

The Sanctity of Life

Lesson 4: The Unborn Before God -- Luke 1:39-45

Two pregnant women meet in the hill country of Judea, and what happens between them is one of the most quietly astonishing scenes in all of Scripture. One is an old woman who had given up hope of ever bearing a child. The other is a young girl carrying a child unlike any before or since. They embrace, and before a single word of theology is spoken, the encounter begins not between the two women but between the two unborn children they carry.

Elizabeth feels it first: “the baby leaped in her womb.” The child who would become John the Baptist, still months from birth, responds to the nearness of the child who is the Son of God, also still hidden in His mother’s womb. Luke does not describe this as a reflex or a coincidence. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, interprets it for us: “the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” Joy. A response. Before he could see, speak, or take a breath of air, the unborn John rejoiced at the presence of his unborn Lord.

Notice how these two believing women speak. Elizabeth does not say “the pregnancy” or “the fetus.” She says “the baby,” her son, leaping within her. And she calls Mary “the mother of my Lord,” treating the newly conceived Jesus not as a potential person but as the Lord Himself, already present, already worthy of honor. The God of heaven, in becoming man, did not begin His human life at birth. He began it, as we all do, as an unborn child.

This is the deepest dignity ever conferred on life in the womb. The eternal Son once dwelt where every one of us once dwelt, small and dependent and unseen. If the Lord of glory was already the Lord while hidden in Mary, and if the unborn John could leap for joy at His coming, then the child in the womb is no mere bundle of possibility. It is a person, known and loved by God. This lesson invites us to look with wonder at the unborn Christ and the unborn John, and to let what we see there settle, once for all, how we regard the smallest among us.

Group Discussion: Why do you think Luke gives us this intimate scene of two unborn children meeting before either is born? What does the leaping of the unborn John, and Elizabeth’s words, teach us that mere argument could not?

Personal Reflection: How does it affect you to realize that Jesus Himself was once an unborn child, hidden and helpless in His mother’s womb? Does that truth change the way you regard either the unborn or your own beginnings?

Read Luke 1:39-45

Study Questions

1. Read Luke 1:39–41. When Mary’s greeting reached Elizabeth, “the baby leaped in her womb,” and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. What does it tell us about the unborn John that he responds to the presence of the unborn Christ even before either child is born?
2. Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, treats the child in her womb as already her son and Mary as the mother of her Lord. How does the way these believing women regarded their unborn children challenge or correct the way our culture commonly speaks about life in the womb?
3. Read verses 42–43. Elizabeth calls Mary “the mother of my Lord” while Jesus is only newly conceived. What does it mean that the Son of God was already the Lord in Mary’s womb, and how does the incarnation itself honor the unborn?
4. When you consider that Jesus Himself once dwelt as an unborn child, hidden and helpless in Mary’s womb, how does that change the way you regard the smallest and most defenseless human lives?
5. In verse 44 Elizabeth says the baby “leaped for joy.” How does the joy of the unborn John at the nearness of the unborn Christ reveal that the life in the womb is not merely biological but already personal and responsive to God?
6. Where have you allowed the language and assumptions of the culture, rather than the witness of Scripture, to shape how you think about unborn life? What would it look like to let passages like this one reframe your thinking?
7. Read Jeremiah 1:4–5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” How does God’s knowing and setting apart of Jeremiah before birth confirm that the unborn are persons known and purposed by God?
8. Is there a place in your own story where you have doubted that your life had purpose from the beginning? How does the truth that God knew and purposed Jeremiah before birth speak to your sense of being wanted and called by God?
9. Trace how Luke 1 and Jeremiah 1 together establish that unborn children are persons known, loved, and even called by God before birth. Why does the testimony of the unborn John and the unborn Christ stand as a powerful witness that the child in the womb is a human being made in God’s image, and not a mere potential life?
10. Look back over Luke 1:39–45 and Jeremiah 1:4–5. Name one specific way these passages are changing how you see unborn life and your own God-given purpose, and one concrete way you will act on that conviction this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 139:13–16, you knitted me together in my mother’s womb; Isaiah 49:1, the Lord called me from the womb; Galatians 4:4, God sent forth His Son, born of woman; Luke 1:15, John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb; Philippians 2:6–7, He emptied Himself, being born in the likeness of men.

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