

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON #2
“MY SOUL DOTH MAGNIFY THE LORD”

Reading: Matt. 1; Luke 1

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INTRODUCTION: We are told at the beginning of the book of Luke that Zacharias and Elisabeth were exceptional people.

. . . they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:6)

And there were others in Judea of similar righteousness. As we study their lives, we must learn from them the attitudes that will earn for us the greatest gifts of God. The events in the lives of Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary, Joseph, and John the Baptist will show wonderful role models of worthy men and women and worthy priesthood stewardship for Latter-Day Saints. Their example to us should increase our commitment to set great examples for others who will learn about the Savior and his goodness by watching us.

Ask yourself this question: "If I could meet and speak anyone in the New Testament other than Jesus, who would it be?" Why would you like to meet this person? When we meet righteous, spiritual people, we often feel a desire to be like them. Today we will meet two people in the scriptures whose qualities are worthy of emulation."

1. ZACHARIAS MINISTERS IN THE TEMPLE, SEES AN ANGEL, AND PROPHESES GREAT THINGS ABOUT HIS SON AND THE COMING OF CHRIST.

What can you learn of the character of Zacharias from Luke 1:5-22? According to Luke 1:13, Zacharias (and probably Elisabeth) continued to pray even after all hope seemed gone. Can you find a lesson in this. We must make hope a principle of perseverance. When we pray for worthy blessings, and God does not grant them at our first request, or even our fiftieth, we must not despair. The memory of this blessing—this baby--- that came to these two righteous people who are both “well stricken in years” must be a constant encouragement to us to keep asking and to keep hoping.

What kind of a man would be worthy to see an angel in the temple? Do not make the mistake of thinking that these blessings came because of John. They came because of the righteousness of John's parents.

But even Zacharias was a little bit skeptical. "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years" (Luke 1:18). His willingness to question the announcement of an angel in the temple is sufficient evidence of the effect of years of unanswered prayers.

And so he received a sign (Luke 1:20). His inability to speak was a continuing reminder to him and to all who knew him (Luke 1:22) that what was happening to his family was under the direction of the Lord.

2. JOHN THE BAPTIST EXEMPLIFIES THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRIESTHOOD

Reflect on the prophecy of Gabriel about John's future standing before God? "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" (Luke 1:15).

Look in the following verses for the things Gabriel said John would do that would make him great in the sight of God. Try to understand the meaning of these phrases. As you do so, you will understand that Gabriel's statements about John present to us a description of the role of a worthy priesthood bearer. You may wish to mark these phrases in your scriptures.

1. (Luke 1:16-: "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord") What can a priesthood bearer, whether deacon or high priest, do to turn people to their God? You may wish to reflect on an example of how a priesthood bearer has helped you to turn to the Lord. Perhaps a letter of gratitude is in order.

2. (Luke 1:17-: "Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children") How can a priesthood bearer help turn the heart of a father to his children? How does the work of the priesthood help to unite families? What have the ordinances and organizations provided by the priesthood done to strengthen your family?

3. (Luke 1:17: "Turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just") Who are the just? A list would need to include the Lord, the prophet and apostles, and local priesthood leaders. You can find the wisdom of the just in the scriptures and in conference. How can a priesthood bearer help the disobedient turn to this wisdom?

4. (Luke 1:17: "Make ready a people prepared for the Lord") What can a priesthood bearer do to help people prepare to meet the Savior? This verse may contain the divine charter for sealed families. Parents must, about all other duties, be about this one. We must prepare the way of the Lord for our children, and make his paths straight (see Mark 1:1; Luke 3:2, etc.).

Read the account of the naming of John (Luke 1:57-80) The prophetic words of Zacharias about his remarkable son also describe additional responsibilities of a worthy priesthood bearer.

5. (Luke 1:76-77: "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people.") How can a priesthood bearer give this knowledge to other people. What are the activities in which priesthood bearers should be engaged that will enable them to impart this kind of knowledge? What must priesthood bearers do before they can *impart* this knowledge.

6. (Luke 1:79: "To give light to them that sit in darkness.") Verse 79 is prophetic of both John and the Savior. What is the light that priesthood bearers should hold up or give to others (3 Nephi 18:24). How can priesthood bearers provide light for their families? For quorum members? For friends? For non-members?

7. (Luke 1:79: "To guide our feet into the way of peace") In order to be a guide, one must know the way. What is the way to peace? Who is the author of peace? (John 14:27) How can a priesthood bearer promote peace within his family, among his friends, within his community?

Notice what happened to John as he grew older in the deserts of Israel: He "waxed strong in spirit" (Luke 1:80). In order to fulfill the heavy responsibilities taught by

Gabriel and Zacharias, one must "wax strong in spirit." This is language that is used about the Savior (Luke 2:40) and the sons of King Mosiah (Alma 17:2). What kind of activities make it possible? Are those activities a part of your life?

3. MARY EXEMPLIFIES THE QUALITIES OF TRUE WOMANHOOD.

The scriptures contain descriptions of many women who are great examples of righteous womanhood. Reflect on what the Book of Mormon says about the mother of the Savior.

And it came to pass that I looked and beheld the great city of Jerusalem, and also other cities. And I beheld the city of Nazareth; and in the city of Nazareth I beheld a virgin, and she was exceedingly fair and white. And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou? And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins (1 Nephi 11:13-15).

And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God (Alma 7:10)

As was the case with John, the scriptures record statements made by and to Mary that teach us the highest qualities of righteous womanhood. In this sense, Mary becomes a role model for all women. Look in the following verses at the qualities of Mary. Consider this question as you study the verses below: "What qualities would make a woman worthy to be selected as the mother of the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world?" You may wish to mark these phrases in your scriptures as you review them and ponder them.

1. (Luke 1:28--"The Lord is with thee") According to the world, a woman's value comes from things like physical beauty, a career, talent, wealth, material possessions, personality, and education. And while these things may be important, they are not the most important. Mary was "highly favored" and "blessed." because she lived her life in such a

way that the Lord was with her. If this one quality is in place, the significance of the others mentioned above are minimal.

Mary, and her cousin Elizabeth, were favored because they were to be the mothers of righteous children who would serve God faithfully. In the Kingdom, this might be the source of a parent's greatest joy? (see 3 John 3:4) How much joy did Mary and Elizabeth have in their children? How do Mothers feel when their children make righteous choices?

2. (Luke 1:30--"Fear not, for thou hast found favor with God")

What qualities does the Lord ask of all women who want to find favor with him? One of the things that makes it difficult for women (and men) to find favor with God is that they are so concerned with finding favor from other sources. What might those sources be? What are the greatest sources of your feelings of self-worth? We can know we are acceptable before God if the Holy Spirit is active in our lives

3. (Luke 1:34--"I know not a man") Mary has that quality which the Book of Mormon describes as "most dear and precious above all things?" (Moroni 9:9) It is a quality of women in which the Lord delights (Jacob 2:28).

4. (Luke 1:38--"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word") Gabriel explained to Mary what the Lord wanted her to do. This was her reply? What do these words tell us about her character? Are there areas of modern life in which mothers and daughters in Israel will need this kind of submissiveness? (See Alma 7:23)

5. (Luke 1:45--"Blessed is she that believes") After the visit of the angel, Mary traveled to the home of Elisabeth and Zacharias (see Luke 1:39,40). These are the words of Elizabeth, spoken to Mary. What happened when Elizabeth's husband, Zacharias, was told that his wife would have a baby? (Luke 1:18-20) What was the difference in the responses of Zacharias and Mary? Which of them was asked to believe in the greater miracle? You might want to mention that there were precedents for the birth of a child to aged parents, but none for the birth

of a child to a virgin. Mark the phrase in Luke 1:37 that describes the principle in which all women should believe?

6. (Luke 1:46--"My soul doth magnify the Lord") What does it mean to "magnify the Lord?" Who do you think first taught Jesus about his Father in Heaven? Luke 1:49 might be an example of the kinds of things Mary would have taught her son. How can a righteous mother influence her children for good and instill in them a desire to love and serve the Lord? Is there a woman in your life who "magnified the Lord" and helped you to understand and love him. One of the great contributions of righteous women is to enlarge the presence of the Lord in the lives of those around them, especially their children.

7. (Luke 1:47--"My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior") The world teaches that women cannot find happiness if they have things like wrinkles, or a used car, or several children. What was the source of Mary's joy?

8. (Luke 1:48 - "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.") These words suggest the humility of Mary, a humility she kept throughout her life.

9. (Luke 1:49-53 - "His mercy is on them that fear him...") Notice in these verses Mary's recognition and expression of gratitude to the Lord for all his goodness and mercy. This idea is suggested in the following words: "great things," "mercy," "shewed strength," "good things," "holpen his servant," "remembrance of his mercy." It is pleasing to the Lord when his children recognize his many gifts and are willing to praise and express gratitude to him for his bounty.

10. (Luke 2:19, 51--"His mother kept all these sayings in her heart") What does the Lord expect us to do with the sacred experiences he gives to us? What words might you use in place of the word "kept" to help us better understand what Mary was doing? (treasured, cherished, prized, revered) What value comes from cherishing and pondering sacred spiritual experiences? Why might it

also be important to record such experiences?

4. ELISABETH'S RIGHTEOUSNESS ENABLED HER TO BE OF GREAT SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Elisabeth was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her husband was also a descendant of Aaron. Thus the son born to them was heir to all the blessings of the Aaronic Priesthood as a literal descendant of Aaron. What blessings would that include according to D&C 68:15-21?

How many women can you name from the scriptures who gave had a child whose birth was announced in advance by a heavenly messenger? What do we learn about Elisabeth from Luke 1:6? She was righteous and she (along with her husband) walked blamelessly in all the ordinances of God. Their conduct was above criticism. How might Elisabeth have responded to her barrenness? Would bitterness or resentment have lessened her usefulness to the Lord?

When Gabriel announced the birth of John to Zacharias, he was skeptical. How do you think Elisabeth responded when he told her. When Elisabeth conceived, she remained in seclusion for five months. What do her words in Luke 1:24,25 suggest about her actions during that time, and her feelings concerning the coming birth of a son of promise.

5. JOSEPH'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SUBMISSIVENESS QUALIFIED HIM TO BE THE STEPFATHER OF THE SAVIOR.

Joseph was espoused or betrothed to Mary. As you reflect on what you now know about Mary, what kind of man would her future husband be? There were no sexual relationships during a Jewish betrothal, but it was a much more binding relationship than a modern engagement.

When Joseph learned that Mary was expecting a child, and he knew it was not his child, he faced a great dilemma. What punishment did the law of Moses require for one in Mary's condition? (See Deuteronomy 22:23,24) The Jews no longer had the right to practice capital punishment. The Roman occupation had taken that power from the Jews.

But Joseph did have the opportunity to force Mary to endure a public shame by announcing her condition as the cause of his rejection of her. What can you learn about Joseph from Matthew 1:19? What do you suppose Matthew meant when he called Joseph a “just man?” If ever a man had the right to come to an erroneous conclusion, it was Joseph. After all, there was only one possible explanation for the condition in which he found his espoused. But he seems to have known Mary well enough and loved enough not to act precipitously. Please note (and mark?) what Joseph did before he acted in this matter. “He thought on these things.” Have you ever been injured or injured others because you acted too quickly?

And do not miss the fact that Joseph was sufficiently righteous for an angel appear to him twice (Matt. 1:20; 2:13) and give him directions about his family. Joseph submitted willingly to the direction of the angel, and married Mary at once.

CONCLUSION: Matthew called Joseph a “just man” and Luke described Elisabeth as a righteous and blameless woman. What tribute did Jesus pay to John in Matthew 11:11. What did Alma write of Mary in Alma 7:10? After the things we have discussed, do you feel they were worthy of such praise? What would you like your children and grandchildren to say about you? What qualities of John and Mary and Zacharias and Joseph and Elisabeth would be most important for you to emulate? I testify that if we will follow the examples of the great men and women we will study this year in the New Testament, we also can be "great in the sight of the Lord." (Luke 1:15)

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