

Big idea: The assurance and truth uttered by Gabriel is tested by Mary and found true – her response is belief expressed in thanksgiving.

FCF:

Application:

PRAYER...

READING...

1. 'Mythbusters'

There is a show that my kids love called, 'Mythbusters'. A team of wacky science kind of people take on 'myths' and test them. The myths can range from ideas perpetuated by movies and tv shows, through to sayings like, 'A bull in a china shop'. They test the myth, and then offer an opinion, a definitive finding, about whether this myth is plausible, or whether it has been 'busted!'.

At the heart of their investigations, it seems to me, is this question: 'How is this possible?' (REPEAT)

They look at various permutations, options, scenarios, testing each one to come to their conclusions.

Mary has asked pretty much the same question – **look at verse 34... READ.**

On a moral level, knowing God's law and the way small towns work, Mary has questions.

On a theological level, a Jewish lass like Mary would have questions – I mean, God taking on some form of humanity?

On a practical level, Mary would have had questions – on the nature of a human bearing the Son of God, on pregnancy with no intimacy, on the whole reality of long-proclaimed promises shaking the dust off.

'How is this possible?'

2. Evidence and truth (vs.36-37)

God's messenger, Gabriel, speaks immediately to her question – **look at verses 35-37... READ.**

Gabriel points to the action of God – he will bring this pregnancy about. In this sense, the pregnancy is not immoral and nor is it impossible.

Gabriel points to the evidence that we know has happened – he encourages Mary to go and have a chat with Elizabeth – remember her?

Gabriel then sums the action and evidence up in a statement of truth: 'For nothing is impossible with God'.

In essence, Gabriel has laid out an answer to Mary's question. But he has done more than that – he has issued an invitation to

examine the facts and come to the only conclusion possible: God can, and will, do what he has promised.

Mary's response is one we love – **look at verse 38... READ.**

It is a grand statement of obedience, and trust and submission to the plans and promises and fulfilment of God. But, we can understand that her mind and heart might be racing... and so...

3. The testing (vs.39-45) **Look at verses 39-40... READ.**

Mary does not muck about, does she? 'In hast', she sets off to see this 'impossibility' that Gabriel invited her to consider.

We understand this inclination, don't we? We know this desire for certainty and evidence and examination. After all, this is why Luke has composed this account of the life and deeds of Jesus: so that Theophilus might be reassured of the certainty of the stuff he has been taught about – and believed in – Jesus. It is no mistake then that, within the account of certainty for Theophilus we have Mary's search for certainty!

And the truth unfolds right in front of her – and for us – as we read the account of her meeting Elizabeth:

(i) the physical evidence – as Mary knocks on the door, and as Elizabeth opens the door, the physical evidence is undeniable and right there: Elizabeth is six months pregnant. The woman who

was barren is not, anymore. There is the evidence, in the flesh, just as Gabriel stated.

(ii) the baby evidence – as Elizabeth hears the greeting of Mary, the baby in her tummy kicks – little John is suddenly very active! We know this immediately as readers. Mary might have spotted this – perhaps she had placed her hands on her cousin’s tummy as she greeted her! But Elizabeth states it openly (look at verse 44). Even the baby inside Elizabeth, who had the job of preparing people for the coming of God’s promised King, recognizes this moment – he is already doing his job! For Mary, this adds to the accumulation of evidence that God alone has brought this about!

(iii) God speaks... - but there is more going on here than active babies and baby bumps. Luke tells us – and this is a statement of his strong investigation (‘Elizabeth, what happened?’) – that Elizabeth ‘was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed’. This is not just the statement of the physical but also the explanation of it by the Author. Elizabeth’s exclamation focusses on two ideas. First, Mary is ‘blessed’ – she has been granted the approval of God (REPEAT). And as we know, this is not because of anything special in her (she is a normal human teenage woman!) but because of God – and we will come to that in a moment. She is blessed because God has chosen her to bear the ‘Lord’ of all the universe (already we are seeing the order that was stated in the birth predictions). This son of hers will be ‘blessed’ too – he will be approved by God. On the basis of this reality that is coming – and I don’t think we know if Mary is pregnant yet – second, Mary is encouraged, exhorted, to ‘believe’. Elizabeth states clearly to

Mary: 'Take God at his word BECAUSE he will do exactly as he promised'.

I think, at this point, Mary understands the truth that Gabriel said would be revealed clearly by the evidence: 'Nothing is impossible with God'. At this point, everything clicks into place, the lightbulbs come on, and Mary grasps the reality – her questions are answered.

'How is this possible?'

It is possible by the action of God alone, by his intervention. And the evidence speaks to that – look at Elizabeth's baby bump, watch Elizabeth's baby jump, listen to God's words: this will happen!

4. A joyful thanksgiving from a believer (vs.46-55)

Mary's song is a remarkable piece of reflection and praise. On one level, the maturity of reflection that produces something like this is amazing – and we must never under-estimate Mary – she is often portrayed in the gospels as a reflective and thoughtful young woman. Moreover, the depth of biblical reflection is astounding, even confronting – after all, this is a young woman who, in one song, reflects on the whole of God's historical action and distils it into a song of praise. And, this is no random, unhinged and ill-thought through stream of conscience – this is a song of praise deeply rooted in the evidence and truth that Mary has just experienced.

The song itself is about God – the descriptions, the actions, the commitment, the praise – they all focus on God, and what he has done. It would be a worthwhile experience, this week, to sit with this song each day and write down an aspect of God, and his character and action, that stands out, and pray on it, and through it.

Mary herself has personally experienced the greatness of God – **look at verses 46-49... READ.**

What she has just experienced has confirmed for her the mercy of God to someone like her – a humble human being. That God would choose to do this, through her, is a statement of his generosity, his mercy, his salvation, and his might.

Mary, in what she has just experienced, has come to know the uniqueness – the ‘holy’ character – of God. There is none like him, and there are many like her.

This turns her praise outward, on a bigger scale – **look at verses 50-53... READ.**

Mary is not unique in one sense – she is one of many to experience the mercy of God. God’s mercy is akin to his grace – his undeserved kindness showered on those who do not deserve it nor have any reasonable expectation of such a gift, from themselves and their nature. God has always acted like this – he is known for his mercy and grace. He is known as the one who takes the downtrodden and lifts them up. He is the one who committed to a world that deserved judgement, that had chosen

death over life, that was mired in sin, that had swapped blessing for brokenness – God committed to that world, and to acting in it to restore it to his design and purpose.

However, whilst this widespread generosity of God is seen everyday – droughts break for everyone – Mary is talking of something much more specific – did you see that there in verse 50?

Mary is singing of the God who is committed to claiming a people for himself, bringing his people back to dwell with him, in his place, under his blessing.

In fact, Mary knows that God's approval of her and all those who relate rightly to him is based not on human good deeds or merit but on – well, **look at verses 54-55... READ.**

God's actions in Mary – in Elizabeth – are rooted way back in what God promised to do through Abraham's mob – remember that from Genesis 12:1-3?

God promised, through Abraham's family, to roll back sin and restore the world. If virgin birth seems impossible, imagine the nature of dealing with human nature – human nature that says, 'I am God and God is not', human nature that is mired in sin!

At the end of this song of praise, we cannot avoid this truth: How good is God! He is to be praised because he has done exactly what he promised – he has worked through Abraham's family to bring about this moment – the moment when his Son will come, and deal with sin, and bring restoration! How good is God? He is to be praised!

5. Nothing is impossible with God...

'How is this possible?'

'Mary, go and visit Elizabeth. God has acted. God will act. Nothing is impossible for God!'

'Elizabeth!'

A baby bump. A baby jump. A proclamation from Elizabeth, via God.

'How good is God! His mercy is in me. His mercy is to those who depend upon him. His mercy is as he promised: he will roll back sin and bring blessing. I have seen it with my own eyes!'

Just as Mary was reassured, so too Theophilus – this happened! Moreover, so too are we: this happened!

But out of that basic, tangible historical reality comes a recognition of the nature and work of God – and he is good, and he is merciful, and he is to be praised!

On one level, Mary proclaims this because of what she has experienced and known – and how she has looked at the world: through the lens of the promise of God to roll back sin, and bring restoration, through Abraham's mob. Is this how we view the world? I mean, it is a lens that directs us to the mercy of God at work in real time and space, for those depending upon him.

On another level, what a song! What emotion! What praise! And all rooted in the basic historical truth of the evidence and truth. Nothing is impossible for God – when was the last time you turned to God, and praised him, for the stuff that he has done in the dirt of this broken world? I mean, we do not experience the unique nature of Mary’s blessing, but we do experience the work of the God who blessed Mary in this way, and he has always done as he promised. When was the last time you sang such a song of praise, rooted in what God has done in history?

How good is God? He is so good, and deserving of our praise and thanksgiving!