

The Festival of the Visitation of Our Lord
2 July, Anno Domini 2023
St. Luke 1:39-56

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Blessed of the Lord,

When you listen carefully to the Magnificat you will notice that it repeatedly speaks of God upsetting the applecart. God looking down on the humble. God scattering the proud. God bringing down the mighty from their seats. God exalting the humble, filling the hungry with good things, sending the rich away empty. What does all this show except that what the world measures as important God detests - glory, pride, success, wealth, strength, pleasure, comfort - and that those who elevate shows of greatness over the humbleness of the things of God will be brought down and humbled. God's eye of love and mercy are precisely on those whom the world counts as nothing, who, indeed, count themselves as nothing and do not seek to make themselves anything, who do not crave after anything that the world is offering. God takes what is nothing, what the world scoffs at and He blesses it, He makes it something good and wonderful and beautiful in His sight and so shames the world and those whose hearts are in love with the things of the world.

This was certainly the case of both the Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth was beyond child-bearing years and barren. Contrary to what the world thinks, barrenness is not a virtue. It was understood to be a cross, a consequence of the fall into sin. Marriage was meant for the bearing and raising of children. Children are a heritage and gift from the Lord. That was the blessing and command given to Adam and Eve in the beginning. But Elizabeth and her husband had been denied that honor and joy. Many would have judged her accursed by God, punished for some wrong that she had committed. Certainly she had been filled with great angst and sorrow over this. She had wept bitter tears of longing as I'm sure some of you gathered here today have. Yet she commended herself to God in faith and found her sole comfort in the promise of the Messiah.

And, indeed, God did look in mercy upon her. She was able, contrary to every medical pronouncement, to conceive a child with Zechariah and when Mary came to visit her, she was already six months along. And not only was she having a baby, she was given to be the mother of perhaps the second most important person

in history - John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New who would turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers and point all to the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

Blessed be the Lord who, for no reason in Elizabeth herself, bestowed upon her the high honor of being the Baptist's mother, raising him in the true faith and teaching him the Scriptures. God chose Elizabeth precisely because nothing about her recommended her to Him. She was not special. She was not better. She was not holier or more pious. She was a sinner looking for the salvation of God. Blessed is Elizabeth for she believed the word that was spoken to her from the Lord, namely, that God would open her womb in her old age that she may bear a son and that after her son would come the One God had promised Eve, the Seed who would crush Satan's head as Satan bruised His heel. And that is why Elizabeth herself counted herself blessed. Not first because of the baby in her own womb, but because of the baby in her cousin's womb. Elizabeth herself said "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Mary's baby was the Blessed One, the Holy One of God, the promised Messiah, Immanuel - God with us. That baby was the fulfillment of our salvation - of Elizabeth's, of Mary's, of yours and mine. That Baby, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the source of every blessing and the One by whose Blood you too are blessed.

Thus is the Virgin Mary blessed. Not because of who she is, but because of the Blessed Fruit of her womb. She bore in her sinful body the One whose sinless Body would bear her sins and take away her guilt, just as He would bear the sins of the whole world. She, a poor, miserable sinner like the rest of us, was chosen by grace to be the Mother of God. It was certainly a great honor to be the mother of Jesus, God's Son, the Savior of the world. We are right to call her blessed on that account and learn from it that God looks upon the lowly and humble, those whom the world casts aside, and He fills them with good things. But let us also not bestow honor upon Mary that is not fitting. She wasn't immaculately conceived. That is only true of Jesus. She is no less a sinner than you or I and therefore she has no less of a need for the salvation of Jesus. She has no greater connection to Jesus than any other Christian who has been Baptized and believes the word that was spoken to them from the Lord. Her true blessedness, as she herself will be quick to tell you, is that the promise of salvation belongs to her as much as anyone else. She was not a person of station. She was no one. She was certainly of low estate and she hungered deeply for salvation.

This is what caused her to run to Elizabeth with the news. This is why her greeting to Elizabeth and John wasn't simply "Hi, Cousin! How are you?" It was one of the purest and most beautiful preachings of the Gospel ever uttered - the Canticle we know as the Magnificat and which we most often sing during Vespers. This song of greeting was a hymn of praise to God for His mighty acts of salvation, salvation which He had promised to our forefathers and which now He was fulfilling in the Blessed Fruit of her womb.

Yes, today we hear of Mary and Jesus' visitation of Elizabeth and John. But what we celebrate is that God has visited His people and redeemed them. That is the visitation which we and the whole Church of Christ rejoice over this day. We celebrate that God has not despised the broken, the weak, the insignificant, the lowly, the humble, the hurting, the depressed, the persecuted, the anxious, the addicted, the dying. Indeed, He has come precisely for these, for you. He has visited you in your low estate to raise you up, to give you new life, hope for salvation, peace in the midst of your turmoil and suffering. Do not be dismayed by or despise that you are nothing. Rejoice. It is those who are nothing whom the Lord visits with healing and mercy. It is to them that He gives Himself and unites Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ has humbled Himself to the point of death to exalt you and make you sons of the Most High God. He has filled you with His own life, with forgiveness, and with peace that nothing in this world nor even the devil himself can take from you because they cannot take Christ from you. And consider what God did for Elizabeth and Mary. Women who virtually no one knew about are now known by millions. Myriads of women share their names. Two thousand years later, we still call them blessed. And let us not be like the world, despising and being offended by what is not glorious and grand but weak and humble. Let the most beautiful and glorious things to you be Christ's Word faithfully taught, His Sacraments faithfully administered, His beloved and precious Church though all of these things appear weak and foolish and pathetic. To despise these is to despise our Lord Himself who chose them.

Like Mary and Elizabeth, you are blessed if you believe that there will be a fulfillment of what has been spoken to you from the Lord this day - that you are forgiven, that your Father will protect and preserve you, that in Christ you are a thing most beautiful and precious to God. You are blessed with every blessing of God's kingdom when you receive in faith what God Almighty promises you and do not allow your own nothingness and the bitter hardships of your life to replace God's Word. There is absolutely nothing more sure or glorious in this world or the next than what God has spoken. And He has spoken clearly to you in His Word.

He will help you just as He helped Israel and He will remember His mercy as He did for Abraham and his offspring forever.

Blessed is Mary. Blessed is Elizabeth. Blessed is John. And blessed are you whom the Lord our God has visited this day with His great salvation.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.