

Magnify the Lord!

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Luke 1:39–56

Luke 1:39-56 (The Visitation)

Preached for choral vespers featuring Bach's Cantata #147 ("Hertz und Mund und Tat und Leben") at St. John's Lutheran Church – Orange, CA. 23 February 2014.

The Visitation brings together two very unlikely women – Elizabeth and Mary. They are kinswomen, cousins of one degree or another. Elizabeth is six months pregnant. Mary has just received the “happy news” from the angel. A mother-to-be who is bold enough to be your grandmother or even great-grandmother. And a pregnant virgin. Truly, with God nothing is impossible!

Elizabeth blesses Mary and the Child in her womb. She sees by faith what the eyes cannot see nor reason comprehend. This is the “mother of her Lord.” Theotokos, as the church calls her. The Bearer of God. Here the mystery of the Incarnation is revealed. The infinite takes residence in the finite. The Creator is embraced by the creature. The eternal Son resides in the womb of His human mother. Blessed is she because of Him. Mary and Elizabeth believe the promises of God. The Spirit is at work. Even John gets in on the act with a joyous prenatal kick. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Stirred by the Spirit and the Word she carries, Mary sings her Magnificat. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” She is a magnifying lens, making large what she is focused on, and she is focused upon the Lord. She does not magnify herself, great as her work is. She is nothing, her Son is everything. The mother magnifies her Son and rejoices in Him as her Savior. It's remarkable that very few words of Mary are recorded in the Scriptures. Mary tends to listen, to take in words, and ponder them quietly in her heart. Her Magnificat is the most words we have from her. A psalm sung by a young pregnant virgin as a Gospel aria to her elderly cousin who bears her Son's forerunner.

The last words of Mary recorded in the Scriptures are in John and the wedding at Cana where she says to the servant at the feast, “Do whatever He tells you.” Sound advice it is from the

mother of our Lord! Do whatever He tells you. Never mind her. Her soul magnifies the Lord.

From henceforth, all generations shall bless me, she says, and that is most certainly true.

Blessed is she among women, and blessed is the fruit of her womb. She is Eve's counterpart, in whom the promised Seed was conceived and from whom He was born. Eve hearkened to the Lie and was deceived. Mary heard the Word of the Lord and conceived. "I will make enmity between you and the woman," God said to the serpent. "Between your seed and her Seed."

Mary carries the promised Seed, the One whose cross-bruised heel would crush the serpent's head to free all of Adam's children. Mother Eve rejoices in Mother Mary in the presence of Mother Elizabeth. Who but the Lord could do such great things?

"He kills and He makes alive," sang Hannah, who is Mary's Magnificat predecessor. "He brings down to Sheol and He raises up again." With the strength of His arm, He scatters the proud in their conceits, He brings down the mighty and topples their thrones, and sends the sated away empty. And with the same strength of His arm, He exalts the humble, He fills the hungry, He has mercy on those who fear Him. Those who are full of themselves, He brings down to depths so that they fully know how empty they are. Adam must die. He must be toppled from His throne or he cannot live forever. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the meek, the persecuted, those who are nothing in this world. The kingdom belongs to such as these – the least, the lost, the lowly, the dead. A little child. Unless you become as a helpless, dependent, trusting little child, you cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. It is by faith in the promise.

Mary is faithful. Full of faith. She believes the promises of God that He spoke to the fathers, to Abraham and his Seed, that through the promised Seed of Abraham all nations, all peoples would be blessed. That Promised Seed here resides in the virgin womb of Mary, who with heart and mouth and deed and life, magnifies the Lord.

The church sings Mary's song every evening at Vespers. As the day comes to its end and the sun is setting on the western horizon, the church takes up Mary's Magnificat upon her lips and magnifies the Lord. Like Mary, the church too is the Bearer of the eternal Word. She preaches Christ and gives out the fruits of His sacrifice – His Body and His Blood. The church is our virgin mother, heavenly Jerusalem, by whom we were birthed through water and the Word by the Spirit as children of God. We are baptismally virgin-born, new creations in

Christ. Adam must die, Christ must rise. We too, daily die and rise. Daily we die to Sin, daily we rise to new life in Jesus.

And like Mary and the church, you too, dear baptized believer, are a bearer of the Word. Not in your womb, of course. That was uniquely Mary's to do. But in your hearts by faith and on your lips, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

He who is mighty has done great things for you. He has rescued you from Sin and Death and brought you into a kingdom that never ends. Magnify the Lord. Rejoice in God your Savior. Proclaim the good news of His salvation. With heart and mouth and deed and life, bear witness to Christ without fear or falsehood, that He is God and Savior of all.

Magnify the Lord!

In the name of Jesus.

Amen

SOURCE

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