

Elisabeth

By Aspen Stander
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Elisabeth, mother of John the Baptist, set a remarkable example of faith and humility.

Elisabeth was a woman of great faith and great humility. Both she and her husband, Zacharias, were “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). Both were descended from the priestly lineage of Aaron. They had grown very old together, their lives spent faithfully serving the Lord as husband and wife, but they remained childless (see Luke 1:7).

Infertility and the Abrahamic Covenant

It was at this time, when Elisabeth was beyond childbearing age, that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias as he was working in the temple and announced that Elisabeth would bear a son. And not just any son—their son had been reserved for that time to act as a forerunner to Jesus Christ, to prepare the children of Israel for the coming of the Lord (see Luke 1:17). Elisabeth was soon pregnant with the child later known as John the Baptist.

After John was born, Zacharias prophesied of John’s calling as “the prophet of the Highest” (Luke 1:76). John would prepare the way for the Lord, the Messiah who would “perform

the mercy promised to our fathers, and . . . remember his holy covenant; the *oath* which he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:72–73; emphasis added). Interestingly, Elisabeth’s name in Hebrew means “God is my oath.”¹ One of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant—an oath that God made with Abraham—is posterity as numerous as the stars in the sky (see Genesis 22:17). We are heirs to the blessings of Abraham, and through him all the families of the earth, including ours, will be blessed (see Abraham 2:11). Elisabeth shows us that women who make and keep covenants with God will eventually have the opportunity to bear children, whether that happens in this life or the next.

Prophecy and the Holy Ghost

Because Elisabeth had lived a righteous life, the Holy Ghost was her constant companion. When Elisabeth was six months pregnant, the angel announced another miraculous pregnancy to one of her relatives. Gabriel appeared to Mary, a betrothed young woman, and told her that she would conceive and bear the Son of God. Gabriel told Mary that Elisabeth had

also conceived, so Mary decided to visit her. The baby in Elisabeth’s womb leapt for joy when Mary arrived, and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (see Luke 1:41).

Elisabeth then exclaimed:

“Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

“And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:42–43).

Elisabeth’s humility and spiritual receptivity are remarkable, but what’s even more remarkable is that she had no prior knowledge of Mary’s pregnancy. Elisabeth discerned the miraculous nature of Mary’s condition through the influence of the Holy Ghost. She received the gift of prophecy as she bore testimony of Jesus Christ and showed reverence for His mother long before His earthly ministry began.

Sisterhood and Empathy

Both Elisabeth’s and Mary’s pregnancies seemed to be biologically impossible. Elisabeth was seemingly infertile and beyond childbearing years. Mary was a virgin. These faithful women recognized the truth that “with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).



Elisabeth comforted and strengthened Mary through the trials and joys of pregnancy.

Elisabeth played an important role in comforting and strengthening her young, newly pregnant relative. Because Elisabeth had faced reproach for her inability to have children, she could show empathy for Mary, who may have feared reproach for her pregnancy out of wedlock. Like Elisabeth and Mary, women need each other’s love and wisdom, friendship and sisterhood in order to grow in the gospel and in their responsibilities as women.

Women also need each other’s support during trials. Elisabeth provided spiritual, physical, and emotional support to Mary. She took Mary into her care at a time when both women felt vulnerable and lonely, and the two were strengthened together. They rejoiced

together in the “impossibility” that had become their reality.

Mary stayed in Elisabeth’s home for three months (see Luke 1:56), and we can only guess how they must have bonded during their shared trials and joys of pregnancy. Maybe they were unfamiliar with all the changes happening in their bodies. Maybe they felt overwhelmed by their callings to bear the Son of God and the prophet to declare His coming. But surely women need the influence of other righteous women, and we know they marveled, they rejoiced, and they prepared one another for their divinely given calling to motherhood. ■

NOTE

1. *A Dictionary of First Names*, 2nd ed. (2006), “Elisabeth.”

THE PRIESTLY LINEAGE

Both Elisabeth and Zacharias descended from the tribe of Levi through Aaron (see Luke 1:5). Their son, John the Baptist, preserved the priesthood lineage to prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

