

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Eighth Week -- Sunday

MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH

"Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!' " (Luke 1:39-42)

The intimation which the angel had given Mary respecting Elizabeth greatly impressed her mind and created a strong desire to visit and confer with that aged relative under the very peculiar circumstances in which she was placed.

They were separated by the extent of more than half the kingdom, and we know not precisely how the journey was made except that we are quite sure that it was not in company with her affianced husband. This would have been adverse to the usages of the time and people. But the journey might, nevertheless, be easily accomplished. Our impression is that she went in a party of friends and neighbors to one of the festivals at Jerusalem, of which party Joseph, as well as her own immediate relatives, may have been. At Jerusalem she would meet Zacharias, who as a priest would certainly attend the festival, even if not on actual duty; and having made known her wish of visiting Elizabeth, she would accompany him when he returned to his home.

When she arrived, she was hailed by Elizabeth with a most unexpected greeting: "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*" This ample and cheering recognition on the part of one whose counsel she had come to seek, and who could not yet have known what had happened to her, stirred the depths of Mary's soul and caused her to give expression to her feelings in a fine hymn of thankfulness and triumph. It is full of phrases and images drawn from the Old Testament, showing how well she had stored that holy book in her mind.

Mary declares her joy, that from her low estate she had been exalted to this high honor. "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed*" (vv. 46-48). And why? Not for what she had done but for what had been done to her; not for her own perfection and excellence but because the Lord's favor had distinguished her in giving her

the happiness for which so many women in Israel sighed. She was a pious and virtuous woman endowed with that lowliness of mind which God delights to honor. But she did not think, nor did the angel or Elizabeth think, that on this account she had been chosen to honor. Mary felt she was a sinner before God and knew that she needed a Savior.

This is the burden of all the utterances heard in connection with this great matter. The angel hails her as one "highly favored," and it was because the Lord "regarded her low estate." It was because "He who is mighty has done to me great things; and holy is his name." It was all the Lord's doing, marvelous in her eyes, and she gives Him all the glory of it. If she had set herself down to find out what good thing there was in her for which she had been thus honored, she would have shown herself but little worthy of the distinction. But she had no such thought. It was all that He had done for her and to her that engaged her thoughts.

From her part in this great blessing, Mary's mind reaches forth to its infinite and enduring regard for the world. She sees that through this event, with which her name is forever connected, the Lord's mercy will come "upon all them that fear Him from generation to generation." Whether she bore in mind that these promises were of larger scope than was usually given to them in her time, and that in Abraham not only his natural and his spiritual descendants--"all the families of the earth"--were to be blessed, has been somewhat questioned. Some contend that she took the narrow Jewish view of the Messiah's function, while others allege that her view, spiritually enlightened, was enabled to see the utmost consequences of the Messiah's advent.

It is hard to say. Most of her words will fall in with either interpretation, and some of them lean strongly to the peculiar Jewish view of the Messiah's functions. There is no reason why Mary should be expected to have clearer views than the apostles, who did not till after the resurrection entertain any clear notions of their Lord's spiritual kingdom. It is reasonable to suppose that her knowledge, like theirs, was progressively acquired. It is true she was taught by an angel; but the disciples, who were taught by Christ himself, continued to retain substantially the common Jewish notions of the kingdom He was to establish over the earth, restoring the house of David and making the Israelites the ruling people of the world.

However interpreted in this respect, the language used by Mary is that of a humble, thankful, and pious heart, praising God in very beautiful poetry; for the piece is poetry, and as usually defined, almost the only poetry that the New Testament contains.