

It has been called, "The button that could have changed the internet."

About 25 years ago, Tim Berners-Lee, a computer programmer who has been credited with inventing the world wide web and the HTML computer language for writing those pages gave a talk in which he suggested an addition that every browser should be given — an "Oh Yeah?" button. He said this:



Imagine an "Oh, yeah?" button on your browser. There you are looking at a fantastic deal that can be yours just for the entry of a credit card number and the click of a button. Oh, yeah?, you think. You press the "Oh, yeah?" button. You are asking your browser why you should believe it. It, in turn, can challenge the server to provide some credentials: perhaps, a signature for the document or a list of documents that expresses what that key is good for. Those documents will be signed. Your browser rummages through with the server, looking for a way to convince you that the page is trustworthy for a purchase. Maybe it will come up with an endorsement from a magazine, which in turn has been endorsed by a friend. Maybe it will come up with an endorsement by the seller's bank, which has in turn an endorsement from your bank. Maybe it won't find any reason for you to actually believe what you are reading at all.

Alas, there were too many problems with his proposed button and the idea was scrapped. But the idea appeals to the skeptic and doubter in all of us — "why should I believe that?" Skepticism is often a good spiritual virtue when surfing the internet (especially social media); unfortunately, too often we accept what we should doubt and doubt what we should accept.

Examples of doubt abound in Scripture. Think about Abraham and God's promise of a son (a doubt that led to sexual sin with Hagar). And Gideon who doubted God's promise to deliver Israel from the Midianites. And Saul who offered a sacrifice though he was not a priest because he didn't believe Samuel would return. And Jonah who questioned God's goodness in saving the Ninevites. And Nebuchadnezzar who doubted God's ability to follow through on the threat to humble him if he continued to live pridefully. And Peter who doubted the wisdom of Christ's crucifixion and Thomas who questioned Christ's resurrection. And Zacharias who doubted the promise that he and Elizabeth would have a son (who would be the Messiah's forerunner).

In contrast to Zacharias was Mary, who was also given an astounding promise, and this young woman (likely an early teenager) believed the promise explicitly and profoundly. We noted last week that while Zacharias asked for a confirming sign of Gabriel's promise to him (and was given the sign of silence), Mary did not ask for a sign, but did receive a sign of God's ability to do what was promised — the sign of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

In the continuation of this account (1:39-45), Mary receives a further sign to confirm God's promise to her. From this story of confirmation we learn a lesson for ourselves —

BELIEVE ALL GOD'S PROMISES ALL OF THE TIME. HE IS FAITHFUL.

Mary's trip to Judea is a model of what it means to live by faith — what it means to believe God and His promises. Mary's trip provides us with **two reasons** to believe God and be confident in His faithfulness —

- 1. Believe God Because He has SPOKEN (vv. 39-40)**
- 2. Believe God Because He has CONFIRMED What He has Spoken (vv. 41-45)**

- ✓ Confirmation by the Spirit's ACTION (v. 41)
- ✓ Confirmation by the Spirit's PROPHECY (vv. 42-45)
- Luke is a historian, recounting the story of Jesus, the Son of Man:
 - ✓ In these **opening two chapters** Luke tells us the foundation of the story (prologue) and the promises of Christ in the story — and we will be in those promises for the next several weeks.
 - ✓ **In this passage**, Luke begins a series of songs which reflect confidence in God and gratitude toward God. Like many of the other songs of Scripture, they are designed to help us remain steadfast and faithful to the Lord.
 - ✓ In Mary's trip we find **two reasons** to believe God —

BELIEVE ALL GOD'S PROMISES ALL OF THE TIME. HE IS FAITHFUL.

1. Believe God Because He has **SPOKEN** (vv. 39-40)

- In this story, Luke begins to directly connect the stories of Zacharias and Mary (John & Jesus). And in tying the stories together, he also reminds us that the story of the Son of Man is a story of faith and joy.
- We've suggested that in this brief account Mary is exhibiting faith — where do we see that?
 - ✓ Luke continues the story from v. 38 — Gabriel's task was finished and he **departed from her** (v. 38).
 - ✓ And immediately Mary got up and went to Judah. He says **Now at this time**... That's a phrase only Luke uses, and he uses it to express contemporaneous action — at the same time that Gabriel left, Mary left. Undoubtedly, she packed and made some arrangements for travel, but she was quick.
 - ✓ Then Luke adds, **Mary arose and went in a hurry** — this is the idea of immediacy. She didn't doddle. What is striking is what Luke doesn't say —
 - He says nothing about what she took (she was gone 3 months and had to pack multiple items).
 - Nor does he say anything about any traveling companions — traveling down to Judea and the region of Jerusalem was not generally considered safe, and certainly not for a woman alone.
 - He likely doesn't say anything about these things because they were unimportant; what was important was that she went with haste...
 - ✓ Remember the length of her journey — she went from her home in **Nazareth** (northern Israel in Galilee) and went to the **hill country of Judea**. We don't know the exact village, but it was probably within 3-5 miles of Jerusalem because of Zacharias' responsibilities in Jerusalem as a priest (most priests lived in that 3-5 mile radius of Jerusalem). It was a trip of around 75+ miles and would have taken 3-4 days to get there by walking, which is almost certainly how she traveled.
- Saying nothing about the journey, Luke simply says that she entered the **house** and **greeted Elizabeth**.
 - ✓ Some have suggested that this was a lengthy oriental greeting in which Mary would have recounted her story of the appearance of the angel Gabriel; that provides a reason why Elizabeth would respond the way she did in vv. 42ff — because Mary had told Elizabeth she was pregnant.
 - ✓ However we have an example of a greeting in Luke already (v. 28) and it seems that it was very brief — and the reason why Elizabeth could know that Mary was pregnant was because of revelation from the Spirit (which is the emphasis of v. 41b).
- The question is, **why did Mary go to Judea?**
 - ✓ Perhaps because of the condemning attitudes of the residents of Nazareth. But the people of Nazareth would not have been critical yet since her pregnancy would not yet have been evident (she had just conceived) and no one likely would have known of Gabriel's visit. Further, if she was trying to hide her pregnancy from the residents of her town, why did she return when she was three months pregnant and on the verge of beginning to show her pregnancy?

- ✓ Maybe because of Joseph's consideration of divorce (Mt. 1). But Joseph's consideration of divorce didn't seem to be communicated to Mary, and Gabriel's revelation to him quickly corrected that and he was gracious and faithful to her (vv. 21-25).
- ✓ This verse clearly connects her departure to her response of obedience and submission in v. 38. The last thing Gabriel said to her was that Elizabeth was pregnant and that last thing Mary said was she obediently submitted. She went hurriedly in faith that what he said to her was true.
- ✓ Even more, God had spoken (through Gabriel) and she went in faith that what He said was true.
- ✓ "Are we going to submit unconditionally to the voice of God who has spoken? Or are we going to insist on screening the message of the Bible, accepting only what appears palatable and remaining free to reject what does not conform to our preconceived criteria?" [Saucy]
- ✓ This isn't a story about a summer vacation or a family retreat; it's a story about the faith of the young woman, Mary, who heard the Word of God and she accepted it and acted on it in faith.
- ✓ We don't believe God and His care of us because we have all the details and all the answers and outcomes; we believe Him because He has spoken, and He has promised to care for us. That He makes a promise is enough for us — "He Himself has said, 'I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,' so that we confidently say, 'THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?'" (Heb. 13:5-6).

2. Believe God Because He has CONFIRMED What He has Spoken (vv. 41-45)

• Confirmation by the Spirit's ACTION (v. 41)

- ✓ There is another indication that Mary did not give an extended greeting: **When Elizabeth heard** is more detailed than that — "it came about when..." (Legacy = "and it happened that when..."). The sense is that as soon as the unborn baby John heard the voice he leapt *in utero*.
- ✓ This is a fulfillment of Gabriel's prophecy in 1:15 — the Holy Spirit is filling John.
- ✓ What does filling of the Spirit mean? It is to be in submission to or controlled by (Eph. 5:18).
- ✓ And that answers the question about how John was able to respond before he had consciousness.
 - When you and I hear voices we run through the list of names/voices we know — "who is that? Oh it's my wife, child, friend ____." And then we respond.
 - John was three months away from birth and had no capacity to evaluate the voice. He is not consciously responding to Mary's voice; his action can only be attributed to the Spirit working in him. And it is therefore clearly a miracle of God to reveal what has happened. The miracle is a sign from God for both Elizabeth and Mary about each other's pregnancies.
 - Gabriel promised Zacharias that John would be the forerunner (announcer) of the Messiah (17); even while in the womb, it seems like his ministry is beginning (by Spirit's power).
- ✓ Not only was John filled with the Spirit, but so was **Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit**.
 - And in v. 67, Luke tells us that Zacharias was also filled by the Spirit.

- All these statements about the Spirit's activities remind us that this is divine story; it's not an accident; it's not coincidence; God is acting according to His purposes. This is the story of God.
- Being filled by the Spirit, Elizabeth interprets John's movement and prophesies according to the Word and authority of God. What follows is not her idea, but the authoritative Word of God.
- ✓ The Spirit has acted (John's movement) and Mary and Elizabeth know and are confident that God's declarations they received through Gabriel are true. Their belief is bolstered and strengthened.

- Confirmation by the Spirit's **PROPHECY** (vv. 42-45)

- ✓ Being filled by the Spirit of God — Elizabeth prophesies — which means declaring the future and also declaring the truth of God ("thus says the Lord"), which is the kind of prophecy given here.
- ✓ There is debate about whether vv. 42-45 are prose or poetry (and a song). Given that this is immediately followed by Mary's song and then Zacharias' song, my inclination is to take it as a hymn. This is the beginning of Luke's "hymnal" — songs to exalt God's character (and equip us to persevere and trust the Lord). Like all good hymns, it is richly theological...
- ✓ *Elizabeth prophesies about the blessing of Mary* (v. 42).
 - Besides the filling of the Holy Spirit, there is another hint about that this is prophetic speech: **cried out** was sometimes used for the declaration of God's truth (Jn. 1:15; 7:28, 37).
 - **Blessed are you among women** — that is, "you are experiencing the favor of God who has been kind to you in what He has done for you." That blessing is greater than what any other woman has known (which Mary also affirms, v. 48 as would another woman, 11:27).
 - ... In Israel it was a particular blessing to have children — **the fruit of your womb** (Ps. 127:3).
 - ... Mary is the most blessed woman because she bore the greatest child in the history of world. Elizabeth also bore a great child, but Mary's child would be greater.
 - ... She is not blessed because what she is or what she has done, but because of what the Lord has done through her. That is also our blessing and privilege; do you take time to contemplate and thank the Lord for His many blessings to you? Do you recite His salvation and what it has done for you? His church/people and what it has done?
 - While it is not the point of the verse, this statement also affirms the reality of Jesus' humanity — He was the physical **fruit** (product) of the physical **womb**. He is born of flesh and blood and is genuine/true Man and the genuine Son of Man.
- ✓ *Elizabeth prophesies about the humility of Elizabeth* (v. 43).
 - As Elizabeth contemplates her own pregnancy and then Mary's, she is stunned and humbled that Mary would come to visit her — not just Mary, but **the mother of my Lord**.
 - The question "how did that happen?" is often asked in disappointment, lament, and even anger. Not Elizabeth. She asks her Q in genuine humility. And that is remarkable. Think about it —
 - ... Elizabeth was mature and elderly while Mary was a young teen

- ... Elizabeth's husband was a priest (and she also was from the priestly line), while Mary was poor and unmarried, and her fiancé was a carpenter.
- ... Elizabeth was from the prominent city of Jerusalem, while Mary was from the small and disparaged town of Nazareth.
- ... Ordinarily, one would have expected Mary to be honored by a visit from Elizabeth, not Elizabeth from Mary. The difference was not in who they were individually, but in the role the Lord had given them in the divine plan of redemption.
- ... While she had a great position as mother of John, Elizabeth understood Mary's role was greater and she humbly rejoiced in it (even as John would later, [Jn. 3:30](#)).
- When she alludes to the unborn Jesus as **my Lord** she is affirming Him as Messiah ([Ps. 110:1](#)). She is affirming both His greatness and her submission to Him and willingness to follow Him.
 - ... Lordship is a theme in the book ([1:76](#); [2:11](#); [24:34](#)) and NT (767x).
 - ... Luke also refers to Christ as Lord 92x in Acts. He (alone) is Master and will have mastery over those who are His people.
 - ... "Elizabeth marvels that Messiah visits her and that her relative bears this significant child. She does not take the visit of her Lord as an everyday, insignificant matter." [Bock]
 - ... Jesus came to earth in a humble manner, but that doesn't change the reality of His lordship. He has come as Master, and He makes a good and gracious Master. You *will* call Him Master ([Phil. 2:9-11](#)). I urge you to call Him Master today ([Rom. 10:13](#)) so He can graciously guide.
- Also don't read something into this statement that isn't there: the term **mother** only points to His humanity, and not the union of His two natures — Mary is the mother of Jesus; she is not the mother of God.
- The Roman Catholic church asserts that Mary is the mother of God, the church, and Redeemer:

Since the Virgin Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Spirit has been treated, it is fitting now to consider her place in the mystery of the Church. "The Virgin Mary...is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer....She is 'clearly the mother of the members of Christ'...since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head." "Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church."...

By her complete adherence to the Father's will, to his Son's redemptive work, and to every prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary is the Church's model of faith and charity. Thus she is a 'preeminent and...wholly unique member of the Church'...

Her role in relation to the Church and to all humanity goes still further. "In a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the Savior's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace."

"This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvationTherefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." [*Catechism*, ¶963, 67-69.]

- What this passage actually teaches is the genuine humanity of Christ without making Mary deity:

“God, being eternal (Gen. 21:33; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28; Hab. 1:12; Rom. 16:26), was never conceived or born, but has always existed. Mary was the mother of the human Jesus, not His eternal divine nature.... Mary is not the mother of God, or the queen of heaven. She plays no role in the redemption of sinners, and does not intercede for them or hear their prayers.” [MacArthur]

- ✓ *Elizabeth prophesies about the joy of the Messiah* (v. 44).
 - As soon as **the sound of [Mary's] greeting reached [Elizabeth's] ears...** reaffirms v. 41a and interprets it — the Holy Spirit (through John) is delighted with the incarnation of Christ.
 - (While every woman experiences movement of the baby in pregnancy, this was different. We don't know what was different about the movement, but Elizabeth clearly noted a change.)
 - The movement in the womb was joyful (that also had to be the Holy Spirit interpreting for her).
 - This is the same **joy** that Gabriel promised Zacharias in v. 14. This joy is over the initiation of the provision of the salvation plan. Salvation has come! (Cf. 2:10; 24:52)
- ✓ *Elizabeth prophesies about the blessing of belief* (v. 45).
 - There is one last blessing in this song — the blessing for Mary; this time for her **belief** (key).
 - When you read this verse, you can't help but think of the context — Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias (who didn't believe, v. 20) is speaking to Mary (who did believe).
 - What she believed is that **there would be a fulfillment** — that God would complete the promise. Despite her youthfulness, she believed every bit of it — and she accepted it for what it was — that it **had been spoken...by the Lord** (vv. 28-37). Gabriel audibly spoke the words; but they weren't his words; they were the Lord's words. And she gladly believed and obeyed.
 - This is similar to what Peter says — the words of Scripture may be written down with pen and ink, but they come from the authoritative mouth of God (2 Pt. 1:20-21).
 - Because they come from the Lord, we accept, obey and follow them. All of them. (1 Th. 2:13).

CONCLUSION: Many years ago someone told me, “coming to faith has always been hard in our family. Belief is always a struggle.” What is your struggle to believe God? He doesn't care about your problem? He is incapable of overcoming your situation? He won't be satisfying to you (something/one else is better)? Listen to His Word. He has spoken. What He has said, He will do. **He has promised to care.** He will.

Mary's trip to Judea and Elizabeth's song and the Holy Spirit's work are a spiritual confirmation for us — the Son of Man is coming. He is indeed remarkably incarnated. We can believe the message, and be strengthened. God has promised and He will do what He says.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25