

Hail Mary and bless Elizabeth

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December 14, 2009

[John 3:16](#) was popularized during the rise of the Sunday school movement and the era of printed gospel tracks. More recently, the verse was Googled furiously after Florida Gators quarterback Tim Tebow [wore](#) it as eye black at a championship game. For many people, John 3:16 is filed in childhood memory.

Luke 1:42 is also one of the most quoted Bible verses in church history--I'm sure it statistically trumps John 3:16--yet I doubt many could quote it from memory given only chapter and verse. It's not a Protestant memory verse; it's located in a different part of the church library, under headings such as "Catholic prayers," "Rosary" and "Marian devotion."

Interestingly enough, the [Hail Mary](#) was popularized by another quarterback, who reportedly made a forward pass with his eyes closed and a quick prayer for good measure:

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Pick up a five-decade rosary for prayer and you will pray this prayer a minimum of 53 times. Add to that the Hail Marys assigned to penitents and the weekly and daily small groups that gather for Rosary prayer, and then multiply this number by the generations of Catholic faithful since the Middle Ages and...you get my point.

The first half of this prayer combines two verses, Luke 1:28 and Luke 1:42. The first two sentences are words from Gabriel to Mary—the glorious Annunciation, in which Mary receives the divine revelation that she will bear God's son. The words that follow are from Elizabeth, pregnant with a joy-jumping child who seems aware of what is going on outside the womb: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."

Elizabeth blesses Mary not once but twice; the second blessing comes quickly on the heels of the first: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

Perhaps these verses from Luke deserve at least as much attention from Protestants as the beloved John 3:16. After all, big stuff is happening in the first chapter of Luke, particularly in Elizabeth’s simple home in the hill country. When these two pregnant women got together, they did more than chat about the radical changes taking place in their bodies. They pointed to the radical changes coming about in history: changes that the child in Elizabeth’s womb would prepare for and announce and that the child in Mary’s womb would bring to fruition.

After receiving Elizabeth’s blessings, Mary gave voice to the character and shape of this change: it would be an all-out reversal of the status quo, a gospel revolution that would scatter the proud, bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, send the rich away empty and fill the hungry with good things.

Such words ought to give all of us pause. While we look for change in the centers of power—in courtroom chambers and lawmaking bodies—God scatters our power and presumption, pointing our attention to a maternity ward where faithful women pray and praise the “mighty one who has done great things,” the one who is still doing great things, and often in the most unexpected of places.