REVD. DR. D. J. AJITH KUMAR

Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth: Transcending Adversity with Hope

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KEY VERSE
Luke 1:45 “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!”

READINGS
Jeremiah 33:10-16; Psalm 68:11-20; 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 1:39-45

The First Sunday of Advent

Advent is a special season in the Christian calendar that prepares us spiritually to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas and reminds us of His promised second coming. The word Advent comes from the Latin word adventus, meaning “coming” or “arrival.” It is a season of hope, expectation, preparation and renewal. Traditionally, Advent comprises the four Sundays before Christmas and begins the new liturgical year in many Christian traditions. Sunday, 29 November 2026, is the First Sunday of Advent, marking the beginning of the Advent season and the start of a new liturgical year. The first Sunday traditionally emphasises hope and watchfulness. It calls us to look forward with faith, trusting in God’s promises even when the world around us is filled with uncertainty, suffering and darkness. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the hope of a coming Saviour, while the New Testament reminds us to remain spiritually alert and prepared for the Lord’s return. Advent invites us to prepare not merely our homes for Christmas but, more importantly, our hearts for Christ. It challenges us to examine our lives, repent of our sins, renew our faith and make room for Jesus in our daily living. As we light the first candle on the Advent wreath, often called the Candle of Hope, we remember that Christ is the Light of the world, shining in the darkness, and that the darkness cannot overcome Him (John 1:5). This season also reminds us that Christian hope is not wishful thinking; it is confidence in the faithfulness of God. As we begin Advent, let us wait patiently, live faithfully and serve compassionately, sharing Christ’s light with those who are lonely, discouraged and suffering. May this First Sunday of Advent awaken in us a renewed hope and a deeper longing for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Life is a journey in which joy and sorrow, hope and disappointment, faith and uncertainty often walk together. There are moments when we rejoice in God's promises, and there are moments when our circumstances seem to contradict everything we believe. We may experience unexpected challenges, unanswered prayers, family difficulties, social rejection, illness, loneliness, or uncertainty about the future. During such times, we may wonder how God's promises can be fulfilled in our lives. Today's theme, “Meeting of Mary and Elizabeth: Transcending Adversity with Hope,” invites us to discover how God works through ordinary people who trust Him in extraordinary circumstances. The meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, recorded in Luke 1:39–45, is more than a beautiful encounter between two relatives. It is a meeting of two women whose lives have been transformed by God's unexpected intervention. Both are facing extraordinary circumstances, both are carrying children connected to God's redemptive purpose, and both need the reassurance that comes through faith and fellowship. Mary is a young woman who has received the astonishing news that she will conceive Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Her calling brings immense spiritual privilege, but it also

exposes her to uncertainty, misunderstanding, and possible social shame. Elizabeth, in her later years, has experienced the sorrow of childlessness. Now, by God's grace, she is pregnant with John the Baptist, the one who will prepare the way for the Lord. Their meeting demonstrates that adversity does not have to become the final chapter of our lives. When God enters our circumstances, fear can give way to faith, isolation can become fellowship, and uncertainty can become hope. Through these biblical passages, let us reflect on three important truths: God's promises sustain us in adversity, godly fellowship strengthens our hope, and faith enables us to recognise God's purpose even before its fulfilment.

1. God's Promises Give Hope in the Midst of Adversity

The first lesson from today's readings is that God's promises remain a source of hope even when circumstances appear discouraging. In Jeremiah 33:10–16, the prophet speaks to a people who have experienced devastation, fear, and uncertainty. Jerusalem faces destruction, and the future of the nation appears bleak. Yet God declares that the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of a bride and bridegroom, and the thanksgiving of worshippers will once again be heard in the land. God promises restoration and speaks of a righteous Branch from David's line who will bring justice and righteousness. Jeremiah's message is remarkable because hope is proclaimed in the midst of despair. God does not deny the suffering of His people, nor does He pretend that their difficulties are insignificant. Instead, He assures them that their present circumstances will not have the final word. His purpose is greater than the destruction they can see. This promise finds its ultimate Christian significance in Jesus Christ, the promised descendant of David through whom God brings salvation and righteousness. The birth of Jesus, which Mary carries in her womb, is part of this unfolding story of divine faithfulness.

Mary's own experience reflects this truth. When the angel announced that she would become the mother of Jesus, she could not fully understand how everything would unfold. She was engaged to Joseph, and her unexpected pregnancy could expose her to misunderstanding and rejection. Yet she trusted the word of God and responded with willingness to participate in His purpose. Elizabeth, too, knew the pain of adversity. Her long years of childlessness had brought personal sorrow and perhaps social misunderstanding. In the world of her time, childlessness could be wrongly interpreted as a sign of divine disapproval. But God had not forgotten her.

Her pregnancy became a testimony that God's grace could bring new possibilities even in circumstances that seemed beyond hope. Psalm 68:11–20 also celebrates God's power to deliver and sustain His people. The psalmist declares in verse 20, “Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.” This confession reminds us that God is not distant from human suffering. He is the One who sustains, delivers, and leads His people through the challenges of life. What adversities are we facing today? Some may be struggling with illness, some with financial uncertainty, others with family tensions, loneliness, or disappointment in ministry. We may have prayed for years without seeing the answers we desire. The stories of Mary and Elizabeth remind us that God's silence must not automatically be interpreted as God's absence. However, Christian hope does not mean that every difficulty will disappear immediately or that every prayer will be answered exactly as we wish. Hope means trusting God's character and faithfulness even when we cannot understand His timing. It means believing that our suffering does not make us forgotten by God and that He can work through our circumstances for His purposes. When adversity surrounds us, let us hold firmly to God's promises. The God who brought hope to Jerusalem, who worked in the lives of Mary and Elizabeth, and who fulfilled His promise through Jesus Christ is still

worthy of our trust.

2. Godly Fellowship Transforms Isolation into Encouragement

Our second lesson is that God often strengthens our hope through the presence and encouragement of other people. Luke tells us that Mary travelled to the hill country of Judea and entered the house of Zechariah, where she greeted Elizabeth. Imagine the emotions Mary carried as she made that journey. She had received a divine message that was difficult to explain to others. She needed understanding, reassurance, and someone who could share her joy without condemning her. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She exclaimed with a loud voice, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” (Luke 1:42). Elizabeth did not respond to Mary with suspicion or criticism. She welcomed her with joy and recognised God's work in her life. Her words gave Mary encouragement at a time when she could have felt anxious and alone. This encounter teaches us the importance of supportive relationships during seasons of adversity. God did not call Mary to fulfil her responsibility in complete isolation. He provided Elizabeth, a woman who could understand something of her experience and affirm the work of God in her life. Their meeting also demonstrates that genuine fellowship is not a competition. Elizabeth was older, and she had her own extraordinary experience of God's grace. Yet she did not become jealous of Mary or seek attention for herself. She rejoiced in what God was doing in the younger woman. Mary, in turn, came to Elizabeth not to compete but to share fellowship. How different our churches and families would be if we learned to celebrate God's work in one another! Too often, people who are already struggling with adversity encounter criticism, comparison, jealousy, or indifference. Instead of helping one another carry our burdens, we sometimes add to them. The Church is called to be a community where the discouraged find encouragement, the lonely find companionship, the grieving find comfort, and those who are uncertain find people willing to walk alongside them. We may not always have answers to another person's problems, but we can offer a listening ear, a word of encouragement, a prayer, and a reassuring presence. Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 3:6–13 reinforce this truth. Paul had been concerned about the Thessalonian believers, who were facing difficulties because of their faith. When Timothy returned with encouraging news about their faith and love, Paul was deeply comforted. He wrote that he was encouraged by their faith despite their troubles and distress. Paul's joy was connected to the spiritual well-being of others. Their faith strengthened him, just as Elizabeth's words strengthened Mary. This is the beauty of Christian fellowship: our faith can encourage another person's faith, and their perseverance can renew our own courage. Paul also prayed that the Lord would make the believers increase and abound in love for one another and for everyone. This is the kind of fellowship the Church must cultivate. Our love should not be limited to those who are similar to us or those who can benefit us. It must extend to everyone, especially those who are vulnerable or discouraged. When someone is passing through adversity, we should not ask only, “Why is this happening?” We should also ask, “How can I walk with this person through this difficult season?” Sometimes, the most powerful expression of hope is the simple assurance that someone is not alone. Like Mary and Elizabeth, let us become people who recognise God's grace in others, speak words that strengthen faith, and build communities where hope can grow.

3. Faith Enables Us to See God's Purpose Beyond Our Present Circumstances

Our third lesson is that faith helps us recognise God's purpose even before we see the complete fulfilment of His promises. Elizabeth's declaration in Luke 1:45 provides the key verse for this

sermon: “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!” Elizabeth identifies something central to Mary's experience: she has believed God's word. Mary does not yet see the whole picture. Jesus has not been born, His ministry has not begun, and the events of His death and resurrection lie in the future. Nevertheless, Mary trusts the God who has called her. Faith does not mean that Mary has no questions or fears. Rather, it means that she places her confidence in God despite the uncertainty before her. She believes that the Lord who has spoken will remain faithful to His promise. Elizabeth also demonstrates faith. She recognises that her own unexpected pregnancy is not merely a personal blessing but part of God's larger purpose. Her son, John, will prepare the way for Jesus. Both women are participants in a divine plan much greater than their individual circumstances. Their meeting reveals that adversity can become a setting in which God's purpose is made visible. The challenges they face do not disappear from the story, but they are no longer the defining reality. God's promise becomes greater than their fear, and His purpose becomes greater than their limitations.

This truth is also reflected in Jeremiah's prophecy of restoration and Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians. Jeremiah looks beyond Jerusalem's devastation towards God's promise of renewal. Paul looks beyond the believers' present distress and prays that they may grow in love and holiness in preparation for the coming of Christ. In both passages, hope is directed towards God's continuing work. For us today, this means that we should not define our lives only by present difficulties. A failed plan does not necessarily mean a failed life. A season of suffering does not mean that God has abandoned us. A closed door does not mean that every possibility has disappeared. We must continue to pray, trust, serve, and discern God's direction. At the same time, faith is not passive waiting. Mary travelled to visit Elizabeth. Paul continued to care for the Thessalonian believers. Biblical hope leads us towards faithful action. We support one another, serve those in need, pursue justice, and continue the work God has entrusted to us. The meeting of Mary and Elizabeth also reminds us that God's purposes often unfold through relationships and shared obedience. Mary carried Jesus, while Elizabeth carried John. Their children would have distinct roles, yet both were part of God's redemptive plan. Neither woman's calling cancelled the importance of the other. Similarly, the Church is made up of people with different gifts, ages, experiences, and responsibilities. We must not compare our calling with someone else's or assume that our contribution is insignificant. God can use each of us to bring encouragement, healing, and hope to others. When we trust God's promises, encourage one another, and remain faithful in our calling, adversity can become an opportunity for deeper faith and more compassionate service. We may not understand every chapter of our lives, but we can continue walking with the God who holds our future.

Conclusion

Dearly beloved in Christ, the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth is a beautiful testimony to the power of hope in the midst of adversity. Two women, living through extraordinary circumstances, meet and discover that God's grace is at work in both their lives. Jeremiah reminds us that God's promises can bring hope to people facing devastation. Psalm 68 celebrates the God who saves and sustains His people. Paul shows us how the faith of others can encourage us during distress. Luke reveals how Mary and Elizabeth strengthen one another through faith, fellowship, and joyful recognition of God's purpose. Today, let us remember three truths. God's promises sustain us in adversity. Godly fellowship transforms isolation into encouragement. Faith enables us to see God's purpose beyond our present circumstances. Perhaps some of us are experiencing our own season of uncertainty. We

may be waiting for an answer, carrying a burden, or wondering what the future holds. Let us not lose hope. Let us seek God's presence, remain faithful to His Word, and allow other believers to walk with us. And when we meet people who are struggling, let us become an Elizabeth to them - offering encouragement instead of criticism, affirmation instead of suspicion, and hope instead of despair. May our homes and churches become places where people discover that they are not alone, where faith is strengthened through fellowship, and where God's promises are celebrated even before their fulfilment becomes visible. Adversity may shape our present circumstances, but it does not have to determine our future. When we trust God's promises, encourage one another, and walk by faith, hope can rise even in the most difficult seasons of life. May the Lord fill us with this living hope and make us instruments of encouragement and blessing to others. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.