

Luke 1:39–56  
Visitation  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
July 2, 2023

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

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today, on July 2nd, the church celebrates the “Visitation,” when Mary, the mother of our Lord, went to visit her relative, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary had just learned that she herself was pregnant. Jesus had already been conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. He was there, God in the flesh, in the womb of Mary.

Elizabeth, too, had experienced a miraculous conception. She was much too old to conceive a child naturally. But God worked a miracle, as He had for so many matriarchs of Israel. Elizabeth, in her old age, would miraculously give birth to John the Baptist. Mary, in her virginity, would miraculously give birth to Jesus, the Son of the Most High God. Nothing is impossible with God.

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, he also said that her relative, Elizabeth, was in the sixth month of pregnancy. Mary quickly went to the hill country, to a town in Judea, to visit her relative Elizabeth. These two had an awful lot in common. The angel Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, announced the birth of both of their sons. Both sons were conceived miraculously. Both sons were crucial to God’s plan of salvation for mankind. John the Baptist would be the greatest of those born among women (Matt 11:11), but Jesus, also born of woman, is greater by far. John is the best man, but Jesus is the bridegroom. John proclaims the word of God, but Jesus is the Word of God. John the Baptist would go before the Lord to prepare His way. He would preach to the people repentance for the forgiveness of their sins. And then

comes Jesus: the Word of God made flesh, the Lamb of God, who actually takes away the sins of the world. The ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus go together from the beginning. No wonder Mary went to visit Elizabeth right away. All of a sudden, these women of God had so much more in common.

Mary entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Zechariah's wife, Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the preborn John the Baptist leaped in her womb because of the joyful occasion. John, the prophet of God who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (1:15) was now for the first time in the presence of His LORD. What else could he do but leap for joy, like a calf coming out of the stall (Mal 4:2)? John the Baptist, even before his birth, recognized his LORD and Savior and received Him with joy. If there are ever any doubts about the humanity of those in the womb, this account settles it. The Word of God is always working, even on the most lowly little humans. The preborn John the Baptist didn't rationally understand what was going on. He couldn't see what was happening. He wasn't even born yet! But He leaps in his mother's womb for joy upon meeting Jesus Christ in His mother's womb. Even the unborn can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit. When she heard the greeting of Mary, Elizabeth cried out: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" If you're a convert from Roman Catholicism or if you've watched enough movies, you'll recognize Elizabeth's line here as part of the "Hail Mary," one of the most common prayers in the Roman Catholic Church. Notice, though, how Elizabeth is not praising Mary for Mary's sake. Elizabeth is not saying Mary is blessed in herself because of something she has done, or even for who she is as the mother of God. Elizabeth says: "Blessed is she who believed there would be a

fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the LORD.” Mary is called blessed because Mary believed God’s Word.

Later, in Luke 11[:27–28], Jesus was speaking to the crowds and a woman cried out: “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” to which Jesus responds: “Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.” Why is Mary blessed? It’s not because of who she is in herself or because of what she’s done; it’s because she heard the Word of God and kept it. Mary is blessed because of the good things God did for her and through her, and because of the faith by which she trusted in God’s Word. Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. So it goes throughout salvation history, even today. You are blessed not because of who you are in yourself or because of what you’ve done. You are blessed because of the good things God has done for you and because of the faith God works in you to trust His Word. To be blessed is to believe the promises of God’s Word. Mary is a model of such humble belief.

Elizabeth knows what happens when God’s Word is not believed. Her husband, Zechariah, was made mute because he did not believe the angel Gabriel’s words, which would be fulfilled in their time (v. 20). Zechariah didn’t believe that all things are possible with God, so he was deprived of his speaking. But Mary is blessed, because she believed God’s promise. Zechariah does not believe, so he becomes mute. Mary believes, and so she breaks out into song, into the “Magnificat.” We sing Mary’s song of praise, the “Magnificat,” everytime we pray the order of vespers, the evening service of the church. The title “Magnificat” comes from the word in that first line, “my soul *magnifies* the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” As a response to the wonderful things God has worked in Mary, she responds by magnifying, or

exalting everything the LORD has done. Mary, like all believers, extols God's graciousness, His might, and His truth.

Mary praises God's grace for his looking upon the humble estate of his servant. Like the rest of fallen humanity, Mary has nowhere to look but up, to the LORD. He who is mighty does great things for those who are weak. He looks upon our humble estate and in Jesus Christ He exalts us. The LORD is mighty. He has shown strength with His arm by scattering the proud in the imagination of their hearts. As God says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1: He will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning He will thwart (1 Cor 1:19). The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor 1:25). God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God (1 Cor 1:27–29). Of course, we see this mostly clearly at the cross, where God took that which looks utterly weak and foolish and used it to accomplish the salvation of the world. We have nothing, God has everything. Mary is blessed because the mighty one has done great things for her. You, too, dear Christian, are blessed because the mighty one has done great things for you. Because of the Mighty One, Christ Jesus was in Mary's womb. Because of the Mighty One, you are in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30).

The Mighty One has shown strength with His arm; He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. Our LORD is all-mighty, and He comes to those who are weak and needy, to those in distress. The Son of God became vulnerable and weak in the womb of His mother Mary, all that He might die a shameful death on the cross, looking weak before all the

world. But again, what the world considers weak, God uses in a powerful way. He who is exalted over all becomes weak, that He might raise up the weak and exalt them above all things. That's what God did by becoming man, it's how God deals with Mary, and it's how God works today as well. If you're honest with yourself, you'll recognize how weak and frail you truly are. Your fallen human nature is tempted by the shallowest desires and arguments. Your sinful flesh so often caves under the slightest pressure from outside forces. Yet, God works through what is weak to show forth His power over all things. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). God so often demonstrates how His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Finally, Mary's song, the Magnificat, praises the LORD for His truthfulness in keeping His promises. "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever." God promised Abraham: "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:1-3). In the offspring, or the seed, of Abraham, through his descendant, the nations would be blessed. Jesus is the Son of David, the son of Abraham, the seed of the woman, who came to crush the head of the serpent. God's children go astray, but the LORD always remembers His mercy in Christ Jesus. The LORD proclaims: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex 34:6). God is faithful to his promises, then and now and forever.

Mary stayed with her relative Elizabeth about three months, so just enough time to be there for the birth of John the Baptist. She then returned to her home, and half a year later, our LORD Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the "Visitation," was

more than just a friendly catching-up with a relative. It was more than mutual consolation in difficult, yet miraculous circumstances. The Visitation is mostly about our LORD's visiting His people to redeem them. God took on our human flesh and blood in Mary's womb. As a preborn child, Jesus was already creating faith in those around Him. He was already eliciting a joyful response from those He came into contact with, including preborn John the Baptist. Our Lord visited His people in Mary's womb, and He continues visiting you, His people, even now in His Word and Sacraments. As we gather here in the name of Jesus, our LORD is with us. We leap for joy in His presence, extolling our God for His grace that forgives us our sins, for His almighty power that rescues us from the hand of our enemies, and for the fact that He is faithful to His promises of old, and to His promise concerning our everlasting future with Him. "He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:24). In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.