

Luke 1:39-46

Sermon: **A Good Soul**

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2022



INTRODUCTION

1 In the previous sermon, we continued our journey through the Gospel of Luke and talked about how God works within our reality. We focused especially on the subject of suffering, trials, and hardships that people go through. We saw that we should not automatically interpret suffering as God's punishment. Sometimes God uses hardship to call us, to awaken us from our spiritual sleep, and to lead us to questions we often never ask while life is comfortable and everything seems to be going well.

1.1 We also talked about the fact that God's priorities are not necessarily the same as ours. By nature, we long for health, security, a comfortable life, the fulfillment of our plans, and the satisfaction of our desires. But God's primary concern is to shape our character and prepare us for what He has promised us. That is why what we experience as loss or hardship can sometimes become the very means through which God changes the way we see life, ourselves, and, above all, Him.

1.2 After that, we returned to Luke's account of Mary and the birth of Jesus. We talked about the work of the Holy Spirit and tried to understand this event from a biblical perspective rather than a pagan one. We focused especially on the words that the child to be born would be holy and would be called the Son of God. We tried to understand what Luke is emphasizing within his own narrative: that something is taking place in Mary's womb that is directly connected to God's promises to Israel, the Messiah, David's throne, and the coming of the Kingdom of God.

1.3 Finally, we looked at Mary's response to God's call: "Behold, I am the Lord's servant. May it be done to me according to your word." This may be one of the most important truths we have seen so far. Mary did not view her calling primarily by asking, *"What do I get out of this?"* Her eyes were fixed on God and on His purpose. She accepted the role God had given her and was willing to submit her life to something greater than her own plans.

1.4 (Luke 1:39-46)

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with the loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul exalts the Lord."

THE MEETING OF MARY AND ELIZABETH

2 (Luke 1:39)

Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah.

Why did Mary set out in such haste? That is the main question.

In the previous passage, we saw that the angel did not tell Mary only that she would give birth to the child who would be called the Son of the Most High. He also told her that her relative Elizabeth, though advanced in years, had conceived a son. Elizabeth was already six months pregnant.¹

Mary was surely overjoyed for her relative. She probably knew how long Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for God to bless them with a child.

But I also believe Mary was thinking about herself. Perhaps she thought something like this: "I have to go and see Elizabeth. If what the angel told me about her is true, then everything he told me about me will also come true."

That is why Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea. And once again, this reveals her humanity.

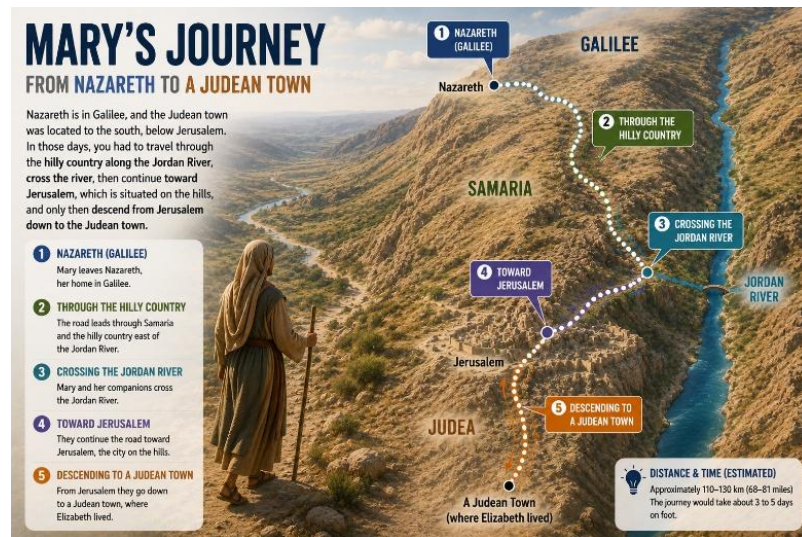
We all look for confirmation. We look for certainty. When God speaks to us, or when we begin to see certain signs in our lives, it often takes time—and further events—to strengthen our confidence that what He has said will truly come to pass.

When we see the same pattern repeated, it confirms what we have already received. It strengthens our confidence.

¹ Luke 1:36

And I believe that is exactly what was happening in Mary's life. She had received an incredible message. The angel had told her that she would give birth to a child. And her natural response was, "I need to go and see. I need to see if this is really true."

She knew that meeting Elizabeth would confirm even more deeply everything the angel had told her.



2.1 In a moment, we will also talk about how long that journey took.

Mary set out from Nazareth in Galilee, while the town of Judah was located south of Jerusalem.

This was not a short journey. The route passed through hilly country, and the exact distance depended on which road a traveler took and the precise location of the town of Judah. But it most likely took Mary several days on foot to reach Elizabeth.

So this was a serious journey. She was not simply visiting the next village. She set out in haste on a journey that would take several days because she wanted to see whether what the angel had told her was truly coming to pass.

2.2 (Luke 1:40–43)

And entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with the loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"

Mary greets Elizabeth, and the child leaps in Elizabeth's womb. At that moment, Elizabeth makes a clear declaration that the fruit of Mary's womb is blessed. Let's slow down here.

There are two possibilities:

1. Elizabeth understood what was happening through the Scriptures and the testimony of her husband Zechariah, and the Holy Spirit gave her the heart to connect it all.
2. The Holy Spirit gave her a direct revelation of who the child in Mary's womb truly was. By direct revelation, I mean the kind received by the prophets in the Old Testament, or like the one her husband Zechariah received when he was in the Holy of Holies.²

2.3 Between Mary's greeting and the baby's leap of joy in Elizabeth's womb, we unfortunately have no indication that Mary had already explained everything that had happened to her. In *Luke* 1:45 we read that Elizabeth says: "Blessed is she who believed." How could Elizabeth have known all this if Mary had not told her?

It's possible Mary shared it with her between the greeting and the baby's leap. Or perhaps Mary had sent Elizabeth a letter before setting out on her journey. Either way, I personally believe that Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, connected the pieces and understood what was happening.

2.4 The reason I take this view is that the text never directly implies that Elizabeth received a revelation from God in the same way we read in other passages of the Old and New Testaments, where God, the Lord Jesus Christ, or angels speak directly to people. We know that both Zechariah and Mary received direct appearances of the angel, who told them what would happen. In Elizabeth's case, the text does not indicate such an encounter.

2.5 This does not mean I rule out the possibility that "filled with the Holy Spirit" here could mean exactly that—that Elizabeth received a direct revelation from God and spoke prophetically. But for me personally, the first explanation feels more compelling.

2.6 Why? Because the text never explicitly says that Elizabeth received a special revelation, the way it clearly says that an angel appeared to Zechariah and Mary and spoke to them.

We are not given that kind of description in Elizabeth's case.

That is why I personally think one of two things happened. Either Mary sent Elizabeth a message before she arrived, or she told her what had happened after she got there.

Elizabeth could then connect Mary's story with what Zechariah had already shared with her.

For six months, she had been thinking about everything the angel had told Zechariah. And now, when she saw Mary and heard what had happened to her, she was able to connect all these events. That is why she said what she did.

Again, I am not rejecting the possibility that God revealed it to her directly.

If that is what happened, I have no problem with that at all. But personally, I find the first explanation more convincing.

² Jeremiah 1:4–10; Isaiah 6:8–13

2.7 And the reason is something I have come to understand through my walk with God. God has given us information through the Bible. He has also given us experiences, circumstances, and events that are woven into our lives.

When we carefully consider all of these things together, we can come to a reasonable conclusion about what we should do next. I am not saying we can know everything. We cannot. But we can connect what God has already given us and make wise decisions.

That is why I want to encourage you. When we have the truth of Scripture, when we know God's Word, and when we pay attention to what is happening in our lives, we can connect those things. We can think carefully about what our next step should be.

What should we decide? What should we do? When we receive biblical wisdom and live according to it, it produces good fruit in our lives.

BLESSED

3 (Luke 1:42)

And she cried out with the loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Elizabeth says to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

The Greek word translated here as "blessed" is *eulogemene*. Simply put, it means that someone has received God's blessing, God's favor, and the good that God desires to give.

We understand this from our own experience as well. When I was growing up, the priest would come to our home after the holidays to bless the house. We believed that through this act God would protect us, bless our home, and provide what we needed—food on the table, health, peace, and well-being in every area of life.

And all of those things are good. Food is good. We all know that, and we all enjoy it. Health is good. We probably value it more than almost anything else in life. Peace is good. Days without war are good as well.

In one sense, all of these things are blessings. A blessing means that God desires good for someone. And as Christians, we should recognize where all of these things ultimately come from.

That is what I want to share with you here. Absolutely everything comes from God. I believe most people would agree with that. And it is true. But why does God give us blessings? Why does He fill our lives with good things? Because He desires our good.

The biblical perspective is that nothing can exist apart from God unless He wills it to exist. At this very moment, as I am speaking and you are listening, God is sustaining everything. As we breathe. As we live. As we eat. As we wake up each morning. Everything exists because God has decided that it should exist. Our food. Beautiful weather. Our next breath. Our next day.

Every one of these things is possible because God has chosen for it to be so—right now, one second from now, one minute from now, one year from now, or one hundred years from now.

And when we truly believe that, it moves us to be thankful. Because we realize that we are blessed.

My great-grandfather, my mother's grandfather, went through many hardships in his life. Near the end of his life, he said something that has stayed with me. He said something like this: "I don't know what comes after this life, but I would rather live one more day here than go there."

Of course, I do not agree with that statement. But it still tells us something about human nature. A person can go through almost anything in life. And my great-grandfather certainly did. Yet he still wanted to live.

Why? Because he understood that life is a blessing. He understood that every day in which you can see, experience, look, smell, taste, and live is better than nothingness.

And that is true.

3.1 Let us return to the text. In this context, when Elizabeth tells Mary that she is blessed, she is saying that God desires good for her. God cares about her well-being.

Out of all the women in the history of Israel, Mary was given the privilege of becoming the mother of the Son of the Most High—the mother of the promised Son whom the prophets had spoken about for centuries.

She was given that role.

And through that role, God desired her good. Why? Because she was directly connected to God's promise. She knew where that promise was leading. Its outcome was life in the blessed Kingdom of God. And she was bringing into the world the Son who would reign over that Kingdom.

Can you imagine a greater calling than that?

3.2 But then the text says, "Blessed is the fruit of your womb." And that raises a question in my mind. Why does God desire good for the child in Mary's womb? Why does Elizabeth say that this child is blessed? Why would Jesus need God's blessing at all?

We know who this child is. He is Jesus Christ. I grew up being taught that Jesus is God, that He belongs to the divine reality of the Father and the Holy Spirit. That is why this question has always interested me personally. If Jesus is God, why would He need a blessing? Wouldn't blessing already belong to Him because of His divine status?

We are not going to explore that subject in depth right now. But I do want to make one important point. Throughout Christian history, the Church has confessed that Jesus is both truly God and truly man. It is important to acknowledge that honestly.

But personally, I believe that many sermons today place so much emphasis on His divinity that they fail to give enough attention to His genuine humanity. Jesus is the visible image of the

invisible God. He is the Son of God. He possesses the authority given to Him by God the Father. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

There is no question about that.

But He was also a real human being. He was born. He grew up. He became tired. He was hungry. He was sorrowful. He experienced disappointment. He became angry. He suffered. He died. And He rose again.

3.3 When Elizabeth says that the fruit of Mary's womb is blessed, she is speaking about the child who would be born as a human being. A child who received God's blessing. A child who was given the role toward which, as I understand it, all of reality is moving.

That child is the Son of God the Father.

There has never been, and never will be, a more important person in human history than Jesus Christ—not in the past, not in the present, and not in the future.

How do we know that? Because people are still talking about Him today. Many people throughout history played important roles. Many kings, rulers, and religious leaders were famous in their own time. But most of them died, and over time their influence faded away.

People have been speaking about Jesus for two thousand years. His name is still proclaimed today. He is still changing people's lives today.

That is remarkable. Truly remarkable.

And that is only one indication of His unique place in human history.

3.4 Now I want to ask a question, but I offer it as a thought, not as a certain historical conclusion. Perhaps one reason people throughout history have often felt such a strong connection to Mary, the apostles, the saints, and other believers is that human beings naturally relate more easily to other human beings.

People want to know that someone understands them. And we naturally believe that someone who has experienced human fear, weakness, pain, and loss can understand us more deeply.

A zebra understands another zebra. A lion understands another lion. And a human being, in the fullness of human experience, is best understood by another human being.

Perhaps that is why so many people have found it easier to connect emotionally and personally with Mary, the apostles, or the saints. I am not saying this is the only reason, nor can I say with certainty that this is how certain church practices developed. I am simply offering a thought.

3.5 But I believe it is important to return to Christ and recognize how real His humanity truly is. When I read the Gospels and look at the life of Jesus, I see that He experienced fear. I see that He became tired. I see that He was disappointed. I see that He became angry and hungry. And in the end, I see Him enduring unimaginable suffering. I also see that He lived in complete dependence on the Father's will rather than His own. He emphasized that throughout His life.

That is why I believe it is a serious mistake to push Jesus' humanity into the background. If we interpret His life only through the idea that He came to prove His divinity, I believe we can miss a great deal of what He actually did and taught.

That is why, as we continue through the Gospel of Luke, I will often look at Jesus from the perspective of His humanity.

Of course, that does not mean He is not the Son of God. It does not mean He is not unique. It simply means that I want to take seriously what the Gospel texts themselves show us—that He lived a real human life.

3.6 And this is where you will often notice a difference between my interpretation and certain traditional church interpretations. I am not going to discuss which ones at this point. But the reason is simple. I want to show that when we see Jesus as a real human being as well, we can relate to Him personally. We can understand His words more deeply. We can apply His teaching to our own lives. And those truths help us remain steady in this world.

In the end, as always, you will have to decide for yourselves whether the way I understand these passages is helpful and convincing—or whether it is not.

TWO LORDS

4 (Luke 1:43)

And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?

The word “Lord” means Master. It is a title that belongs both to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. God, as the Master of all things, decided to give everything as an inheritance to His Son Jesus, who is the image of Him, the invisible God.

Jesus deserves the same treatment from people that God the Father receives, because He is the Master of all creation—He represents the authority of the invisible God in the visible created order.

Elizabeth recognizes this, and that is why she says to Mary: “The mother of my Lord—Jesus, my Messiah—comes to me.” This is an act of humility on Elizabeth’s part.

4.1 (Luke 1:44)

For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

Here is my suggestion of what may have happened. I believe Mary told Elizabeth what had happened to her. And as Elizabeth listened, she had a personal experience of her own.

This brings us back to what we talked about in the previous sermon—the sign. The child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth could have understood that moment as confirmation that everything Mary was telling her was true. For her, it was an incredibly powerful and deeply personal moment. The movement of the child in her womb meant a great deal to her.



4.2 But to someone else, it might not have meant anything at all. We tend to read this passage very quickly today. We move past it and continue reading. But we should pause and think about what Elizabeth experienced in that moment.

Why? Because every one of us can probably think of a personal experience that means everything to us but very little to someone else. When we tell that person what happened, they may find the story interesting. They may even say it is beautiful. But it will never mean to them what it means to us.

Because it is something we experienced personally.

4.3 Let me give you an example from my own life. I remember being in Lika. I prayed that God would give me a sign that He was with me and that He would not leave me alone as I went through the most difficult and dramatic season of my life. Those were the first moments when I truly began to open my heart to the possibility that God exists. That there is a power governing everything in this world. I began to accept that there is Someone who is in control of everything, including my life and its outcome.

I prayed that God would not leave me alone as I went through it. I was not expecting anything at all. At that time, I was reading the Bible very intensely.

One day I was sitting beneath a large walnut tree. I often spent entire days there reading the Bible. Then something happened that I will never forget. I was holding my Bible in my hands when a white butterfly landed on my hand.

Now, a butterfly can land on anyone. It might land on your shoulder, your head, your finger, your knee, or your foot. And usually, as soon as it lands, it flies away again.

But this butterfly stayed on my fingers for forty-five minutes. It simply would not leave. I moved my fingers. I moved my hand. It just kept moving from one finger to another. I will never forget that experience for as long as I live. The circumstances, the place, my state of mind

at the time, and everything that had happened beforehand all came together in that moment. That is why it became such a powerful and personal experience for me.

4.4 But when I tell that story to someone else, I know it will never mean to them what it means to me. And I believe something similar happened with Elizabeth. She could describe what happened. She could share that moment with others. But what she experienced within herself can only be understood by someone who has gone through something deeply personal as well.

4.5 Before we move on to the next subject, however, I want to say one more important thing. Our experiences can sometimes be misleading. That is why we should always examine them carefully before making decisions based on them. We need to ask ourselves: Where is this experience coming from? Is it leading us closer to God? Does it agree with what God tells us through the Scriptures? Or is someone trying to deceive us?

The Bible speaks about the father of lies, the one who wants to lead people away from God. And we must be honest—things like that have tried to happen in our own lives as well. Sadly, they have happened to me many times. But when we have hearts devoted to God, when we use reason and logic, and when we study the Scriptures, we can recognize those traps. And through the wisdom we receive from God's Word, we can resist them more quickly and more effectively.

That is what I wanted to say before we leave this subject.

FORTUNATE

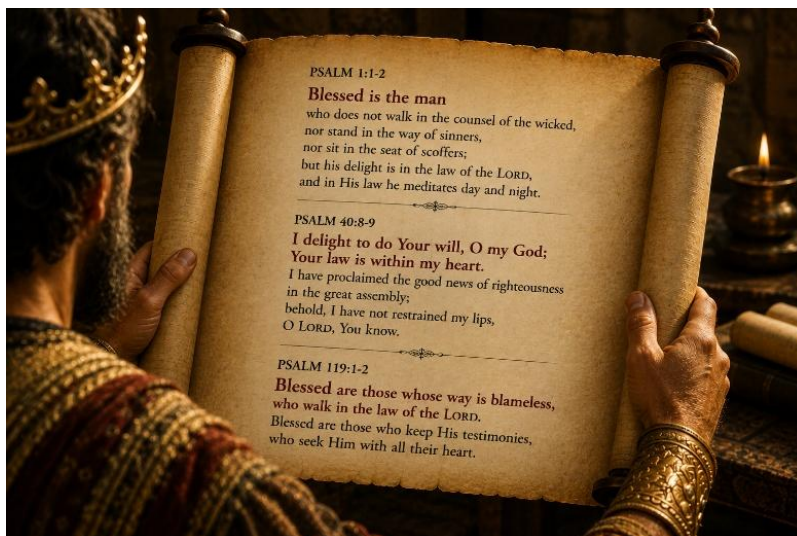
5 (Luke 1:45)

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.

Elizabeth says to Mary, “Blessed is she who believed that what the Lord had spoken to her would be fulfilled.” The words “blessed” and “blessing” will appear often as we make our way through these sermons.

To begin with, in the Bible this word often means that someone is truly fortunate. That someone is genuinely happy. So I could translate Elizabeth's statement like this: “Happy is the one who believed.”

Elizabeth is speaking directly to Mary here. But the principle she expresses is much broader. Blessed are those who believe God's promises. Blessed are those who want to bring their lives into harmony with what God has promised.



5.1 Where did Elizabeth get this idea? From the Scriptures. From the Psalms, for example. King David and the other psalmists speak many times about those who are blessed. Blessed are those who love God's law. Blessed are those who walk in His ways. Blessed are those who turn away from evil. Blessed are those who love righteousness.

Elizabeth understands this idea. In other words, she is saying, "Happy are those who listen to God. Happy are those who believe His promises. Happy are those who accept that what God says is true."

And I believe that is a beautiful idea. It is a profound and far-reaching truth. And we will return to it many times.

5.2 Now let us come back to Elizabeth. She is speaking to Mary because the two of them are having a conversation. But this principle applies to everyone. Elizabeth herself received God's blessing. So did her husband, Zechariah. They are blessed because they believe God's promises.

In other words, happy are those who believe God's promises.

5.3 Let us slow down for a moment. In my view, this is the most important question every person must answer: Do I believe God's promises, or do I not? Those who reject them as false will, sadly, end in destruction. But those who believe them are moving toward eternal life. That is why they are called blessed.

They will become the new Adam. They will reach the full potential of what it means to be human. Why? Because they will no longer be attacked by their own sinful nature. They will be free from it. They will be morally perfect. And only then will the full potential of human life be realized. Only then will we truly become human beings shaped in the image of God—reflecting His character and who He is.

Personally, I can hardly wait. I can hardly wait to become that human being.

5.4 I want to stay with one more thought behind Elizabeth's words: "Blessed is she who believed."

Mary's journey would not be easy. We will talk much more about this when we reach *Luke* 2:34–35. But for now, let me summarize it briefly. Simeon tells Mary, the mother of Jesus, that Jesus is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel. He says that Jesus will be a sign that people will oppose. And he tells Mary that a sword will pierce her own soul.

These verses clearly show that even though Mary is the mother of the promised Messiah, she is not exempt from the question of who Jesus really is. Her journey will be difficult. During Christ's ministry, she will experience confusion. She will have to wrestle with His words, His actions, and the way people respond to Him. And she herself will have to make decisions of eternal importance.

In other words, although she accepted at the beginning that she was the Lord's servant, her faith would continue to be tested throughout her life. She would have to keep believing God's promises as they unfolded through the life and ministry of her Son.

That is why Elizabeth's words are more than a source of comfort. They are also a warning. Whoever believes God's promises, whoever believes who Jesus is and why He came into the world, is blessed. That person is truly fortunate. She is blessed. They are blessed.

A GOOD SOUL

6 (Luke 1:46)

And Mary said, "My soul exalts the Lord."

Before we finish, I want to talk about one more subject. I have called it, "A Good Soul."

When I was growing up, my mother would sometimes say, "What a good soul." She would say that about someone she liked or found especially kind.

But who actually has a good soul? That is the question I want to think about now.

Mary is responding here to Elizabeth's words. And we see both her humility and her deep gratitude toward God. She understands how much God has given her. God freely gives His blessings to every human being. He is a good God. He calls every person. He never stops calling.

6.1 But sadly, most people reject that gift. They are simply not interested in it. They want to go their own way.

Now Mary speaks about the soul. What does that word actually mean here?

I believe she is speaking about the inner person—about who someone truly is. Many people openly acknowledge that God exists. Some come to the intellectual conclusion that someone must have created everything they see. Others believe because that is how they were raised.

But deep within themselves, at the very core of their being, they do not really trust God. They do not believe His promises. They do not seek Him with all their hearts.

How do we know that?

If we live with someone long enough and observe the fruit of their life, we begin to see whether they truly love God or not. That is why Jesus said we would recognize people by their fruit.

As my sister likes to say, “Many people believe in God, but very few believe God.”

That is a powerful statement. It is one thing to acknowledge that God exists. It is something entirely different to trust Him. To believe His promises. To listen to Him. To seek Him with all your heart.

6.2 The soul Mary speaks about here reveals who we really are on the inside. Some of us truly believe God and His promises in the deepest part of our being. We seek Him with all our hearts. And that changes us throughout our lives.

Personally, I have seen the lives of people who are nothing like they used to be. The change is astonishing.

We begin to take into ourselves everything that comes from God. Truth. Gentleness. Grace. Kindness. A love for justice. Humility. Love for our neighbor.

And when I say “neighbor,” I am not talking about family relationships. I am talking about another child of God.

Most importantly, we begin to listen more and more to God the Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ. The culture we live in gradually loses its influence over us. Our neighbors. Our friends. Our brothers and sisters. Our parents. Politicians. The news.

The books of philosophers, gurus, and motivational speakers.

All of these voices begin to lose their hold on us. We no longer listen to what most people in this world are listening to. Their opinions become less and less important to us with each passing day. We begin to see how foolish it is to trust the wisdom of this world, because in the end its fruit is always bad. It has no answers to life's greatest questions, and it never has. Who are we? Why do we exist? What is good? How should we live?

Unlike the rest of the world, we know, just as Mary did, that God has called us to inherit His Kingdom.

And because of that, our souls—our very being—rejoice.

Amen.