

Miracles. I've seen miracles. And, I'm here to offer the gift of encouragement. Mary came to me because she felt like I was the only person who could truly understand what she was experiencing. In no way do I claim that my miracle, my son John, was of the magnitude of her giving birth to the Messiah; however, I do claim him as a miracle!

We were old. For years I had tried to have a child. Years had passed and I felt like a complete failure. I understand that I was not a failure for this, but I *felt* like one anyway. Then, my husband stopped speaking. I didn't know what was wrong with him until, until I realized I was pregnant. **A miracle!** I should not have been able to be pregnant and yet I was.

So Mary came to see me after she knew that she had conceived the Son of God – an impossibility! **A miracle!** The moment I saw her, my heart leapt within me. Something had changed in her. She was no longer the little girl I remembered. She was a woman and she had this peace surrounding her that was contagious.

My heart was not the only thing in my body to leap. John leapt as well. As if he knew before he ever saw the light of day that he was in the presence of holiness. Once he started leaping, he never stopped!

As I said, Mary had a peace about her, but the young girl was scared at the same time. Others did not believe her. And, you wouldn't believe the things that were said to her during those days. People can be so cruel. There were times she even questioned herself. There were times she felt like she had gone insane.

But, as soon as I saw her, I knew. If a miracle like John could happen to me, there was no way I would deny that Mary could be a mother to God's son. I was honored that she chose to come to me when she felt so alone. I was happy to share with her my story and to assure her that she was indeed "the mother of my Lord."

Miracles! Don't you see? Don't you believe? If this could happen to me, then I know miracles are in your future as well. If this could happen to Mary, don't you think the Lord will use you? We were nothing special. I was just an old barren woman. Mary – just a young and silly girl. We each had made mistakes and no one would have ever guessed that God would work miracles through us.

It may be easier for you to believe this about your neighbor than yourself. I'm here to tell you that there is no one more suited than you. Be encouraged. Be open. And, you will be used in performing miracles – the miracles of The Most High Lord.

Discussion Suggestions - Elizabeth

Recall our theme for the year, “Gifted to Serve.” We all possess the gift of encouragement. The word, *encourage* is defined as: “to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; to fill with courage or strength of purpose; the raising of one’s confidence.” (Webster)

Anyone can encourage another person. All it takes is a can-do, uplifting attitude, compassion, and a spirit of giving. Everyone **needs** encouragement at various points in their lives. I dare say that everyone has been on the giving and the receiving end of encouragement within their lifetimes.

When Mary went to see Elizabeth at her home, each of them had a miracle story to share with the other. Elizabeth, who had been married many years, was past childbearing age and had little hope that she would ever experience motherhood. Yet here she was half way through her pregnancy with not just any child, but a divinely appointed child who was to prepare the way for the Messiah! Mary, nearly still a child herself, was engaged (or betrothed) to Joseph, and had been visited by an angel announcing her divinely appointed pregnancy. She would carry THE Messiah, the Savior of the world, God’s Son. Elizabeth and Mary were there for each other, supporting and encouraging one another, sharing their miraculous stories together.

It is never easy to go through something new alone. We need the encouragement and support of one another. We need to know that we have someone on the sidelines cheering us on, believing in us.

- ✦ Think of a time when you needed encouragement. What were the circumstances of the situation? Who did you turn to? Who reached out to you? What was the outcome?
- ✦ Who are people around us now that could use our support and encouragement? How can we reach out to them and share in their journey by offering encouragement and strength to them?

As a group, brainstorm ways your Women’s Ministry group can be encouraging to those in your church family, community, and even abroad. Maybe you could adopt a group of soldiers who are serving their country and send them words of encouragement on a regular basis. How about adopting a cottage at our children’s home in Denton, Texas? Let those children know that people they are likely to never meet are offering prayers and encouragement for them, but by people who care and want to share in their journey. Have you considered volunteering as a mentor at your local elementary and middle schools? So many of our young people need to know that it matters to others how they choose to live their lives. What about letting our missionaries know that they are not forgotten? Let them know that you are praying for them and their work on a regular basis.

PRAYER:

Close by praising God for the miracles He performs each day. Thank God for sending those who are encouragement to you. Pray for guidance in encouraging others.