

Luke 1:39-45 ³⁹ Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, ⁴⁰ and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³ "But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ "For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. ⁴⁵ "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

If there is one thing that Lutherans have been adamant at in the past, it is putting Mary in her place. In response to the Catholic Church which at times has lifted Mary up as the sinless one worthy of our prayers and our trust, good Lutherans have regularly and rightly argued against such teaching. And while arguing against such false teaching is right, perhaps we have not always treated Mary fairly either. After all, if you hear a Lutheran talk about Mary, sometimes you might think that that she ranks somewhere between Judas Iscariot and the devil himself.

Today our text will help us truly place Mary in her rightful place. Today we seek not to say more about Mary than the Bible says, but also we wish not to say less either. Today we will be reminded that Mary's place, her worth, is her intimate connection with the promised Christ child.

In our text for the day, Mary goes to visit her relative Elizabeth. And boy does she have a story to tell. An angel has just appeared to her and told her that she will bear the Son of the Most High. Imagine receiving such news! She had to share it with someone. But who would even believe her story. She has an idea who might. She would go to a woman who understood well miraculous births. Her relative Elizabeth had been well past her child bearing days when she was conceived John the Baptist who now was growing in her womb. If anyone might understand what Mary had to tell, perhaps it was Elizabeth. So she packed up and went.

As soon as Mary walked in the door, Elizabeth felt John do a flip in her womb. Oh sure the baby have moved before, but not like that. Immediately Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She then knew that John, even in the womb, knew that his Lord had come to visit him. And she, by the Holy Spirit, knew it too. She said, “Why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord should visit me?” As far as the scripture tell us, before Elizabeth uttered these words she had no idea Mary was even pregnant and now by the Holy Spirit she knew not only that she was pregnant but that the child in Mary’s womb was her Lord. And Elizabeth was confident of one other thing also. Mary was blessed because she had believed the word of the angels who had told her of the miraculous birth she was about to have. When Elizabeth had received word of her miraculous birth, she had some trouble believing it. But not Mary. She simply believed the word of God. She was blessed beyond all other woman because of the fruit of her womb, Jesus.

This is Mary true place. She is to be remembered, yes even honored, as one who in faith heard God’s word and believed it. She is blessed in the most miraculous sense possible. She was blessed to be able to bear the Christ child. From the promise in the Garden of Eden, the children of God had waited for the seed that would crush Satan head. And now that seed went with Mary everywhere she went. She was blessed to carry around Jesus in her womb. In the most literal sense, Mary had God himself dwelling inside of her. She has chosen by God to fill this role. And for her faith in accepting that role, we indeed are right to think of her as a role model of faith. She is a model of what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is one who hears the promises of God and believes them. This is Mary.

This story of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth is most appropriate for this last Sunday in Advent. We have looked in this season as promises of the Messiah that were made hundred, even thousands of years before He actually came. But now as we stand four

days from Christmas, we are just that close. The long awaited Messiah is in Mary's womb, just months from finally being seen for the very first time.

As I am relearning again, pregnancy is filled with many things, but primarily with one thing. Anticipation. I am not sure how many times I have heard Jaimee say, "Is it March yet?" She is ready for the baby to come. Oh sure, part of it might be to get rid of the discomfort of pregnancy, but I know more fully it is to see the one who has been with her so long now in her womb. The nine months that precede birth can seem like an eternity. But the closer one gets to their due date, the more the excitement grows. I can remember with our first child talking in those last weeks with great excitement about whether each day might be the day when waiting would give way to fulfillment.

Speaking in terms of the church year, we are nearing our due date. Well more properly, Mary is nearing hers. Yes, today we are just that close, just days away, from seeing again our Lord lying in the manger. We are days from when waiting will give ways to fulfillment. And we are to be just as excited as the not yet born John the Baptist was for that day. We are to leap for joy. For we know that with Jesus' coming come salvation, peace, forgiveness, and all other blessings. We know that that Babe in the manger will later be the Man of the cross, taking away our sins. And we know that the Man of the cross will three days later be the Conqueror of death at the empty tomb.

How excited are you for Christmas day? Perhaps you are very excited about many things. Perhaps Christmas is your very favorite time of year. You can't wait for your family gather, to exchange gifts, and eat wonderfully prepared food. But perhaps for some of you, you are not very excited about Christmas at all this year. Perhaps this is the first year without a loved one. Perhaps this Christmas season brings up memories of other Christmases which weren't so great. But whatever your feelings about Christmas time this year are in general, it is good that you are here today.

Because today, we take this last Sunday in Advent to get real excited about the One in Mary's womb. If you feel like you have much to be excited about, Jesus should be at the top of your list. And even if you feel like your list isn't long at all this year, Jesus coming should make your list worth having. Jesus is the heart of what makes Christmas Christmas. He is the reason why we can be excited, the reason that we can leap for joy, that we can do a flip again this year. The one in Mary's womb is Jesus and He is the long-promised Savior. And we are pregnant with anticipation this day, waiting for our Lord to be born. Amen.