

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

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# CHRISTMAS 2018

## TELL YOUR STORY

### Luke 1:39-45

*In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."*

What follows then in verse 46 is Mary's magnificent song of praise. Mary begins by saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed..." -- a beautiful song or hymn of praise.

We have here this unique account in the gospel of Luke. We have been told about Zechariah and Elizabeth, that in their old age they've never had children; she has been barren her entire life. Now that she is past the age of having children, she is going to have a child, and this child will be John the Baptist. He will be the one who prepares the way for the Messiah, for the one who has come to save the world.

Then Mary as a young teenager was told that as a virgin she will conceive and give birth to the Messiah, the Son of God, who will save the world. Now these two women meet together. Mary, upon the announcement from the angel, receives the word of God in faith -- receives, believes, embraces God's will for her life. She gets up immediately and goes to see Elizabeth.

This encounter is remarkable, because you have to remember that Elizabeth is 55 or so. I'm just picking a number, but somewhere in there give or take, maybe a little bit older, maybe just a little bit younger. Mary is maybe 15, so there is a gap of decades. These two women meet together and there is this *explosion* of praise to God and joy to God as they celebrate what God has done. And on this last of our major Christmas messages, I want to talk to you about celebrating

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

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---

what God has done, about praising the Lord for his goodness and his work in your life, because I think it's key to understanding and discovering your purpose.

In fact, let me say it this way. **I want to give you something that will help you discover and release God's purpose in your life. Your purpose is more than a job. It's more than a vocation. It's more than a career. It's more than academic pursuit.** All of those things are avenues for you to fulfill your purpose. They are all important. We want to live out our relationship with God, our faith in all of that, in all of the roles as husband and wife or parent or child or grandparent. Those are avenues for us to fulfill our purpose. But they are not the purpose itself that God has given us.

What's interesting (and maybe you've experienced this in your own life) is that sometimes you discover your purpose by doing it. You feel like, "Wow, I've just kind of stumbled into it." **Something happens when the door of purpose opens before you. It has a way of sealing your identity. You will struggle knowing who you are if you don't have a clear understanding of your purpose. And that will only come out of relationship with God, out of a relationship with your Maker.**

We know that anyone who constructs something, that creates something, that makes something, does it for a purpose, and the creator builds the purpose right into whatever it is. **Our purpose comes from God and begins with a relationship with God.** Here's the odd thing about it. **When we engage in praising God and giving glory to God, we release and discover and fulfill our God-given purpose, because we were made to glorify God.**

Now, if you are here and you happen to be a Christian, you know that you are supposed to do this, right? But it's different. This is not just a "supposed to." When we really discover the joy and the fulfillment that come to us, when we lock into our purpose, it's magnificent.

I've known people in life who've just been in the wrong place. They've been so fixated to be in that place that when they finally break free of it and they get in God's place, they are like, "What was I thinking over here?" **God has a path for you. He has made you. He has created you. He has formed into your very being the need, the desire to worship him. You will only know fulfillment and joy and peace in God Almighty. So run to his purpose for your life.**

That's what we are going to talk about. **We're going to talk about releasing, developing, and discovering God's purpose.** Are you ready?

### I. It begins with expectations.

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## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

---

**God works through ordinary people in supernatural ways.** We would not know anything about Elizabeth and Mary except for God's supernatural workings in their lives. There are two miracles. We may say, "Well, they are similar miracles, supernatural births, right?" But they are of a different order. It's a miracle that Zechariah and Elizabeth are about to have this child, but it's a miracle that has occurred through the normal and natural means. Mary is about to give birth to a child who is the Son of God and she has never been with a man. That's on a whole different order, right?

Do you remember that we talked about how the miracle that Mary experiences provides a paradigm, a model for us?

**Every time God is working in your life supernaturally, he is wanting to shape Christ in you.** We observe this and sometime we experience this in our lives, where God does something that is clearly his blessing. It is supernatural, but it's through natural means. He uses medicine. He uses a doctor. He uses someone who gives us counsel, and yet, it's still out of the ordinary. It was not a mere formality. It was unexpected. It was God at work in our lives.

Then there are other times where God just interrupts and intervenes and bypasses natural means, and we welcome both. We don't despise either. We welcome however God chooses to work in our lives. The natural means are God's grace to us. They are God's gift to us. We have all been in experiences where the people that control those natural means, whether it be a doctor or someone else, offers us no hope. But God says, "I'm going to give you hope, even though you've lost hope and others don't see hope. I'm going to use this for my glory."

**Why is this important? Because God wants to do amazing things through your life to bless other people.** And you won't engage in that if you don't believe that God wants to use ordinary you. You won't! If you don't believe and embrace that God is constantly doing amazing, supernatural things in you and through you and around you, then you will meet these difficult situations and scratch your head and say, "I just want to run from that." William Carey, the founder, the father of the modern missionary movement, said this: **"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."**

**It begins with expectations. It begins with understanding.**

If you've read parts of the gospel, you may have heard of this. It may be obscure to you. It may not. Don't worry about it if you don't. The religious leaders of Jesus' day are all embroiled in this conversation about the resurrection. The Sadducees and the Pharisees are debating one another and they try to drag Jesus into it. Jesus says, "Listen, have you not read the scripture that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? He is the God of the living, not the God of the dead."

It's such an insightful way, the way that Jesus just demolishes their whole framework of understanding, to say, "You are living in practical denial of the power of God in your lives. You are standing here looking at the perfect image of God and the Son of God and you have no expectation for God to work. In fact, in your thinking, God is just the God of the dead, the God that used to work, the God of the has-been, when God is right in front of you, bringing the kingdom of God."

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

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---

Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” and that is a miraculous occurrence that God wants to bring about.

Let’s just unpack this first point a little bit more. **God works through ordinary people in supernatural ways. God fills ordinary people with his Holy Spirit.** This is part of what the New Testament teaches us. In the Old Testament there were exceptional leaders and exceptional men and women that God used. The Holy Spirit came upon them and did really remarkable things.

We read about Abraham, we read about Moses, we read about David, and various individuals. But those situations are described to us more as exceptional rather than the norm in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets, hundreds of years before Jesus arrived, said, “Listen, a time is coming where one will come who will immerse us in the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God will live in you and be in you.”

There was this tension under the Old Covenant where the prophets were saying, “Our hearts are not bent toward God. They are not inclined toward God, but God is going to fix that through the indwelling presence of His Spirit.” One example would be in Ezekiel. This is hundreds of years before the arrival of Jesus. Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Verse 27: “And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”

We read in the book of Acts that Jesus ascends and then he pours out his Spirit on those first Christians, those early followers of the New Covenant. This is recorded in Acts chapter 2. Peter gets up and begins to preach. Do you remember that this is Peter, who denied Jesus three times? He bragged that he would never deny Jesus, then denied him three times. Now he is full of the Spirit of God and he stands to proclaim to thousands who Jesus is.

He begins with a quote from the Old Testament prophet Joel. He says, “You know what? Joel told us about this day. He told us that God said, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, men and women, servants and non-servants.’” He describes that, then he ends that with this glorious, glorious promise: “And all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**There is salvation in Jesus Christ, and that salvation is a new birth. Jesus gives us his Spirit and the Holy Spirit comes in, making all things new.**

So it begins with expectations. It’s not the expectation of what I can do, what I can accomplish in the natural. If you’re sitting here and hearing this message and saying, “Well, I’m not ordinary. I’m exceptional!” I don’t know. Maybe God can’t use you. But if you’re ordinary, or like me, maybe just a little bit below ordinary, just average minus, God uses you powerfully.

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

---

This is the amazing thing. This has happened to me over the years. People will come and point out to me my faults. Only on occasion, once in a while they'll want to bless me. And I want to say, "You know, you have no idea. There is so much worse than you are even expressing." But this is the amazing thing about God – he is using me! Even me! You guys look like you are agreeing way too much with this point. God uses ordinary people and the more ordinary, the more glory God gets. Then we realize, "It's just God – it's not me."

I'm enjoying having my kids here for Christmas and celebrating. One just graduated, commissioned into the marines, one more so close to financial independence. I am so proud of my son and the accomplishments in his life. But I want to say this – when I look at the fruit of God in my kids, I often say they make me look so much better than I am. I can't give you a formula. I can give you biblical truth, but I can't give you a formula. And you know what? It's God's grace. I love to give glory to God because I am so aware of my own brokenness and pride and selfishness, and how if it were up to me, without Jesus Christ as my savior, I would just be a wreck.

Let me just say this before I move on. I was strongly impressed with this this morning, here in the office praying early. I was thinking there are individuals here who have been praying for loved ones for years and years and years – for a very long time. And there is a temptation for you. You believe in Christ, but others that are dear to you do not know Jesus, and you are heartbroken over it. I want to tell you: **Don't lose hope. Pray. Stand. Believe God. Nothing is too difficult for the Lord. As we experience delay, as we experience unfulfilled desire, it's easy for that to be more credible in our hearts than the truth of God. I want to tell you: May the Spirit of God awaken faith in you for what God wants to do.** Amen?

### II. The Holy Spirit surpasses expectations.

**It begins with expectations. Now I want to tell you that our expectations are always too low.** They are just too low. God is going to blow the windows out of your house of expectations. He is going to blow the doors off. He will do amazing things in your life.

Remember Zechariah? He wanted a child. He prayed for a child. He prayed for God's restoration in Israel, but when it came, he just wasn't ready. Right? Remember we talked in that first message about the transition that happens? Even this very solid, godly man needed a transfer from his own kingdom thinking to God's kingdom.

The longing for an heir, the longing for a child – that was still there, but now it was surpassed by the purpose of God for the ages. That brought about a joy that was unspeakable and that cannot be contained. The Holy Spirit surpasses expectations.

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## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

---

Here's how the Holy Spirit works, just a couple of observations about how the Spirit of God works.

- 1) **The Holy Spirit exalts Jesus.** Here is how we see this in the account where Elizabeth welcomes Mary. We are told that Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit of God. She is filled with the Holy Spirit. She begins to exalt God and bless Mary, and the focus of it is Christ. Her blessing to Mary is related to the fact that the Son of God is in her womb. Then she exalts Jesus, whom Mary is carrying. This is what the Holy Spirit does. He brings the truth of God home to our hearts. He gives us understanding, and that understanding – listen very carefully – is always centered in, surrounded by Christ. It is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. **Everything that God has for you is found in Jesus** -- forgiveness of sin, rightness with God, wisdom, strength, the fruit of the Spirit – everything we receive by faith through Christ as we learn to walk it out. Eternal life, received through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is very important. This is a guide for us. This is something that protects us from every vain imagination. We know that the Holy Spirit always exalts the Lord Jesus Christ. There are a number of verses that we could look at. Here is 1 Corinthians 12:3: “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.” It’s the work of the Spirit of God.

We could go to John 15, where a description of the work of the Holy Spirit is given in verses 26 and 27. The Apostle John tells us that the Spirit of God bears witness in our hearts to who Christ is, then helps us to give witness or testimony to others of who Christ is. This is one of the ways that God helps us to experience the miraculous, to experience his kingdom. He helps us by exalting Christ, giving us an understanding of who Christ is.

- 2) **The Holy Spirit fills us with joy.** He fills ordinary people with great joy. That’s what you see in this passage as these two women meet. There is this explosion of joy as Christ is exalted.

Just stop, friends, and think about this for a minute. If you are like me at all, you are prone to think that the key to life is for me to be exalted. I’m clever enough not to go around saying that, smart enough not to maybe even articulate it in my own mind, but when people put me down, I don’t like it. When people lift me up, it feels good, right? It’s the way we are.

Left to our own accord, we will go through life saying, “Okay, I am going to orchestrate, manipulate, form and shape all of my life towards this goal.” And God says, “Listen, I want to bring about a transition in your thinking. Real joy is found in exalting Jesus Christ.”

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

---

A friend of mine says, “God will let you do just about anything as long as you don’t have to have the credit.” The first thing that happens when we start arguing for credit? The Spirit of God leaves the room. But when we understand it’s by God’s grace and we seek for the Lord Jesus to be exalted, we begin to experience joy.

Now, here’s the great news in this: You may have entered into this service today thinking, “This has to happen, and this has to happen, and I hope that this year this doesn’t happen.” You are naturally tempted to tether your personal happiness to these events, which are largely, if not completely, beyond your control. But you know what you can do? You can exalt Jesus no matter what happens in all of those events. That you can do. You can seek God’s peace. You can seek him and his kingdom and all of those things, then you will experience a greater joy than you could ever consider, even if those things don’t exactly go the way you want them to. I’m really wanting to just say, “Amen,” myself. Yeah! But my joy is not found in your agreement. The Holy Spirit fills ordinary people with joy. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

I haven’t made this point yet. Do you remember what Gabriel told Zechariah? “You’re going to have a child. You are going to call him John. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb.” That’s an amazing promise, right? Mary walks in the door to Elizabeth’s house and she says, “The child within me leaped for joy.” That’s the Holy Spirit exalting the Lord Jesus Christ.

The *baby* is overcome with joy! Why are you so grumpy, Christians? It’s not that hard! Come on, right? “Oh, I don’t know. My washing machine broke.” You have a washing machine! For thousands of years people have washed their own dishes and clothes – thousands! You have a machine that does it! “Life is so hard.” The Holy Spirit fills us ordinary, grumbling people, even preachers with his Holy Spirit, with joy.

Alright, here we go. We’re getting to the end, the last point. This brings it all together.

### III. Tell your story.

This is how we discover, fulfill, release purpose: **Celebrate what God is doing in your life.** When I encourage us to praise God, you will be fulfilling your purpose. It will release that fulfillment. Great joy will come; identity; all of those things.” When I tell you that, you may think, “I just don’t know how to do that without it sounding unnatural. I’ve known people who are always saying, ‘Praise the Lord,’ or ‘Praise Jesus’ and it’s just not me. It doesn’t sound authentic.” Sometimes we don’t even know what language to use. So here’s something: **Just tell your story. Just celebrate what God is doing in your life. Give glory to God for his presence, his salvation, the forgiveness of sin, where it’s really about exalting Jesus, and not exalting ourselves.**

## Christmas 2018 – Tell Your Story

Luke 1:39-45 | Sunday, December 23, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

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In the last two messages I have made the statement that God wants to do more than just give you good gifts. He wants to make you a better you. That could be misunderstood. It's not about more of you. It's not about more of me. It's not just a feel-good, self-help -- it's about Christ. It's about you and I being molded and shaped into Christ, into the image of Christ. That transformation is not just more of the same. It's a new me, which is glorious. And as God is doing that, we celebrate what God is doing, and what God is doing all around us. It's about him and not really ourselves.

Then this is key:

### IV. Praise multiplies joy.

I look at Mary and Elizabeth and think that this could have been an awkward encounter. They are 40 or 50 years apart in age. Elizabeth is blessing the younger and the station that God has given her, and Mary breaks out into this incredible song of praise, quoting references from the Old Testament, exalting the Lord. This is a happy moment in scripture. This is a party. This is a celebration.

**When you tell your story, joy is magnified in your heart. You are reliving it. It's happening. You are expressing praise to God. You are fulfilling your purpose. You are confirming your true identity.** This also, sadly, works in the reverse. It doesn't take a lot of faith to see the faults of other people, to see what God isn't doing, to see what isn't happening. If that's what we always notice, and if that's what always gets our attention and we always speak that, we just move toward it. Then, you know, there's that cloud that follows us. People say, "Oh, here comes Brian and his cloud."

But when we have the grace of God and the Spirit of God is bringing home to our hearts just how amazing and wonderful Jesus is, and in faith and through our experience we are speaking that... You may be of a tradition where you open some gifts tomorrow night. This Christmas you may get something you have wanted for a long time. I hope you have marvelous gifts and you enjoy that and you celebrate it. You may open them on Tuesday morning if you have enough discipline to wait past tomorrow night. I'm not promising I will. For many of us, by the time Wednesday gets here we will have moved on to the next thing. **But when Jesus becomes the thing, we never exhaust his infinite beauty and grace and majesty. We never move on and joy is magnified in our lives.** Amen?