1–7)

FRIDAY

One Spirit
(1 Corinthians 12:4–13)

SATURDAY

One Body
(Romans 12:3–8)

SUNDAY

Building Up the Body Together
(Ephesians 4:1–16)

Notes

FIVE GENERATIONS

WEEKLY THEME:

ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE

BASED ON:

Luke 1:46–55

LESSON AIM:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

KNOW: Review Mary's song praising God's faithfulness.

FEEL: Appreciate the faithfulness of God's people from generation to generation.

DO: Examine areas in life where our faithfulness to God can be strengthened.

TARGET

Mary expresses praise and gratitude to God for what He was going to do for the world through her. In these verses, often referred to as The Magnificat, Mary sees God as concerned for the poor, oppressed, and lowly (Luke 1:46–55).

TOOLS

Student magazines, Bibles, pencils, index cards

OPEN THE LESSON

Ask your Jammers the following questions:

1. What does Christmas mean to you?
2. Do you think many have forgotten the true meaning of Christmas? Explain.

REALITY CHECK

Five Generations

"Family! Family! Now that we've exchanged gifts, let's go into the family room, gather around the fireplace, and listen to Granddaddy Lewis tell the Christmas story," said Jaylin's Uncle Lee. This had been a Wilson family tradition for the last 50 years. Granddaddy Lewis and Grandma Lila were now in their late 80s, with five generations living. The family Christmas dinner tradition originally started at their home until the family expanded through births and marriages. Their home soon became too small to hold the family's annual Christmas celebration.

This year, the family Christmas dinner was held at Uncle Lee's house. The sounds of joy and

laughter covered the house like a warm blanket in winter. Family members came from near and far to feel each other's affectionate embrace. The cares and woes of the year eased away during the Wilson family Christmas gathering. This was the true meaning of Christmas.

"The love of family is a weapon against the cruel world," expressed Grandma Lila. "Jesus in the family brings joy." Granddaddy Lewis added, "The angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus would bring joy to everyone and peace on earth."

The little children sat at their grandparents' feet; the adults sat on the sofa and in chairs. Jaylin and his cousins took their usual spots along the wall. It didn't matter how old they were—this was a special moment. Everyone—all five generations of the Wilson family—gazed at Granddaddy Lewis in anticipation of the rest of the traditional Christmas story.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the tradition the family in the story practiced after dinner?
2. According to the story, what is the true meaning of Christmas?
3. Why do you think everyone was so eager to listen to the Christmas story?
4. How can you spread the true meaning of Christmas?

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES IN MY HEART

Recite this verse: "[The Lord] has helped his

servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promises he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever” (Luke 1:54–55, NIV).

WORD!

Use “Target” to help you teach this lesson as the students take turns reading the Scripture to a beat.

SIDEBAR

According to the Promise

Jammers will learn more about the Scripture passage and how Mary praises God for choosing her to fulfill His promises.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

How to Remain Faithful

Jammers will obtain tips to stay faithful in order to receive promises from God.

1. Practice the Word.
2. Read the Word.
3. Obey the Word.
4. Meditate on the Word.
5. Integrate the Word in your daily routine.
6. Seek truth in the Word.
7. Expect to grow from the Word.

GOT IT!

A. Mary’s Song

Jammers will use Word! to help them determine whether each statement from Mary’s Song is TRUE or FALSE.

1. God sent the rich away empty.
TRUE FALSE
2. God was merciful to Abraham and his descendants.
TRUE FALSE
3. Mary said, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God.”
TRUE FALSE
4. The Lord has performed mighty deeds with His hands.
TRUE FALSE
5. God has gathered the proud and brought up the rulers.
TRUE FALSE

6. He filled the hungry with small things.
TRUE FALSE

B. Kind Words for Christmas

Jammers will give kind words to each other for Christmas. Give students an index card and instruct them to write their name on it. Collect the cards, then pass them out again, making sure no one receives his/her own. Advise students to think of encouraging, motivating, and uplifting things to say about the person whose name is on the card and to anonymously write them a special note. Collect the cards and return them to the student whose name is on the front.

JAM SESSION

Celebrating Promises Fulfilled

Jammers will learn Abraham’s reward of promise through his faithfulness to God. Jammers will see that the fulfilled promise is Jesus Christ. They will know that God is faithful to His promises, and that He looks for us to remain faithful until the promise is fulfilled.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

JAM ON IT!

The Wait is Great

Jammers will think about the feelings associated with waiting a long time for a promise to be fulfilled. Encourage them to visit J.A.M.® on Facebook to share their thoughts and feelings.

NOTES

According to the Promise

Bible Background • LUKE 1:26–56; GALATIANS 3:6–18

Printed Text • LUKE 1:46–55 | Devotional Reading • 2 CORINTHIANS 1:18–22

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: REVIEW Mary’s song praising God’s faithfulness; APPRECIATE the faithfulness of God’s people from generation to generation; and EXAMINE areas in our lives where our faithfulness to God can be strengthened.

In Focus

It was Christmas morning, and it was Brenda’s ex-husband’s turn to have the children. Brenda felt so alone. Life just had not worked out the way she had thought it would. She walked into church and Michelle gave her a great big hug.

“Where are the kids?” Michelle asked.

“Their father has them,” Brenda answered, as the tears streamed down her face.

“Come sit by me,” said Michelle, as she enfolded Brenda in her arms.

Michelle allowed Brenda to freely cry out of her pain and disappointments. She did not try to console her with words; just her touch seemed to comfort Brenda.

Brenda remembered how her family had once been whole – intact. She vowed that her children would never have to live and deal with the problems of a dysfunctional home as she did. She vowed that she would do all she could to honor God with her marriage. She did all she could, but problems still came into marriage and ripped it apart. No matter what she did or did not do, her husband still chose to leave the marriage. Now, on Christmas Day, her precious little ones were spending time with their dad, instead of with the two of them together. Brenda’s heart seemed to break in two.

God was still caring for Brenda and loving her, even in a very rough situation. God is always faithful. Sometimes we just have to ask God to help us see things from His perspective.

Keep in Mind

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46–47, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 1:46** And Mary said my soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

The People, Places, and Times

Angels. Angels are created beings whose primary purpose is to serve God and worship Him. Some angels are used specifically to bring messages to people from God. These angels appear like human beings and are never described as having wings. They are never described as children or women. The angels with wings are the cherubim and seraphim. The cherubim and seraphim never leave the immediate presence of God and are continually worshipping Him. Since angels are created, they have a beginning. They are not all-knowing or present everywhere as God is. They do not marry.

Background

Mary sang the beautiful words of today's Scripture passage while she was visiting Elizabeth, her relative. Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, were an elderly, childless couple. They had prayed many years for a child until they reached the age where they no longer expected God to answer this request. Both Elizabeth and Zechariah were of the tribe of Aaron, so Zechariah was in rotation for serving at the Temple in Jerusalem.

After Luke's introduction to his Gospel record, he plunges right into the story of the birth of John the Baptist. It was Zechariah's turn to serve at the Temple, a great privilege for a godly Jew. As he went in to burn incense, suddenly the angel Gabriel was standing beside the incense altar (Luke 1:11). Zechariah had the same reaction that all who have ever been visited by an angel had—he was afraid.

After telling him not to be afraid, Gabriel told Zechariah that God was answering his and Elizabeth's prayers for a child, a very special child that they were to name "John" (v. 13). Unfortunately, Zechariah found this hard to believe, and so he became speechless until after the birth of John, their baby. John grew up to be the prophet we know as John the Baptist (or Baptizer).

Word must have traveled, in spite of the lack of modern communication devices, because Mary heard that her elderly relative was now pregnant. Mary was on the other end of the age spectrum, probably only around 15 years old, the age when women of those days usually got married. Gabriel had also visited Mary to tell her that she would be pregnant in the most miraculous way ever (vv. 26–38). Mary was going to give birth to the Son of God and this would be a virgin birth.

Shortly after Gabriel's announcement to Mary, she hurried to see Elizabeth (about an 80-mile hike). As soon as she walked in the door and Elizabeth heard her, baby John in her womb leaped in praise at the presence of the Baby who was growing within Mary. At this time, Elizabeth was already six months pregnant, while Mary's pregnancy had just begun. After Elizabeth had finished praising God for the coming Savior, Mary began singing a song of praise to God that reminds us very much of Hannah's song of praise when she became pregnant with baby Samuel in answer to her prayers. The similarity of Mary's prayer to others in the Bible makes us think that Mary studied Scripture and meditated upon it even in an era when women had little access to formal education.

At-A-Glance

1. God's Personal Blessing on Mary (Luke 1:46–49)
2. God's Blessings on His People (vv. 50–53)
3. God's Faithfulness in Sending the Messiah (vv. 54–55)

In Depth

1. God's Personal Blessing on Mary (Luke 1:46–49)

This stanza of Mary's song sings of how blessed she is. From a worldly perspective, this would seem to be the opposite of Mary's situation. Mary came from Nazareth, a town that was so poor that many of its few inhabitants lived in caves. She was engaged to a very godly man with a respectable job, but now she was pregnant – and not by him. Where are the blessings in such a situation?

First, she rejoices because God is her Savior. Every Christian, regardless of his or her

situation, should remember that the greatest blessing is to have God as Savior. Then, thinking upon the news from angel Gabriel, Mary praises God for choosing her for this blessing, in spite of her humble status – she is poor and a woman, two things that in that era assigned one to an automatic inferior status.

But Mary does not see her lowly status as a disadvantage in the sight of the Lord. God delights in blessing the ones who are of a very humble socio-economic status, but who put all of their trust in the Lord.

2. God's Blessings on His People (vv. 50–53)

Mary has trust in the Lord showing mercy to His people, because she knows that Scripture details how God had blessed His people in the past. This is more than simple optimism. This is hope based upon knowledge of how God has worked in the past. Based upon how He has blessed His people, Mary knows that He will continue to do so in the future.

As we look closely at the things that Mary sings about concerning how God acts, we see that when Jesus came to the earth, He brought about a moral revolution. He is using His mighty arm to sweep aside the proud. Pride has no place in the Christian because our standard is Jesus Christ. When we see ourselves compared to Him, we realize how far we are from how God desires us to be.

Then we see a social revolution. Jesus brings an end to the labels and titles that people think elevate them. In the sight of our Lord, the lowest person is just as important as the person with money and power.

Next, there is an economic revolution. Just think about the first Christians in Acts 2:44–45. No one went hungry in that first Christian community, because the rich sold their riches so the poor could have the basic necessities of life. That ideal community probably existed for

only a short time, but no Christians should go hungry while others have an abundance. We live in a very materialistic and greedy society, but Christians should have a different set of values than that of the world.

3. God's Faithfulness in Sending the Messiah (vv. 54–55)

Mary acknowledges that all these great and revolutionary changes in us can only come about through the coming of the Messiah that God had promised to send. Mary is thinking about God's promises to Abraham, Father of her people; but God promised Mother Eve back in Genesis 3:15 that He would send a Savior that we all so much need (see also Genesis 4:25). God is always faithful to keep His promises, even if we have to wait!

Search the Scriptures

1. What specific blessings does Mary thank God for (Luke 1:46–49)?
2. What sort of people does God bless (vv. 50–53)?
3. What attributes of God did Mary recite (vv. 50–55)?
4. How did God treat the descendants of Abraham (vv. 54–55)?

Discuss the Meaning

When Jesus was born, He brought blessings for individuals and for certain groups of people. What sort of people does Jesus favor? Why do you think He reaches out to those who fear Him, and to the poor, the humble, and the hungry? Compare these categories of people to the ones who are blessed in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12).

Liberating Lesson

Mary's song highlights the different set of values that emerged from the birth of Jesus. God is concerned for the people who are on the

bottom of society. In what ways can Christians as individuals bring about some of the things that Jesus came for? How can churches model His values?

Application for Activation

Some people are facing a difficult Christmas. Look around you and see if you can find someone to help before the day is over.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Baltes, A.J., ed. Biblespeech.com. <http://www.biblespeech.com> (accessed August 11, 2010).

Cox, Steven L. "Angel." *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2003. 66-67.

Say It Correctly

Anakims. **AN**-uh-kims.

Chaldees. **KAL**-dees.

Debir. **DEE**-buhr.

Eleazar. El-ee-**AY**-zuhr.

Negev. **NEG**-ev.

Seir. **SEE**-uhr.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Is Faithful

(2 Corinthians 1:18–22)

TUESDAY

A Faithful Heart

(Nehemiah 9:6–10)

WEDNESDAY

Descendants of Abraham

(Galatians 3:6–12)

THURSDAY

Inheritance through the Promise

(Galatians 3:13–18)

FRIDAY

Jesus' Birth Foretold

(Luke 1:26–38)

SATURDAY

Elizabeth's Blessing

(Luke 1:39–45)

SUNDAY

Mary's Song of Praise

(Luke 1:46–55)

Notes
