

## “THE REALLY GOOD LIFE”

### *‘Life of Christ Series’* Studies in Luke’s Gospel

#### Holiday Family Gatherings

‘*National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation*’ is a comedy movie about how chaotic things can get when relatives come as house guests for the holidays. The movie definitely isn’t a Christian family reunion! On the contrary, it’s about very unspiritual people trying to have a sentimental secular get together. Though I can’t recommend this movie for numerous biblical reasons, it is a hilarious portrayal of how a great idea of bringing a family together for a few days can end up in total mayhem when the Reason for the season, Jesus Christ, is not invited to the celebration. In real life, millions of people will be traveling between Thanksgiving and Christmas to reunions with family and friends for the holidays. And though the memories won’t be as hilarious (or disastrous) as that movie, getting together with loved ones ought to rekindle relationships of people separated by distance between the holidays.

The original Christmas story of the Bible highlights the importance of good spiritual fellowship during seasons of change in the plan of God. After the angel Gabriel abruptly departs and the Holy Spirit impregnates Mary, she feels compelled to journey southward for a visit to her aged relative, Elizabeth. A wonderful, Spirit-filled three-month fellowship together ensues! Since Elizabeth’s husband, Zacharias has been muted, he is greatly restricted in communication with his pregnant wife. What a blessing it must have been to have the silence broken by exuberant Mary’s joyful presence in those final months prior to the birth of John! What pleasant retreat for Mary from her concern about the stress that her pregnancy will surely bring to her family, neighbors and fiancé back in Nazareth. If Mary is Luke’s source (**1:2**) for the contents of chapter one, she must have been in her mid to late 70s as she told her story to the author. The specifics of chapter one reveal the deep impression left upon her through these memories of that original family fellowship at the commencement of God’s awesome redirection of her life.

Are you planning a family gathering for the holidays? As a Christian you are also part of a spiritual family of believers in addition to your natural kindred. As you plan for holiday fellowship, how about also looking around your church family for those who are separated from natural kin by distance or some other reasons? Maybe you could enhance your 2008 holiday memories by expanding your invitation list to include brethren who will be new to your ‘family circle’ (*please see Luke 14:12-14*). In a very special way the Lord may give an extra special blessing to you for making sure no one is excluded or left out of our holiday fellowship plans. A holiday party without Christ-centered fellowship might end up like the ‘*Christmas Vacation*’ movie. But celebrations that embrace others in need of friends this time of year will probably be filled with great memories you’ll never forget that will bless generations to come, like Mary’s experience in Luke one...

### Blessings of ‘Christ-Centered’ Gatherings

*(Mary & Elizabeth’s Spirit-filled Fellowship)*

Luke 1:39-48

#### The Guest List: Spirit-filled Friends

*“Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

*Luke 1:39-41*

It seems that Mary didn’t tell Joseph or her family about the angel visitation and her new position as the mother of Messiah. She apparently just takes a leave of absence to visit her relatives south of Jerusalem for a time. **Matthew 1:18-25** appear to be what happens with Joseph when he sees her 3 months pregnant upon her return to Nazareth.

**Monday meditation:** **1 Peter 4:7-9** is a reminder that in these last days before Jesus comes again, it is so important for those with His Spirit in their hearts to be *‘hospitable to one another without grumbling.’* Who are some believers God is speaking to your heart about who need your hospitality for the holidays? In all fellowships you attend, be sure to avoid grumbling so you don’t ‘spoil the fruit of the Spirit’.

**Tuesday devotional:** **1 Peter 4:10-11** reminds us all about a most important Christmas present God has already given His children – ‘your spiritual gifts’ (abilities placed in you at salvation to glorify God with your new life in Christ and bless others). Stop and think about how your spiritual gifts can be used during the holidays and who it is God wants to bless through you. Pray for God’s leading in expressing His love through you to specific people during the holiday season.

## The Delicious Menu: Spirit-filled Faith

*“Then she (Elizabeth) spoke out with a loud voice and said, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”*  
*Luke 1:42-45*

We don’t know exactly what Mary’s greeting was but it certainly inspired Elizabeth to detect the awesome things God was doing in her. There is absolutely nothing in these verses to indicate worship of Mary, genuflecting to her or receiving of grace from her. Clearly Mary was a blessing because she had been blessed for her faith and submission to the revealed plan of God for her. Unlike the sad, foreboding icons of her, it is certain that her countenance joyfully radiated the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ to others.

Colossians 3:12-17

**Wednesday meditation:** *Colossians 3:12-15* concludes with the phrase *‘be thankful’*; but notice all the preparations of the heart and mind that go into that result! Just like a bountiful thanksgiving feast, a bountiful thankful heart takes much preparation. There are at least 9 ingredients in these verses for a thankful heart to happen. Take about a minute to think about each one (that’s only 6 seconds a piece). Which ones do you need to add to your ‘shopping cart’ for the holidays?

**Thursday thoughts:** *Colossians 3:16-17* also concludes with *‘thanks giving’* again! But notice again that there are some specific activities you must do to cultivate a naturally thankful heart. ‘Spirit-filled’ Christians actually generate thankfulness by obedient behavior of Bible study, positive communication, singing joyful tunes and saying ‘praise the Lord’ for the good things happening all around them!

## The Table Talk: Spirit-filled Fruit

*“And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name.”*  
*Luke 1:45-48*

This song is called ‘Mary’s Magnificat’ (the first word in the Latin translation). Obviously Mary is extremely knowledgeable of the Old Testament Scriptures and how they practically relate to her day and her situation. Contrary to Roman Catholicism’s emphasis on Mary herself, God’s Word focuses entirely upon the exalted One within her, the Son of God. She sees her own need of the Savior, for she is a sinful human being like everyone else. She acknowledges her future fame as ‘blessed’ because of the honor of being physically used for God’s physical entrance into the world. She never claims divine holiness for herself nor does any Scripture whatsoever. Her wonderful model is summed up when she says, ‘**holy is HIS Name**’, not mine’!

Ephesians 5:17-21

**Friday meditation:** *Ephesians 5:17-19* points out the choice every Christian has to make all the time— foolishly follow the ways of the world in dealing with trials or be filled with the Spirit. You can’t have it both ways. On the weekends and especially during the holidays lost souls will imbibe at the fool’s bar of physical gratification which only complicates their misery in the end. Christians must politely decline to take the Savior and the Holy Spirit to parties and places where moral holiness and spiritual fellowship are not welcome. Whatever social events you’re invited to always ask, ‘Is my Savior, Jesus, welcome to come with me?’

**Saturday devotions:** *Ephesians 5:19-21* expresses the blessedness of ‘spiritual inebriation’. Just as any drunkard thinks, talks and acts radically different than normal under the influence of alcoholic spirits, so is the Christian who is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. To the degree we are empty of lesser things being served up by the world, the flesh and devil, God is able to fill and overflow our hearts and lives (see *John 7:38-39*). Be careful today about what others want to pour into your body, soul and spirit – if it isn’t producing the effects of this passage, someone is trying to ‘spike your heart’ with some cheap stuff of the world instead of the ‘good stuff’ of the Spirit. Pray for church tomorrow – that we all will be filled with the awesome sense of Him.