

The Visitation of Mary & Vicar Installation – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 1:39-56: “Your Life Matters from the Womb to the Tomb.”
July 2, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Almighty God, You chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of Your Son and made known through her Your gracious regard for the poor and lowly and despised. Grant that we may receive Your Word in humility and faith, and so be made one with Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Celebrating the Saints*, p. 115)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, / “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” / And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. / For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. / And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. / He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. / He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” / And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home. (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who “made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phi. 2:7), in order to redeem us by His perfect life and innocent death, dear fellow redeemed:

The mothers who have carried in their wombs the greatest people in the history of the world, did not know what their little babies would become. The Apostle Paul’s mother could not have guessed that her son would one day preach Christ crucified around the world. And Margarethe Luther would not have expected her son Martin to become a great reformer.

Elizabeth and Mary were different. They knew that the baby boys in their wombs were destined for tremendous things. Elizabeth learned it from her husband, a priest serving in the Jerusalem temple, who was visited by the angel Gabriel. The angel told Zechariah that he and Elizabeth would have a son. He would *"be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb,"* and would *"turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God"* (Luk. 1:15, 16). His name was to be John. After Elizabeth conceived this child, she kept herself hidden for five months. Who would believe that this old woman was carrying a child after a lifetime of barrenness?

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel Gabriel visited her young relative Mary. As you know very well, Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph, but they had not had relations with each other. Mary was a virgin. Gabriel shared the stunning news with Mary that she would bear the Christ Child, *"the Son of the Most High"* (Luk. 1:32), who would reign over an everlasting kingdom. And he had even more news to share. Her elderly relative Elizabeth was six months along in her own pregnancy. *"For nothing will be impossible with God"* (Luk. 1:37).

So what did Mary do next? She got up and hurried to Elizabeth's house. Even if no one else believed her, Elizabeth would—Elizabeth whose life had also been touched by the unexpected working of God. By this time, Elizabeth's belly had expanded to make room for the growing boy inside her. She might have felt little flutters as he moved around and hiccupped. Her baby was about twelve inches long and 1½ to 2 pounds in weight. His eyes may have just begun to peek out behind red eyelids.

Elizabeth did not know that a monumental meeting was about to take place. The Messiah was about to enter the home of His messenger. With Mary's arrival, the two men who would turn the world upside down with their preaching and teaching, were now in the same room in the flesh. Elizabeth had not heard about Mary's pregnancy, and yet she knew. She knew as soon as Mary greeted her, and her baby leaped in her womb. She knew, because at Mary's greeting she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit revealed to her that Mary, a virgin and yet pregnant, was *"the mother of her Lord."* She spoke three blessings to Mary: *"Blessed are you among women," "blessed is the fruit of your womb,"* and *"blessed is she who believed"* what the Lord said. Elizabeth did not honor Mary because she had accomplished great things on her own. Elizabeth honored Mary because of her connection to the teeny, tiny baby growing in her womb.

But how could the little baby of a poor woman save the world? The world doesn't think much of little babies or of poor women. Little babies are viewed more and more as burdens. Babies get in the way of careers and riches and personal freedom. All of us have thought that at one point or another. But Elizabeth and Mary were once babies, as were their sons John and Jesus. You and I were babies, and here we are. We are supposed to be here. God gave us life. Every Christian should be pro-baby, because God is pro-baby!

Every soul is precious in His sight, which means every soul should be precious to us. Our hearts should expand in love for all our neighbors, from the poor ones to the rich ones, from the lowly ones to the well-regarded, from the unborn to the elderly. Every life has value. Every life matters. Just look at the care with which God formed us in the womb. The psalmist David wrote, *"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you,*

for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:13-14). He goes on to describe how we were *"made in secret, intricately woven,"* and how even at our conception, God had a plan for all our days (vv. 15, 16).

The miraculous composition of a human being should be enough for people to acknowledge and praise the almighty God. But our sinfulness is great, and it has been with us for as long as we have existed. Adam and Eve's fall meant that all their descendants would inherit their sin, and sin keeps us from fearing, loving, and trusting God as we should. In another of his Psalms, David wrote, *"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (Psa. 51:5). That is true of every one of us. We were sinners from the moment we were conceived.

But Jesus was an exception to that unbroken line of sin. He was conceived not by a human father and mother, but by God the Holy Spirit overshadowing the womb of Mary. In this way, God the Son took on human flesh but without human sin. By His entrance into the world as an embryo, God was showing that life matters from its earliest beginnings, even before the human eye can see it. As He went through each stage of life—from His growth in the womb, to His birth, as a toddler, a child, a young adult, a grown-up—Jesus was redeeming every stage of life from the sin that pollutes us.

God does not take shortcuts. There was no simple, easy way for mankind to be saved. The Son of God had to take on flesh, and He couldn't just appear in the flesh like you might appear in costume. He had to take human flesh into His Person. He had to start the way all humans start, with the joining of tiny cells. From the time that Gabriel visited faithful Mary, the eternal Son of God became God and Man in one Person. And He remains God and Man for all eternity.

This is the One whom John would go into the wilderness to proclaim. But that would be about thirty years later. Today was the day for Messenger John and his Master Jesus to meet. And how do we know that John was aware of Jesus' presence? Elizabeth exclaimed to Mary, *"For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."*

John continued to rejoice. Those thirty years later after Jesus was baptized, John cried out, *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (Joh. 1:29). As Jesus' following increased, and fewer were coming to John, John testified, *"The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease"* (Joh. 3:29-30).

John had it right; his glory was in Jesus. The long-promised Savior had come. Elizabeth saw it the same way. She welcomed Mary with all humility, *"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"* Mary saw it the same way. In her famous song, the Magnificat, she said that her Savior God *"has looked on the humble estate of His servant," "has done great things for me,"* has *"exalted those of humble estate,"* and *"has filled the hungry with good things."*

And so it is for you and me. The Lord has looked on our humble estate. He saw how helpless we were, how lost in our sin. And He has done great things for us. The little baby in Mary's womb was growing there for you and me. The six months bigger baby growing in Elizabeth's womb would go before Him to prepare His way. All of this happened more than 2,000 years ago, but God had you in mind.

God the Father sent His only Son for this express purpose—to save your soul. He gave you birth, so that He could give you rebirth. He formed you in the womb, so He could transform you by the power of the Gospel. You might wonder sometimes how much your life matters. You might wish you could go back, make different choices, and do more with your life. You can put all those thoughts to rest when you see what God did for you, when you see the womb of a virgin swelling with Child, when you see the God-Man making His way to Calvary carrying His cross—for you.

Your life matters. God loves you. He forgives all your sin. He wants you to join Him in heaven with Elizabeth, John, Mary, and all the saints. This is the message He calls sinful men to preach. We give thanks that He has sent another vicar to our parish to preach this Word to us and to continue training for the noble work of pastor. Pastors have nothing to offer you of their own, just as Mary had nothing to offer of her own. But as God chose her to bear the Christ-Child in her body, so He has chosen sinners to “*rightly handle His word of truth*” (2Ti. 2:15), and to distribute His means of grace through our mouths and by our hands.

The presence of Jesus in Mary’s womb brought joy to Elizabeth and John, and His presence still brings joy to us. When the sound of His forgiveness and grace reaches our ears, the Holy Spirit comes to remove our burdens and lift our hearts. Then our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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