

December 20, 2015
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 1:39-45

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 1:39–45 (ESV)

³⁹ In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,
⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

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

Amen.

“Count your blessings,” we are told. Be grateful for all you have, all that God has given you.

Not bad advice. Yet this also presents a problem. How many individually identified blessings count as being *highly* blessed?

Are wealthy people more blessed than poor people?

And what do we count as a “blessing”?

Counting one’s blessings may actually miss the point of what it means to be blessed by God.

In our Gospel today, Mary and Elizabeth help us see the true nature of blessedness: We Are Blessed by God through the Presence of Christ.

Being blessed by God comes from the presence of the incarnate Christ. Elizabeth declares Mary blessed among women. No sooner had the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the Savior than she hurried off to visit a woman she knew would understand and share her joy: her relative Elizabeth, herself expecting the baby John the Baptist in her old age (vv 39–40). What a surprise at her greeting (vv 41–44)!

Right away, as Mary approaches, John in Elizabeth’s womb recognizes not Mary, but Jesus in Mary’s womb!

John leaps for joy, and Elizabeth calls Mary blessed.

Mary acknowledges that she is indeed blessed moments later in her song, the Magnificat (v 48b). We sing Mary's song quite often in church. You'll get to hear it sung by some of our young women at Christmas Eve worship.

However, Mary is not blessed because of who she is.

In the Magnificat, she notes the "humble estate of [God's] servant" (v 48a).

She also calls God her "Savior" (v 46), for she is a sinful human being like all people, in need of being saved. Some put Mary above others, but like us today, being blessed by God does not mean that we aren't sinners, or better than anyone else.

Furthermore, Mary is clear that it is God who has "done great things" for her. She gives all glory to Him (v 49).

Mary is blessed, as Elizabeth tells us, because of the blessedness of the "fruit" of her womb. Jesus is the reason that Mary, as well as all of creation, is blessed.

Her blessedness isn't her future enduring fame or the fortune in product licensing a good marketing team could make for her. Her blessedness is simply the presence of Christ within her womb.

The Church, in which Christ also dwells, is likewise blessed.

We are not blessed because of who we are, for we are all sinners who "justly deserve [God's] present and eternal punishment".

Our blessedness is also not measured in any of the "things" we have—fame, toys, health to run marathons or even just to leap for joy.

Our blessedness, like Mary's, consists rather in the presence of the incarnate Christ. Jesus Christ is the ultimate source of every true blessing, no matter who is the vessel being used to carry or deliver the blessing.

Jesus entered Mary's womb and came into the presence of Elizabeth and John, for one reason. So that He could die on the cross. So the He could be the ultimate blessing for us and all creation.

Jesus' death, by taking away the sin that had separated us from God, brought us back into God's presence now and forever.

In Baptism, we are then clothed with the righteousness of Christ's death, the heart of our blessedness before God (Gal 3:27).

That presence is realized also in the true body and blood of the crucified Christ in the Holy Supper, where our Lord comes to us with gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Being blessed by God is received through faith in the promise of Christ's "presenting" Word. Now Elizabeth declares Mary blessed as one who believed there would be a fulfillment of God's promise (v 45).

By God's grace—and quite miraculously—Mary had understood and responded obediently in faith to Gabriel's announcement as God's own word (1:38). Instead of fear, uncertainty, doubt, she found assurance and peace in the promise.

Mary knew and believed that the Child in her womb was a direct fulfillment of God's prophetic promises.

We in the Church who likewise accept in faith this word of promise are likewise blessed.

Every time Christ's Word is preached or read, it presents Him to us just as surely as did the angel's word to Mary; Christ is present just as surely as He was with Mary, Elizabeth and John.

By the Holy Spirit's power, we understand and respond in faith to the continued proclamation that our Lord Jesus, who took on human flesh and dwelt among us, is our promised Redemption and Salvation.

Faith believes this promise that Christ is with us, whatever sadness or seeming lack of blessings we experience.

Instead of fear and doubt, we are blessed with hearts strengthened with peace in the assurance of God's grace for us sinners.

Christ present with us in our sins and troubles, is what it is to be blessed. For now, we remain earthbound saints, who continue to have hope in Christ's promise to return again in glory at the end of time.

Our blessedness is therefore not merely a temporary joy but is also anticipatory, looking to the future in faith.

That future blessing we can count on.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria