**Luke 1:39-56 (ESV)**

**39** 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.

**“A Reason To Rejoice”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. The miracle of Christmas and the miracle of the cross are a mystery. An empty tomb at the resurrection is no more shocking than the womb of a virgin housing the Son of God. Christianity from start to finish is a miracle for a sinful world. On this last Sunday in Advent, God sets apart a special place for women in His plan of salvation. Like the women who were first to witness the empty tomb. Two women were the first to share in the good news of Christ coming into the world. God has always cared for the daughters of Eve knowing they bring forth humanity.

 Yet, how does this look today? A politically correct society will not allow for a discussion on gender. The Devil tricks us to play down the difference of men and women, as if it does not matter, but it has always mattered to God. The very basis for humanities continuation came by those Words against the Devil saying, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Where the sons of Adam, men, tend to live by reason, which is not always reasonable and what overlooked the empty tomb. God turns to women with the gift of taking upon human flesh. It is comfort for those who bring forth the life of sinful humanity. The incarnation is the reason we all can rejoice at Christmas.

 What comes of boasting when God gives His blessing by grace? Zechariah had nothing to say after he questioned the Word proclaimed by the angel. Joseph had his own troubles over how to handle a situation far outside of his control. These men would come around to God’s undeserved favor, but the blessing first belonged to their wives. Except, how different were these two women! Elizabeth bore the pain of barrenness. Mary bore the pain of a child while still being a Virgin. Elizabeth was already six months pregnant. Mary was just starting out in pregnancy. Beauty was fading in the face of Elizabeth. Beauty was surfacing in the face of Mary. How different were they. Yet, God’s grace rested upon both. Mary had the greater glory, but Elizabeth received the right to boast saying, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

 Since all are born in the sinful flesh, pride wants to push out the blessing of God’s grace. It gladly steals away what God gives and even uses it against our neighbor. The trend of this sinful world is to glorify self. Mary as the mother of God could have demanded reverence above all others. However, Luther remarks, “Mary will cut the ground from under all arrogant people…That is the first virtue, great humility. Men and women everywhere ought to form a picture of this in their hearts and be horrified because of their proud and obstinate minds…So arrogant have they become, even though they are but poor, miserable beggars” (Postils Vol. 7 344) Mary did not boast in her nature, beauty, or success for the Savior was the blessing for all women. In the same way, what baptism gives is not our work, but God’s work by the Gospel for sinners. As St. John said, “And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (John 1:16).

 Why is it granted to us to have the presence of God as our blessing? Elizabeth recognized this gift in the greeting of Mary. The child leapt in her womb over hearing good news from the Word become flesh. No one else could tell, but the mother of John said, “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” This was a kind of rejoicing far exceeding mere pregnancy. God had come to deliver His people as promised long ago. All of life was changing by the presence of Mary’s child. As the prophet Micah stated, “And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.” Elizabeth recognized her Lord hidden in the womb. This woman was the opposite of doubting Thomas. Jesus later said to that man, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

 If life in the womb is up for debate, the presence of God will hardly be a blessing. Sadly, children died by a shooting last week. All have concerns about how to stop such killing. Yet, millions have silently gone away that none will ever see on TV. What value is there in life by killing the life God gives? The child of Elizabeth leaps in the womb to repent over such trickery fallen especially upon women. The child of Mary comes to proclaim forgiveness even for the murder of one’s own child. Infant baptism is a comfort to confess that all human life has value by God’s grace. It happens not by what we see in a person, but by trust in what Christ speaks for the smallest sinner. Like Elizabeth, the Lord greets us today by Word and Sacrament. This is more than life, but God able to deliver us from the darkness. Plenty passed by Mary as they do the church today, but for those who hear the greeting of salvation given from God’s Son. It is a blessing of the Holy Spirit to say, “Why is this granted to me?”

 How can we have such blessing from God in such bad times? It surely is not because everything goes our way. It might even seem to go in the wrong direction. Elizabeth knew the child of Mary was to face the darkness that fell upon Eve and all the children of women ever since. No son of Adam won such a battle, but where man failed. Jesus would prevail as promised by God. This was the very reason why Elizabeth’s own son, John, was sent “to prepare the way” for this Lord. She gave Mary the answer for bad times, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” What God accomplished by the incarnation would carry its way to the cross. It is there where Mary’s song was not merely over her sinless child in the womb, but God suffering and dying to save a sinful world. In losing her son, which would be the worst moment for any mother. The Son of God gave this woman, Mary, a reason to sing Easter morning, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

 Lutherans notice the bad times pretty well because we take serious sin, death, and the Devil. It is also time at Christmas to take serious the confession of our faith on how God justifies sinners, to hope in God’s work by Word and Sacrament in a sinful world, and to sing with all the saints against the gates of hell because we have Jesus. Mary is the mother of God and no other woman can claim this glory. Yet, Christ gives all the reason to rejoice for when a woman said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:27-28). This is the treasure for any mother to take time to teach the Word to her children. This is the strength, which sustains and protects all conceived in sin. This is the richness on the Last Day when a sinful creation receives Christ as Lord and Savior. “And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.” The incarnation is the reason we all can rejoice at Christmas. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.