

Luke 1:39-45 O, for a faith like Mary's!

Advent 4 December 20-21, 2009 (Children – No Sermonette, communion)

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen

God's Word about the great things He accomplishes is written in Luke 1:39-45

These are Your Words heavenly Father. We pray. Lord, as You dealt wonderfully with the virgin Mary in choosing her to be the mother of Your dearly loved Son, grant us grace in all humility to receive Your Word with hearts of faith and to rejoice in Jesus our Savior. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

In the Lutheran Church we hear very little about Jesus' mother, Mary. I suppose it is a reaction to what another church body falsely teaches about her. They teach that she had no sin and that's why the holy baby Jesus could live within her. Back 500 years ago, the church at Martin Luther's time gave Mary the title Queen of the Universe. I have seen that title: "Mary, Queen of the Universe" on a large shrine while traveling in Florida. It is also taught that Mary was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, that she is sitting next to her Son, Jesus, and that if anyone prays to her she will intercede with Him. Who would listen to His own mother? They have called Mary the co-redemptrix, meaning that along with Jesus, Mary can save people from hell. With these kinds of teachings that arose not from Scripture, but from 2,000 years of church traditions, it is no wonder that people drive over to Holy Hill Shrine and sit in the chapel dedicated to the Mary and say their prayers to her with confidence that she will bring blessing to their lives.

With so many false teachings floating around, it's no wonder that Lutheran preachers say little about Mary. Yet, rather than ignore her place in history and among all women as the mother of God's Son, we will read from Luke 1 and let Mary speak for herself about who she was and what she received by faith from God.

O, for a faith like Mary's!

First, hers was a faith that said, I don't deserve God's favor. Mary was happy just to be a person who believed in the coming Messiah. To be chosen to bring God's Son into the world by carrying Him as a baby inside her would be an honor far beyond what she could imagine. Mary said, [God] *"has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed."* v.48 God had her do something unique to the whole world. Yet, her faith was much like John the Baptist who said that he was not worthy to loosen Jesus' sandal strap. The Apostle Paul wrote in a similar fashion, calling himself the least of the Apostles and the chief of sinners. Yet, Mary's humility did not reject the promise of the angel Gabriel. When he said that she would have a child she asked how this was going to happen or basically, "what do I need to do? His answer was, "You don't need to do anything. The Holy Spirit will overshadow you, *so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*" (v.35)

Mary knew of no reason why God would choose her over other women. Certain things were needed. She had to have the royal bloodline of David and she had to be a virgin who was a believer. She was one among thousands of girls. She was willing to let God be God as far as why He had chosen her. Elizabeth called Mary the mother of [her] Lord. And so she was. Yet, Mary took no credit as if she had been in a contest and won the position to be Jesus' mother. She was as surprised as anyone that God in His grace had chosen her. She told Elizabeth, *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."* v.47-48 She admitted that she needed a Savior. She humbly gave honor to God alone. If someone would have tried to worship her or pray to her, she would have said, "This isn't about me. It's about my Son, who is God's Son. It's about God's gracious love to all of us in Jesus."

With her humble faith, Mary was willing to be used for whatever purpose God had in mind. She answered the angel, *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."*(v.38) Sometimes people may think that to be humble means to just sit back in a corner and not do anything. But, that is not true humility. The angel told Mary, *"Nothing is impossible with God."*(v.37) If God promised a miracle inside Mary, she was not going to stand in His way. Mary was willing to be God's instrument. In a sermon on these verses, Martin Luther described Mary as a vessel

that held a treasure. It's an honor to be the vessel, but it's the treasure that's most important.

Luther went on to say, "[Mary] was not crucified for us, nor did she die for us or pray for us while on a cross." God had a specific purpose for her, we dare not go beyond His purpose, which will only take away from the Savior's work. So, we also need to see ourselves as God's servants. He has made us His own in Christ. He has given us time and abilities that He wants to use for good. And when we're done with life, it won't be Mary or our works that save us, but only Jesus' innocent death on the cross. Whenever people want to praise us for something we've done, we are to say, To God be the honor! He worked good through us.

Luther commented that Mary realized she was like a tool being used by God's powerful hand. She said, "*The Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is His name.*" (v.49) With a few words she cast down what the world thinks as important: the proud rulers, and the rich whom God sends away empty. Mary's greatness was not in herself, but in God, who lifts up people who are humble. God fills the spiritually hungry. For her everything good came from God and so her praise would return to God alone. If we have a faith like Mary, we will do the same.

Second, by faith Mary made God's promises her own. After the angel told the news to Mary, she immediately believed God's Word. Elizabeth said, "*Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!*" (v.45) Earlier in the service we heard the song, Mary Did You Know? That's a good question. What did Mary know about the promises of God? She didn't know that Jesus would walk on water or how many healings He would do in a day. Yet, she was expecting God to fulfill His promise to send the Savior. She also knew the Savior would be a king to save His people. She didn't know all the details, but she knew enough to know that once Jesus was born, she was holding in her arms her Savior and the Savior of the world.

God had prepared her with a wonderful knowledge of the Scripture. We can see that in her words in the Magnificat. Mary's words have references to many of the Psalms, especially Psalm 98. Also, her words are similar to the words of Hanna, the mother of Old Testament Samuel. Mary didn't have a humble faith by living apart from Scripture. She knew it by heart. When we think how Jesus humbly grew up as a child, it would have been Mary teaching Him in His early years from the Psalms and other Bible lessons.

If we want a faith like Mary's, we need to be close to God's Word and pray for His guidance. In the Word we will better learn that God keeps His promises for us in Christ. We won't know every detail of our future. But we know that God will lift us up when we are down. He will fill us up when we are empty. He has chosen us in Christ to be with Him forever in heaven. He has chosen us to bear, not His Son, but the treasure of the Gospel. God truly loved all people and through Jesus, who is perfect, who is the King of the universe, who earned salvation for all people by giving His innocent life on the cross, we have eternal life! God has blessed us with His Good News. Like Mary, running off to Elizabeth, we should feel honored that God gives us opportunities tell the news of Jesus to children, adults, family, friends and strangers. Christ, our Savior has died for our sins, for Mary's sins, and for the sins of the whole world.

Only God knows what great things He will accomplish through our lives. Mary was privileged to have Elizabeth explain some things to her. Like Mary our focus does not need to be within, but on Jesus. We should live remembering the great things that God has already done for us in Christ. In time, Mary would be tempted to doubt God's goodness. She would need the encouragement which she found in Elizabeth. God has blessed us with the rich encouragement of His Word, and of His holy Supper, and in our fellowship with Christians. Our challenges are many, but with God nothing is impossible. So trust in His promises. This is what we can learn from Mary, not the sinless queen of the universe, but a humble young woman of faith, whom God used to accomplish great things. Amen.