

I.N.I.

Third Sunday in Advent
Dec. 17, 2017
Luke 1:39-55

In Christ Jesus, the God-Man Savior, begotten of the Father from eternity and born of the virgin Mary, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Two weeks ago we heard John the Baptist proclaim to us the Law and Gospel. He said a mightier One than he was to come who would pour out His Spirit upon His children. He would thoroughly purge the threshing floor by taking the believers to His heavenly home and casting the unbelievers to eternal torment in hell. His words have helped us prepare our hearts for proper Christmas celebration, one from the heart with godly repentance and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

In our sermon text this morning, we hear of two faithful women who are intricately involved in the story of Christ's birth: Elizabeth and Mary. They are cousins who clearly understood the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the Messiah. Like John the Baptist, God had chosen these two women to play a very important role in carrying out His plan of salvation for all of mankind. We see that they were indeed filled with the Holy Spirit and were able to proclaim this salvation to each other and to all generations to come.

Luke begins his Gospel with the angel Gabriel announcing to Zacharias that he and his aged wife Elizabeth would be the parents of this forerunner to the Messiah whose name would be John. In the following verses Luke reports on Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she would be the mother of the Son of God. At this time the angel mentions to Mary that her cousin Elizabeth, **"has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren."**

After the angel left, Mary quickly made her way up into the hill country to visit with Elizabeth, to rejoice with her over her good news and also to share her own miraculous news. Even as God has caused two miraculous conceptions in the wombs of these women, He brings about another miracle as they meet. When Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting, the unborn baby John, leaps in his mother's womb and Elizabeth is filled with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. She immediately knows why Mary has come and through inspiration Elizabeth says to Mary: **"BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN, AND BLESSED IS THE FRUIT OF YOUR WOMB! BUT WHY IS THIS GRANTED TO ME, THAT THE MOTHER OF MY LORD SHOULD COME TO ME? FOR INDEED, AS SOON AS THE VOICE OF YOUR GREETING SOUNDED IN MY EARS, THE BABY LEAPED IN MY WOMB FOR JOY. BLESSED IS SHE WHO BELIEVED, FOR THERE WILL BE A FULFILLMENT OF THOSE THINGS WHICH WERE TOLD HER FROM THE LORD."**

Through a special revelation from the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth now knew what only Mary knew: that she was going to give birth to the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. That is why Elizabeth speaks the very same words the angel Gabriel said to Mary: **BLESSED ARE YOU AMONG WOMEN.** The greatest honor the Lord has ever bestowed upon a woman is now being conferred upon Mary. What a special blessing it is for any woman to conceive a life, carry it under her heart for nine months and then give birth. Every conception and birth is a miracle of God's grace; a creation of life in a mother's womb. But when that child is the very Son of God, God in human flesh and blood---that is a very special blessing and honor.

Elizabeth shows by her words that she believes that her unmarried, virgin cousin was going to give birth to the Christ. But we also heard of another witness to this miracle. Her unborn child, John, leaps for joy in her womb for he too was now in the presence of His Lord and Savior. What excitement, what feeling of awe and wonder there must have been between these two women in witnessing, in feeling, in experiencing the power and glory of God and the fulfillment of over 4,000 years of prophetic history.

And what **HUMBLE** women they were. Elizabeth says: **BUT WHY IS THIS GRANTED TO ME, THAT THE MOTHER OF MY LORD SHOULD COME TO ME?** In other words, "why am I so favored?" And that's the first point of our text:

ELIZABETH SHOWS US HOW TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

1) WITH A HUMBLE HEART OF FAITH ELIZABETH BELIEVES THAT JESUS, THE MESSIAH, WAS TO BE BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY.

This greatest of miracles, God in human flesh and blood, Immanuel, “God with us” in human form, is being denied by many today; even by so called theologians and religious teachers. They use their vaunted intelligence and wisdom, their human reason and come up with such statements as this, written in an ELCA theological textbook used in their seminaries: *“the notion of the pre-existent Son of God becoming a human being in the womb of a virgin and then returning to His heavenly home is bound up with a mythological picture of the world that clashes with our modern scientific world view...the primary interest of dogmatics (study of doctrine) is to interpret the virgin birth as a symbol and not as a freakish intervention in the course of nature...Biblically, the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke seem to...call for a symbolic or mythical reading. Reading them symbolically seems to (be) truer to the text than reading them as historical descriptions.”* What? Can we be reading this right?

Elizabeth who was there, witnessing and hearing the news, did not use her intellect or reason, or scientific world view, but humbly, simply believed what the Spirit had revealed to her. Her virgin cousin was expecting the Son of God by a miraculous intervention in the course of nature. The Son of God was implanted into Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May our Christmas worship and celebration also be one of humbly coming before the Christ-child in the manger and see and contemplate this miracle of the ages: the Power and Majesty of our God in sending His Son into this world as one of us, for each of us! The miracle of the incarnation (coming in the flesh) of Jesus is real, is an historic fact, and is the beginning of our redemption.

Mary now joins Elizabeth in singing her praises and we see her humble spirit as well: **MY SOUL MAGNIFIES THE LORD, AND MY SPIRIT HAS REJOICED IN GOD MY SAVIOR.** Mary’s soul magnifies, that is exalts, praises, glorifies and adores her Lord God. Her whole being rejoices in God her Savior. These are indeed precious words. Mary is clearly showing that the child she is carrying is not only the Savior of the rest of the world, but her Savior as well. Mary was blessed by being chosen to be the human mother of Jesus, to bring Jesus into this life; but this same baby Jesus was chosen by the Father to bring eternal life to His human mother. Mary needed a Savior just like you and me, and every single person ever conceived of a human mother and father. For she too had a sinful heart just like you and me.

But she was also unlike you and me in the fact that she, out of the millions of possibilities, she had been chosen, chosen by God for this special cause, to bear His Son. Mary again puts it this way in her hymn of praise: **FOR HE HAS REGARDED THE LOWLY STATE OF HIS MAIDSERVANT; FOR BEHOLD HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED. FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME, AND HOLY IS HIS NAME.**

We see that Mary was a child of the Old Testament. She knew her scriptures well. Almost every single line in her song of praise has a corresponding passage written somewhere in the Old Testament. When Mary spoke in praise to her Lord God she spoke the words of her God, the words of Scripture. She knew them by heart and they flowed freely from her heart to her tongue and out of her mouth off her lips. These verses of Mary’s song are found in Psalms, Genesis, Job, Isaiah and Micah. Mary’s knowledge of the Old Testament was thorough.

Mary, like her cousin Elizabeth, humbly acknowledges that this blessing of being chosen to be the mother of God’s Son, the Savior of the world, was not because of anything she had done. It was not because she had earned this calling by being so humble, obedient, chaste, pure and sinless. It was simply because of the undeserved love of her God. Mary is not making some proud, self-righteous claim that people should worship her when she says: **FOR BEHOLD HENCEFORTH ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED.** She simply is stating a fact, prophesying the truth. Down through all generations Mary has been called blessed because of this wonderful calling. Mary is not saying “from now on all generations will call me sinless, holy and pure” but “blessed”, meaning happy. The reason that all generations shall call Mary blessed and happy is because as Mary herself says: **FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR ME.**

**So MARY ALSO SHOWS US HOW TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS
II: WITH A HAPPY HEART OF JOY, GIVING ALL GLORY TO GOD FOR THE**

WONDERFUL THINGS HE HAS DONE FOR US

It is interesting to note that psychologists tell us that there is so much depression during holidays, especially Christmas. The holiday blues is a real serious dilemma in the lives of many people. The loss of loved ones feels more acute at this time. Loneliness sets in, the memories of past happier Christmases can cause tears and sorrow. For some the hectic nature of the season brings on more stress than usual and therefore relationships suffer between husband and wife; parents and children; fellow workers; classmates; teachers and students. Because of the hectic nature of the way we celebrate Christmas so many seem to be on edge for lack of sleep and lack of time to get everything done and we are less patient and understanding than usual. Have you noticed that in yourselves?

Some celebrate the holidays in a sinful way of overindulging in alcohol and partying and cause untold problems within the family. For others the actuality of all that was spent, facing the bills in January causes arguments, disagreements, depression and strife. WOW! What a depressing list!

But our Christmas celebration can be joy filled and happy not only now and next week, but also every week throughout the new year and beyond when our hearts and minds are focused upon Christ and the message of our salvation. God has chosen us to also bear and carry His Son, in our hearts; to have His Word, the proclamation of Jesus' sacrifice for us, His suffering, death and resurrection live in our hearts and carried out to the world. When the message of God's great love for all of us sinners is imparted to each of our hearts; when Christ and all He has done for us--beginning with the cradle and continuing through the cross to the empty tomb--when all of that is the center of our Christmas worship and celebration then the joy and happiness of Christmas will not end when the tree is taken down and the decorations are put away, but will ever live in our hearts.

In the second half of her song of praise:

MARY AGAIN SHOWS US HOW TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS III: BY PRAISING GOD FOR HIS ACTS OF MERCY HE HAS DONE FOR ALL BELIEVERS.

In verse 50 we read: **HIS MERCY IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.** When father and mother live in humble repentant faith in Jesus and loving obedience to His Word, and this same type of lifestyle is taught to their children through the Word, then this promise is fulfilled: **from one generation to another the Lord's mercy shall extend.** What a blessing of God's grace when several generations of one family is found in His Word, in His house faithfully living in and enjoying their salvation through Jesus. What eternal blessings they and future generations will have as they continue to teach each new generation the Good News of a Savior born to save us. May these words be an encouragement for us to continue to do this with our children and grandchildren.

Throughout this last portion of Mary's song of praise there is a contrasting picture being drawn. A Moral contrast; a Social contrast and a Spiritual contrast. Mary says that those who revere His name shall receive blessings from one generation to another; but those who are proud in their own imagination, look upon themselves as being the important ones, look to themselves and neglect God and His Word; they will be scattered. We read verses 51-53: **HE HAS SHOWN STRENGTH WITH HIS ARM; HE HAS SCATTERED THE PROUD IN THE IMAGINATION OF THEIR HEARTS. HE HAS PUT DOWN THE MIGHTY FROM THEIR THRONES, AND EXALTED THE LOWLY. HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS, AND THE RICH HE HAS SENT AWAY EMPTY.**

A moral contrast between the reverent, repentant faithful and the proud, self-centered unbeliever. **A social contrast** between the ones of low estate and the rulers of this world. **A spiritual contrast** between those who hunger and thirst after Christ's righteousness and those who believe themselves to be rich with their own good works.

These words of Mary came true in Jesus' day. The proud, the mighty rulers, the rich of His day didn't want anything to do with Jesus. To whom did Jesus turn? To whom did He bestow His blessings of forgiveness and salvation? Upon whom did Jesus perform His miracles? To the reverent faithful, the people of the streets, the ones of low estate who repented of their sins and longed for Jesus and believed in Him and His promises of forgiveness, everlasting life and salvation.

The proud Pharisees, the rich Sadducees, the powerful High Priests were not chosen as Jesus' disciples. It was the lowly fishermen, the despised tax collectors, the less educated ones that Jesus

called. He called the average, the ordinary. Those who thought themselves to be something would not listen.

What a marvelous lesson for us to learn as we rapidly approach another Christmas celebration. May the Holy Spirit fill us with **HUMBLE** hearts that simply believe this message of a virgin born Son of God; humbly stand in awe of this great miracle of time: God has become a human being in the person of Jesus, the Christ, the God-Man Savior.

May the Holy Spirit fill us with **HAPPY** hearts to acknowledge all of the wonderful things that God has done for us; sending His Son to suffer and die for us, to earn our salvation and for having chosen us to carry this Christ to the world.

And may the Holy Spirit fill us with **REPENTANT** hearts that lead us to realize that we have no righteousness of our own, but who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that Christ gives to us freely through His perfect life and His atoning death. Then generations to come will also call you and me **BLESSED---FOR HE WHO IS MIGHTY HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US.**

Amen.