



CONTENTS

Introduction	9
Call to Worship	13
Elizabeth's Song: Beatitude	17
Mary's Song: Magnificat	35
Zechariah's Song: Benedictus	67
The Angels' Song: Gloria!	101
Simeon's Song: Nunc Dimittis	123
Hymn of Response	145
Heartfelt Thanks	149



DECEMBER 1
Call to Worship

NEVER IMPOSSIBLE

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow
you; therefore the child to be born will be
called holy—the Son of God. . . .
For nothing will be impossible with God.

{ LUKE 1:35, 37 }



THE ANCIENT OF DAYS BECAME a newborn. The One who created the first woman was born of a woman.

Though heaven and earth cannot contain Him, He chose to be confined to a human body. He chose to be held in the arms of a teenage girl, even though His own arms, His “everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27), hold the entire universe in place. He whose voice is “powerful” and “full of majesty” (Ps. 29:4) was reduced to communicating with the coo and cry of a tiny baby. He who “sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD [who] sits enthroned as king forever” (Ps. 29:10) exchanged His lofty throne for an animal’s feeding trough.

Impossible.

Yet in this case, because the story of Jesus' birth is so known and familiar to us, we do something we don't do often enough. *We believe the impossible.* We sing with joyful acceptance about things that make no earthly sense unless God actually did what cannot possibly be done. We marvel at it, and we worship Him for it, despite our inability to understand it. Because it's baby Jesus, because it's the Christmas story . . . it doesn't sound so impossible anymore.

This year, however, as you prepare for Christmas, don't start with what you already know of the story. Imagine yourself instead in the heart of a young girl to whom the events of Luke 1 occurred on just another ordinary day, in a place where impossible things never happened. She didn't wake up that morning expecting an angel to visit. She had no way of knowing ahead of time what God had chosen her to do, much less how He intended to do it. She was likely thinking of little else besides her plans for getting married and living happily into the future with her future husband. She held in her mind, as perhaps you hold in yours, a simple little picture of what her life was to be like—a picture framed by nothing but *possible* outcomes.

Yet before her name became written in Scripture, before her likeness was carved and colored into countless nativity scenes—before Christmas became somehow easy for us to believe—Mary believed. She believed the impossible.

“For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Surely, in this December season, you're faced with God-assigned tasks where you're asking, "How can I do this? I don't have the ability. I don't have the time. I don't have the resources. *This is impossible!*" But your task, like Mary's task, is meant to be made possible only by the power of the Holy Spirit. You and I must be willing to surrender ourselves by faith and let God take over, knowing He alone can do the impossible through us.

{ *My Prayer* }

Lord, apart from You I will accomplish nothing of eternal significance today or throughout this Christmas season. So I look to You to overshadow me, to fill me with Your Spirit and enable me to accomplish all You have purposed for me to do. Help me to trust not in my own strength, skills, or success, but only in You—for Your honor and glory alone.

The First Songs of Christmas

{ *Keep Reading* }

DEUTERONOMY 33:26-29

“Who is like you,
a people saved by the LORD!” (v. 29)

PSALM 29:1-11

“May the LORD give strength to his people.” (v. 11)

JOHN 15:1-8

“For apart from me you can do nothing.” (v. 5)

{ *My Response* }

Even if the tasks awaiting you in the coming days are things you’ve done many times before, how might they grow in significance as you consciously depend on God to perform them?



ELIZABETH'S SONG

Beatitude

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.”

{ LUKE 1:39-45 }



DECEMBER 2
Elizabeth's Song

WHERE THE SONG COMES FROM

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!"

{ LUKE 1:41-42 }



LONG BEFORE CHRISTMAS ACTUALLY ARRIVES, it is already on everyone's tongue. You hear its music in the shops and stores. You see its lights and colors in people's windows. And that familiar catchphrase, "Merry Christmas," while not as universal as it once was, still speaks its customary message of goodwill.

But when Elizabeth opened her door to Mary, who had just arrived from Nazareth, customary greetings went out the window. Instead she cried out, "Blessed are you!" The Greek word translated "blessed" in this version is the word from which we get our English word *eulogy*, referring to the gracious,

complimentary things we typically say of people at their death. It means “to speak well of, to express good wishes.”

“Blessed are you!” Elizabeth exclaimed. This is why her song, which begins in Luke 1:42 and covers four total verses, is traditionally known as the Beatitude of Elizabeth, conveying words of “supreme blessedness or happiness.” (The term *beatitudo* is also applied to the individual verses of Matthew 5:3–12 because they begin with the same Latin word for “happy” that Elizabeth’s song employs.)

But notice: happiness is not what motivated Elizabeth to burst into blessing at the sight of Mary’s appearing, though Elizabeth did have good reason to be happy. Only recently she had been a childless woman, past childbearing age, but God had answered her lifelong prayer. In the months leading up to this visit from Mary, He had miraculously enabled her to conceive.

And yet the words of blessing she spoke came not from being filled with happiness, but from being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” She was not only a woman who was “righteous before God,” who walked “blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (Luke 1:6); she was also willing to be controlled and guided by God’s Spirit. And *that’s* where her blessing came from—because she actually had no way of knowing Mary’s news at that moment, except by a revelation of the Spirit. He provided her both the insight and the incentive to bless Mary in a way that celebrated what her young relative was experiencing.

Elizabeth's Song

God has placed His Spirit inside His children to lead us, to counsel us, and, yes, even to show us what to say. His presence should affect the way we talk. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our mouths should be filled with words like those of Elizabeth, words that are gracious and life-giving (“Blessed are you among women”), words that express our praise and worship (“and blessed is the fruit of your womb”).

Too often we speak before we’re consciously aware of the Holy Spirit’s direction and discernment about what to say. May we learn, as Elizabeth did, the importance of letting our tongues be guided by Him. This Christmas, ask Him to employ your words so that they bless those around you, saying not just what comes mechanically to mind, but what God Himself has given you to say—or sing!

{ *My Prayer* }

Father, thank You for the opportunities You give each day to speak blessing into others’ lives. Help me see my words in terms of stewardship—not possessions to use as I want, but gifts to be shared at Your prompting and pleasure. May my speech always give evidence that Your Spirit truly resides within me, so that people feel Your touch when they hear my voice.

The First Songs of Christmas

{ *Keep Reading* }

PSALM 85:8-9

“Let me hear what God the LORD will speak.” (v. 8)

PROVERBS 2:1-6

“From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

(v. 6)

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

“. . . addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” (v. 19)

{ *My Response* }

How would you assess the weight and impact of most of your conversations? Think of deliberate ways you could elevate them this Christmas—in value, in blessing, in God-honoring tone.



DECEMBER 3
Elizabeth's Song

OUTWARD AND UPWARD

And why is this granted to me that the mother of
my Lord should come to me?

{ LUKE 1:43 }



ELIZABETH HAD SO MUCH TO TALK ABOUT. Imagine the stories and testimony an older woman in her situation could tell. It had been an unbelievable six months since the angelic announcement concerning her pregnancy, yet she'd spent most of that time in seclusion, keeping everything to herself. And with her husband unable to communicate, having been struck mute by the angel for his disbelief, the sudden sight of Mary at the door must have felt like a huge relief. Finally, an audience! Someone she could talk to!

But see where Elizabeth focused her attention instead: *not on herself, but on Mary.*

I love the picture here of an older woman ministering to a younger woman. Rather than assuming that her age, status, and experience made her the most important participant in

this relationship, Elizabeth humbled herself. She recognized that God was doing something special in Mary's life, and she placed first priority on making sure she met the needs of her guest above her own.

I can remember my dad saying when I was a girl, "When you're with other people, ask them questions about themselves." That, I have found, is wise advice to follow. Not only does it acknowledge that people are usually more interested in talking about their own lives than ours, but it also provides a practical way to demonstrate love. Love is concerned about the other person first. Love focuses outward.

Elizabeth seemed to understand at once that Mary needed some love in that moment, some reassurance, some encouragement. Mary needed someone else to believe with her what God had told her. She needed what all of us need from our mentors—words that stimulate faith in our hearts, words that affirm us in our obedience and help banish our fears.

When you begin to desire more from your life than merely personal blessings, He will open doors of ministry to others who are going through similar circumstances and situations. That's exactly what happened with Elizabeth. She focused not on herself, but on Mary. And, with the insight of the Holy Spirit, *not on herself, but on Christ*.

"Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth was proclaiming that the baby in Mary's womb was not just anyone; He was (and is) Christ

the Lord. And not only was He *the* Lord; He was *her* Lord, the object of her personal worship and devotion.

Elizabeth's song (like Mary's song, which we'll soon consider) was supremely focused on God and His character. These two women, as remarkable as their lives were turning out to be, knew they were not the point of the events taking place. Jesus was the center of the story. And so should He be in our story, and in all our interactions with others.

Not on herself, but on Mary.

Not on herself, but on Christ.

May our lives reflect a similar focus.

{ *My Prayer* }

Thank You, Father, for making Your Son the ultimate example of humility. When I look to Him, may Your Spirit quench my pride, causing me to pour myself out in care for others—and in worship of You. Keep me ever sensitive to the needs around me, and multiply what You have already invested in my life so that You will be praised.

The First Songs of Christmas

{ *Keep Reading* }

RUTH 2:8-13

“Why have I found favor in your eyes?” (v. 10)

PSALM 69:30-33

“When the humble see it they will be glad.” (v. 32)

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

“In humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (v. 3)

{ *My Response* }

“Death and life,” the Bible says, “are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). Who might God be directing you toward this Christmas season to provide encouragement and support—to speak life into?