**Luke 1:39-56**

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.” **46** And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, **47**  and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, **48** for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; **49** for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. **50** And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. **51**  He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; **52**  he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **53** he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. **54** He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, **55**  as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” **56** And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

**“Blessed By His Presence”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. “Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come…” This phrase is the opening line we prayed for the Collect of the Day. It is what both started and now ends the season of Advent. When God stirs up things by His power, there is certainly glorious ways he has done it. God stirred up creation by His Word of love that declared, “Let there be light!” He stirred up a sinful world by judgment of the flood keeping life safe in an Ark. The Lord stirred up deliverance again for the Jews from slavery in Egypt to take them to the Promised Land. God at last even stirred up the false stability of Israel by exile and destruction to prepare them for something more.

One can see why we pray for God to stir up His power and come. However, what God stirs up in nature, by judgment, and His commandments is not the only glory. When Adam and Even fell into sin, God’s stirred up the promise of a Savior telling Satan, “…He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The Gospel is different from the other ways God has stirred things up in life. It is a long-term glory coasting along the currents of a sinful world. When the fullness of this glory came, even Mary had questions. Yet, the Angel Gabriel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy— the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). When Mary visits Elizabeth, we really have two different glories from God. The lesser meets the greater and there is great joy. How blessed are we when God still stirs up life by the presence of Christ.

God comes with the presence of good news to stir things up in life. The last time God did such stirring was by the prophet Malachi, which was over four hundred years prior to Elizabeth and Mary. Plenty of shifting took place with earthly kingdoms, religious developments, and social changes. God had his hand in it all by His divine providence. However, it was hidden and many labeled that time, “The Intertestamental Period” or the time between the Old and New Testament. Yet, when Mary goes to Elizabeth, God closes that gap of four hundred years. Elizabeth a barren woman of years with a priest for a husband, now carries a son who was the last prophet. This witnessed to the old and fading glory for Israel. In contrast, Mary is a young woman, conceives without any man, and now carries the Son of God. This witnessed to the new and eternal Israel God made for all people.

God stirring up His power is looking for His glorious acts at the present. For us this might feel more like the intertestamental period. Yes, we want miracles that free us from the burdens we bear in this life. God surely can do this if He wills, but it is a lesser and hidden kind of glory. A greater glory comes to greet us as we now draw near to Christmas. It is that God has become man and it is more than what any can conceive. Barren woman might later bare a child, but the virgin birth goes beyond what we know of life. God wanted to come into this world and intervene in our lives against sin, death, and the Devil. He had to do it in a way that would not scare us by His glory, but also had to carry our burden by being fully man. Rather than passing miracles for a time, the eternal miracle resides in Christ. St. Paul tells the baptized, “The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).

The blessedness God brings is joyous life that stirs beneath the surface. Elizabeth received this newness when John leaped in her womb and as a gift from the Holy Spirit. She told Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” None other was the Mother of God. No other womb carried the sinless Lord sent to save sinners. This blessedness to be the Virgin did not from who Mary is. She later sang without shame that the Mighty One, “…has looked on the humble estate of his servant.” Mary came from a nowhere town of Nazareth. She had no earthly glory or some special “in” with God. The Lord was her Savior like the rest of those in a sinful world. Except, all generations would call her blessed, because beneath the flesh of this daughter of Eve God dwelt in His glory. A perfect body prepared for the perfect Son of God who was the Second Adam. This is why John before birth leaped with joyful faith at His presence, since Jesus was the perfect sacrifice.

God stirs up the question, “What makes life blessed?” The Church has the answer only because Christ dwells in her by His Word and Sacraments. It is not a blessedness based on who we are as if that takes precedence. St. Paul says, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight…” (Romans 3:20a.) Beneath the surface, our hearts always stir in God’s presence to confess that we are sinners. Blessedness also is not on the surface of what we have in health, wealth, or reputation. Those are passing glories that moth and rust destroy along with every enemy we fear in this earthly life. True blessedness in the Church, like Mary, is alone in the presence of Christ. Since Jesus was born of the Virgin, His life was able to stir up the right payment for sinners by the cross. We now stand right in the presence of God. Baptism into His Name leaps with joy from the Holy Spirit at work in us. Beneath the surface of His called servants, Jesus speaks forgiveness to His people. He takes no offense even to be under bread and wine for the greatest gift is this humble Savior present to eat and drink.

Being blessed is now life stirred up for any to believe in God’s promising Word. Mary would have arrived to greet Elizabeth about less than a week after being pregnant. There was no physical change she could sense, but simple trust sent her on her way. Elizabeth praised this gracious miracle from God saying, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Instead of ignoring it or taking offense over how it came into her life. Mary received this promising Word with peace and confidence. For her to take charge of the situation would have meant certain failure. Mary lived a life of praise hidden in sacrifice rather than power for success. Her blessing was to glorify God who would carry it to completion for, “…He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.”

This same blessed life now stirs up in the Church for any to believe what God promises. As Gabriel gave the Word to Mary, so whenever we hear Christ’s Word preached and given He is present. Such faith in the Lord is not a work of man, a product of culture, or a temporary success. It is a gift, a miracle, an act of God’s grace by the Holy Spirit. God stirs things up to meet us in our meekness and distress. As Luther states, “You must not only think and speak of lowliness, but come into it, sink into it, utterly helpless, that God alone may save you…For this reason we are Christians and have the Gospel, that we may fall into distress and lowliness and that God thereby may have his work in us” (Christmas Book, 21). God can stir things up in ways that shock a sinful world by the Law. Yet, Advent takes us from the lesser to the greater glory. God comes in our flesh born to save. How blessed are we when God still stirs up life by the presence of Christ. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpassing all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.