

C8 - Women of the New Testament

Study 1 - Elizabeth

BIBLE READING:

Luke 1: 5-25, 36-37, 39-45, 57-80

KEY VERSE:

For nothing will be impossible with God.

Luke 1: 37

Elizabeth's story is told by Luke at the beginning of his gospel. The fact that she was mother to the man chosen by God to be forerunner for the Lord Jesus makes her a significant character. Our readings present an older lady with a life well-lived, from whom we can learn various lessons.

ELIZABETH'S HERITAGE

Elizabeth descended from the priestly line of Aaron and her husband Zechariah was also a priest. Elizabeth had grown up in the ways of God. Perhaps you have been privileged to have had godly parents who have lived out their faith before you and ensured that you were taught God's Word. (**Proverbs 22: 6; Ecclesiastes 12: 1**) If you were saved when you were young that is a reason to be very thankful and to appreciate the value of your upbringing. Elizabeth and Zechariah embraced their heritage and made it their own. Luke depicts a devout couple, **"they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord."** (Luke 1: 6)



Mariotto Albertinelli's (1503) imagining of Elizabeth (right) with Mary.
(Source: Wikipedia)

ELIZABETH'S HEARTACHE

It is perhaps surprising that Elizabeth and Zechariah continued to trust and obey God given the heavy burden of childlessness which they carried. For a Jewish woman, not having a child was a great stigma. We read of other Bible women who were barren – e.g. Sarah, Rachel and Hannah. From their stories, we learn that ultimately it is God who allows a woman to conceive, and the timing is His. God is sovereign over all the events of our lives; this means that everything happens according to His plan and intention. For Elizabeth, decades passed when many prayers were made (**1: 13**) but her childbearing years came to an end. Luke records that **"both were advanced in years"**. (**1: 7**) Hope had gone and there would be no opportunity to pass on their godly way of life or to enjoy the pleasure of children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, despite this, Elizabeth was not embittered; rather, as a couple their allegiance and obedience to God remained strong.

ELIZABETH'S JOY

Can you imagine the joy that Elizabeth experienced when she became pregnant in her old age? In keeping with her faith she exclaimed, **"The Lord has done this for me."** (**1: 25**) This was truly a miracle! During her months of seclusion, Elizabeth's joy became even greater when she received a visit from Mary who was shortly to give birth to the Lord Jesus. She was filled with the Holy Spirit and her heart overflowed as she greeted Mary. (**1: 42-45**) Her salutation to Mary provides an insight into this godly woman's understanding. The significance of Mary being chosen and the greatness of the child she would bear brought double joy to Elizabeth! Mary had been granted the highest honour longed for by many Jewish women but there was no hint of jealousy on Elizabeth's part, only delight. She could truly **"Rejoice with those who rejoice"**. (**Romans 12: 15**) Both Elizabeth and Mary experienced the blessing of believing that God would fulfil His word to them. (**1: 36, 45**) Elizabeth's words must have been such an encouragement and affirmation to the young Mary. Her attitude should be a challenge to us as to how we react when others are chosen above us. Are our words encouraging to others?

ELIZABETH'S CHILD

Soon the angel's promise was fulfilled despite Zechariah's unbelief, and in due time Elizabeth had her baby. Luke records that the Lord had shown Elizabeth **"great mercy"** and as foretold, her joy was shared by neighbours and relatives. (**1: 14, 58**) She had the privilege of raising this very special child. He was named John, as Zechariah had been instructed. Everyone knew that this was no ordinary birth or child. (**1: 66**)

In the end God intervened in the barrenness which sat alongside Elizabeth's consistent godly life. Their prayer had been heard. (**1: 13**) The depths of her trial were only surpassed by the heights of joy she later experienced. Gabriel's words, **"For nothing will be impossible with God"** (**1: 37**) (**Key Verse**) had proved true. (**See also Jeremiah 32: 17, Matthew 19: 26**) Do you have this confidence in God in your life?

C8 - Women of the New Testament

Study 2 - Mary, the Mother of Jesus

BIBLE READING:

Luke 1: 26-38, 46-55;
John 2: 1-11; John 19: 25-27

KEY VERSE:

“I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word.”

Luke 1: 38

BACKGROUND

Mary came from Nazareth, a small, unimportant town in Galilee with a bad reputation. (see **John 1: 46**) Her family were descendants of King David. When we first meet her in **Luke chapter 1** she is a young girl (probably a teenager), betrothed to a man called Joseph. Betrothal was a much greater commitment than our modern-day engagement, it was a legally binding agreement which could only be broken by divorce.

THE SUBMISSION OF HER LIFE

Against this backdrop of her very ordinary life in Nazareth there is an unexpected interruption. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and brings her a message from God - a message which will change her life. God has a special calling for her, a role he wants her to fulfil. Gabriel tells her that she is going to have a Son – He is to be called **“Jesus”**.

Mary does not doubt this extraordinary message, but questions how it will happen, **“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** (**Luke 1: 34**) Gabriel goes on to explain what will happen and she indicates that she is ready to play her part in God’s amazing plan. Mary knew that saying yes could mean a ruined reputation, suffering, even death, yet she is obedient. She responds in humility, adopting an attitude of servanthood and is submissive to the will of God. (see **Key Verse**) God has a plan for each of our lives, a role that He wants us to fulfil. He wants us to respond in obedience and submission, just as Mary did.

THE SCRIPTURE IN HER HEART

When the angel Gabriel departed Mary went almost immediately to her close relative Elizabeth. When she arrives at Elizabeth’s she discovered that not only was Elizabeth miraculously pregnant as the angel had said, but that Elizabeth knew by prophetic revelation that Mary was going to be the mother of the Lord. (**Luke 1: 42, 43**)

Mary reacts with faith and joy to the news, and she sings of God’s greatness, faithfulness and mercy. Her song is

filled with words from the Old Testament - it is clear that she knows the Scriptures and that she knows her God. In the same way it is important that we take time to get to know God and His Word.

THE SECRETS OF HER HEART

Just before the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem due to the census, and on arrival they discovered there were no places available to stay. **Luke 2: 7** tells us that, **“she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”**

When the shepherds visited we are told in **Luke 2: 19** that, **“Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”** A similar phrase is used when Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple as a baby and hear the prophecy of Simeon. (**Luke 2: 35**) When Jesus was found in the Temple in Jerusalem at the age of 12 and returns to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, once again we are told that **“his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.”** (**Luke 2: 51**)

Clearly, Mary was not a superficial person, she was deeply thoughtful and reflective, taking time to learn more about Jesus as she watched Him grow.

When Jesus performed His first miracle at the Wedding at Cana, it was Mary who announced that the wine had run out. She knew that Jesus had the power to overcome this embarrassing social dilemma and her faith and obedience shine out clearly when she says, **“do whatever He tells you”**. (**John 2: 5**)



The Virgin in Prayer, by Sassoferrato, c. 1650 (Source: Wikipedia)

THE SWORD IN HER SOUL

Mary was present at the Cross. (**John 19: 25-27**) She stood there and watched her first-born crucified as a common criminal. The pain of this would be like a sword piercing her soul as Simeon had prophesied in **Luke 2: 35**. Jesus spoke to her from the cross (**John 19: 26**) and in the midst of His suffering made sure that she would be cared for by John.

THE STRENGTH OF HER FAITH

Mary was a woman of faith – a godly woman who was submissive, obedient, trusting, and loyal to God, despite the difficult circumstances that she found herself in. She lived out her calling and through her faith, her obedience and her submission she played her part in the higher purposes of God – she was part of God’s plan to bring about our salvation.

Answer Sheet

C8 - Women of the New Testament

Study 1 - Elizabeth

Return address on back of answer sheet

Name: _____

Address: _____

1. Elizabeth had a godly heritage. Compare Timothy's upbringing. Read *2 Timothy 3: 15*.

- a) What had Timothy grown up knowing? _____
- b) What was the benefit of this? _____
- c) Look up *2 Timothy 1: 5*. From whom had he learned this? _____

/3

2. What kind of life did Zechariah and Elizabeth live before God?

/2

3. "Blameless" does not mean sinless but is used to describe someone who fears God and whose life shows integrity.

- a) Name the Bible characters with whom the word blameless is associated:
- i. *Genesis 6: 9* _____
- ii. *Genesis 17: 1* _____
- iii. *Job 1: 1* _____
- b) Read *Ephesians 1: 4*. What is God's purpose in choosing us? _____
- _____

/4

4. Give brief answers to these questions about Zechariah's encounter with the angel Gabriel.

- a) Where was Zechariah? _____
- b) What was he doing? _____
- c) What name was to be given to the child? _____
- d) Why did Zechariah doubt this news? _____
- e) What happened to him as a result? _____

/5

5. Explain what happened to Elizabeth when Mary came to visit her. Why was she so filled with joy?

/4

6. Who said the following words?

- a) "...many will rejoice at his birth." _____
- b) "For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." _____
- c) "Thus the Lord has done this for me..." _____
- d) "No; he shall be called John." _____
- e) "What then will this child be?" _____

/5

7. Write down two things that Elizabeth learned about God through what she experienced in *Luke 1*.

THINK: Elizabeth finds joy in becoming a mother in old age (*1: 58*) and in the fulfilment of God's promises. (*1: 45*) What brings you most joy in your life?

/2

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 2 - Mary, the Mother of Jesus

1. Read *Luke 1: 26-38* again.

a) Write down four things that Mary is told about the Lord Jesus in this passage.

- i. _____
 ii. _____
 iii. _____
 iv. _____

b) List four characteristics of Mary that we can learn from this passage.

- i. _____
 ii. _____
 iii. _____
 iv. _____

 /8

2. Read *Luke 1: 46-55*.

a) What does this song tell us about Mary's knowledge of God?

b) Describe four of the characteristics of God that Mary highlights.

- i. _____
 ii. _____
 iii. _____
 iv. _____

 /5

3. What do you think Simeon meant when he prophesied to Mary, "a sword will pierce through your own soul"? (*Luke 2: 35*)

 /2

4. Read *John 2: 1-11* again and give short answers to the following questions:

- a) Where did the wedding take place? _____
 b) Who was invited to the wedding? _____
 c) What problem occurred at the wedding? _____
 d) What did Mary do about this problem? _____
 e) What did she say to the servants? _____

 /5

5. What does Mary's presence at the cross tell us about her?

 /2

6. Our final glimpse of Mary is in *Acts 1: 12-14*.

- a) What is she doing? _____
 b) What does this tell us about her? _____

 /3

THINK: What qualities of this godly lady would you like to have? What steps do you need to take to begin to develop them?

 TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 3 - Mary and Martha

1. Answer these questions:

- a) Which of the sisters had a gift for hospitality? _____
- b) Write out the phrase from **Romans 12: 13** where Paul mentions providing a welcome for others.

- c) In what way should we serve according to **1 Peter 4: 11**? _____

/3

2. Mary had chosen "the good portion".

- a) Explain why Mary's choice was a good one. _____
- b) How could you follow Mary's example in your own life? _____

/4

3. Put these sentences in the right order by numbering 1 to 5. Also provide the verse number from *John chapter 11*.

	Order	Verse
Martha went out to Jesus first.	_____	_____
The sisters sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick.	_____	_____
At Jesus' command Lazarus came out of the tomb.	_____	_____
Jesus was moved by grief.	_____	_____
Jesus came when Lazarus had been dead for four days.	_____	_____

/10

4. Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life".

- a) Write the two promises which Jesus makes in **John 11: 25**.

- b) How is this verse a great comfort to relatives or friends of a Christian who dies.

- c) What indication is there in this narrative that Jesus understands grief?

- d) What does **Revelation 21: 4** tell us that God will do with tears in a future day?

/5

5. Lazarus' illness was "for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it". (John 11: 4) Explain how this statement was fulfilled through what happened.

/3

THINK: Which sister's temperament can you identify with? Ask God's help to spend time listening to Jesus and to learn to serve well too.

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

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Study 4 - Mary Magdalene

1. Write down three things that we learn about Mary Magdalene from *Luke 8: 1-3*?

- i. _____
 ii. _____
 iii. _____

/3

2. Mary used her resources to serve the Lord Jesus. Give three examples of ways in which you could use your time, your talents and your money to serve Jesus.

- i. _____
 ii. _____
 iii. _____

/3

3. Read *Matthew 27: 45-54* and list four things that Mary and the other ladies would have seen and heard at the cross.

- i. _____ ii. _____
 iii. _____ iv. _____

/4

4. Give short answers to the following questions:

- a) When did Mary visit Jesus' tomb? _____
 b) What did she discover when she went to the tomb? _____
 c) Who did she tell about her discovery? _____
 d) What did the two disciples find when they went into the tomb? _____
 e) What did Mary think had happened to Jesus? _____

/5

5. What two questions does Jesus ask Mary when she first meets Him at the tomb?

- i. _____
 ii. _____

/2

6. What is Mary's response when she realises that Jesus is not the gardener?

/2

7. Summarise in your own words the message that the Lord Jesus gives Mary to convey to the disciples? _____

/2

8. What evidence for the resurrection is seen in the following verses from *John chapter 20*:

Verse 1 _____

Verses 6-7 _____

Verse 12 _____

Verses 14-16 _____

/4

THINK: Mary's life was transformed by Jesus. In what way has your life been changed since you came to faith in the Lord Jesus?

Return your completed answer sheet to:

TOTAL = /25 UNIT TOTAL = /100

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Study 3 - Mary and Martha

BIBLE READING:

**Luke 10 :38 –42;
John 11: 1, 3-7, 17-46; John 12: 1-3**

KEY VERSE:

**“I believe that You are the Christ
the Son of God who is coming into
the world.”**

John 11: 27

Mary and Martha were sisters who lived with their brother Lazarus in the village of Bethany outside Jerusalem. This study will look at the relationship each sister had with Jesus.

MARTHA'S SERVICE

Luke 10: 38 records that Martha welcomed Jesus into her house. What a lovely thing to do... to have Jesus and His disciples as guests and prepare a meal for them! **1 Peter 4: 10, 11** says that whatever gift we have received, we should **“use it to serve one another.”** Martha was willing to use her gift of hospitality to serve others. You may not have a home as Martha did, but you will have some possession or gift that you could use to serve Him!

Martha's good intentions, however, were sidetracked. We read that she became **“distracted with much serving”**. (**Luke 10: 40**) She became focused on how much there was to do and the fact that she had been left on her own. In self-pity she spoke to Jesus, inferring that He didn't care about her problem. She ordered Him to tell Mary to help!



MARY'S GOOD CHOICE

Mary was **“at the Lord's feet”** listening to His words! What a privilege! Jesus understood Martha's anxious heart and

frazzled demeanour. Gently, He pointed out that **“one thing is necessary”** and that Mary had **“chosen the good portion.”** (**Luke 10: 42**) The application here is clear. To spend time with the Lord listening to His Word and growing in our relationship with Him is more important than service. It is not His intention that our lives are so busy serving that He is robbed of our personal communion with Him.

MARTHA'S FAITH

When Lazarus became ill the sisters sent a message to Jesus. (**John 11: 3**) They turned to the right person in their difficult circumstances. But Jesus did not come. He had a different result in view and explained that Lazarus' illness would be **“for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”** (**verse 4**) By the time Jesus came, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

Martha regretted that Jesus had not come earlier. For us too, there are times when we cannot understand what God is doing or we question His timing. Martha's initial reaction, however, showed some faith (**verse 21**) but note the further expressions of Martha's faith and how it grew:

KNOW Verse 22 - **“I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You.”** She acknowledged Jesus' connection to God and its implication for any request He might make.

KNOW Verse 24 - **“I know that he (Lazarus) will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”** Martha envisaged Lazarus' rising someday but not that day!

In **verse 25**, Jesus declares **“I am the Resurrection and the Life”** and explains the certainty that belief in Him brings. He challenged Martha personally. **“Do you believe this?”** Martha's faith took another significant step forward and she confidently stated,

BELIEVE Verse 27 - **“I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God.”**

Martha grasped that Jesus is God and He has power to give life. Her journey in faith is reassuring for us. Our faith can be small to start with (**Hebrews 11: 6**) but as we learn more about the Lord Jesus, it is nurtured and established. (**Colossians 2: 6-7**)

MARY'S GRIEF

Later when Mary met Jesus she is consumed by her grief. (**verse 32**) Jesus too was **“deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled”**. (**verse 33**) This is followed by the shortest verse in the Bible – just two words – **“Jesus wept”**. (**verse 35**) How comforting to know that Jesus shared our humanity and understands our grief. At this point of deep sadness Jesus intervened with a loud voice, **“Lazarus come out!”** (**verse 43**) The glory of God was visible as Lazarus emerged from the tomb!

MARTHA AND MARY'S GRATITUDE

John 12: 1-3 is the happy sequel to **chapter 11!** At this special dinner Martha served with no mention of frustration and Mary expressed her love and devotion in anointing Jesus with perfume. Her gratitude overflowed as an act of worship. Are you truly grateful for what the Lord has done for you?

C8 - Women of the New Testament

Study 4 - Mary Magdalene

BIBLE READING:

**Luke 8: 1-3; Matthew 27: 55-61;
John 20: 1-18**

KEY VERSE:

“I have seen the Lord.”
John 20: 18

BACKGROUND

Mary Magdalene was an important person in the life and ministry of Jesus. She was a Jewish woman from the fishing town Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Mark and Luke record the healing of demons from Mary's life. (**Luke 8: 2; Mark 16: 9**) The Bible doesn't tell us the story of Mary's deliverance by Jesus but at some point she encountered Jesus and He freed her from torment.

WILLING TO SERVE

Mary's deliverance from darkness and her salvation transformed her into a dedicated follower of the Lord Jesus. Whatever background we may come from, Mary's story teaches us that the Lord Jesus can transform us too into faithful followers.

Mary now wanted to serve the Lord Jesus in any way she could. She joined a small group of women travelling with Jesus and serving the disciples' practical needs. Mary must have had some financial resources and freedom to travel, because **Luke 8: 1-3** tells us that this group of women supported Jesus' ministry out of their own resources. God wants us to serve Him in whatever way we can, using the resources that He has given us.

WITNESS TO THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS

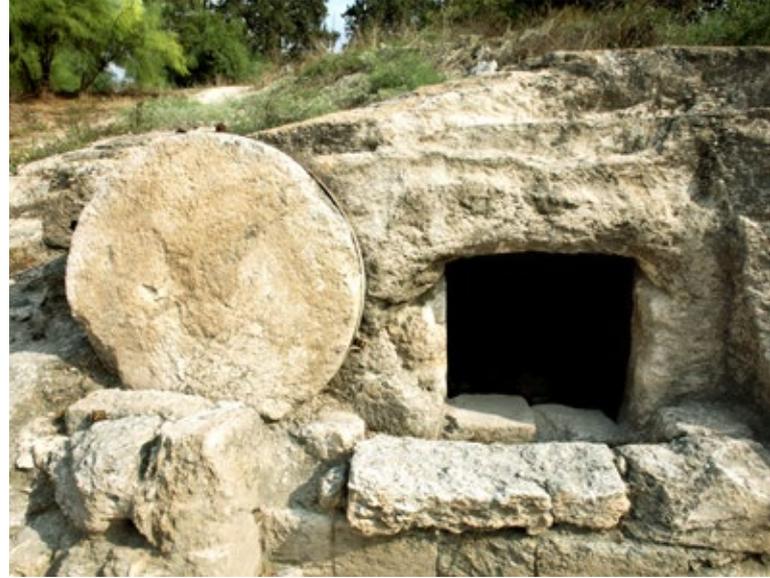
Not every Gospel account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection focuses on the same events and details, but all four indicate that Mary Magdalene witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and burial. Mary's faithfulness and service led her to the foot of the cross! While other disciples fled and were in hiding, Mary's devotion and courage took her to the cross where she witnessed His shameful death by crucifixion.

Mary remained there until Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and she witnessed Joseph of Arimathea's burial of Jesus. She knew the exact location where he had been laid to rest. (**Mark 15: 47; Luke 23: 55**)

WEeping AT THE TOMB

Mary visited the tomb twice on Sunday after Jesus died. The first time, she came with a small group of women to anoint the body with spices. But when they arrived, they found the stone moved and the tomb empty! They saw an angel who told them Jesus had risen and to run tell the disciples. Mary ran to tell Peter and John, who ran to the tomb, went inside and then left together.

Mary, however, stayed at the tomb, too upset to do anything else and, **“as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain.”** (**John 20: 11, 12**) The angels ask why she is weeping and Mary replies **“They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have laid him.”** (**John 20: 13**)



WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

Mary then turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but did not know that it was Him; instead she assumed that He was the gardener. Jesus said to her **“Mary!”** When Mary heard Jesus say her name, immediately she recognised Him. He indicated to her that their relationship would change because he would be leaving them physically and going to his Father and sending the Holy Spirit to live in them.

Mary is given the privilege of being the first to **“bear witness”** of His resurrection to the disciples! Mary was sent to bear the most joyous news ever told! Like Mary, Jesus calls us to **“go into all the world and proclaim the gospel...”** (**Mark 16: 15**)

CONCLUSION

Mary was a woman of strong faith whose life had been transformed by Jesus, and her loyalty to him was unwavering. She was one of His friends and a faithful follower, dedicating her life to serve Him. She not only followed Him during His public ministry but she was there when He was crucified as well as being the first person to whom He appeared after His resurrection.

This is the second of two units on **Women of the Bible.**

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