

Luke 1:39–56  
Visitation  
Marienkapelle, Landstuhl-Atzel  
July 2, 2024

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,

How appropriate that we meet this evening in the Mary chapel here in Landstuhl for this great Marian festival of the Church: the Feast of the Visitation. The chapel we're in right now goes back to an oath made at the end of World War II. A Roman Catholic priest (Stamer) of Landstuhl promised that if the city was preserved from destruction, they would build a chapel to honor Mary. Sure enough, by the grace of God the city was spared and in 1953, this little chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima (by Bishop Isidor Markus Emanuel). Like all Marian festivals though, the Visitation is not so much about Mary but about Jesus. Tonight, I assume for the first time in its history, this chapel dedicated to Mary in the hill country of Landstuhl is being sanctified by our little Lutheran congregation. Even at this altar, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Mary's son, is coming to us in His Body and Blood, assumed from the Virgin Mary. With that Body and Blood He is feeding us for the forgiveness of sins. What better way to truly honor Mary than by honoring her son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by receiving the forgiveness of sins in His Body and Blood tonight!

The Feast of the Visitation is all about a visit. Pregnant Mary visited her pregnant relative, Elizabeth. Mary had just conceived Jesus in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit and Elizabeth was already six months pregnant with John the Baptist. There's

nothing quite like two pregnant women bonding with each other and with the children they are bearing. And there's nothing quite like a visit: laid-back, undemanding, stress free, a time to converse with family or friends. That's what a visit *should* be. It's what visiting is all about: time to catch up and time to spend with loved ones.

From a worldly perspective, visiting is a waste of time, especially with so much work to be done. But the world doesn't understand the ways of God. The one who upholds the universe by the word of His power also takes a rest on the Sabbath day. Our God is a God who loves enjoyment of the little things, taking a step back to marvel at the seemingly insignificant. Our God is a God who delights in conversing and communing with us. Our God is a God who visits us. The Feast of the Visitation, Mary's visit to her relative Elizabeth, is a picture of God's visiting His people in Jesus Christ.

When Mary entered the house of her relative Elizabeth and Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, baby John the Baptist leaped inside Elizabeth's womb. Where Jesus is, there is the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" You might recognize this line from that medieval prayer, the Hail Mary. "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." That's what the Angel Gabriel said to Mary. "Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus." That's what Elizabeth says. Elizabeth calls Mary blessed and it's true. Mary is blessed by the LORD in that she's chosen to bear the Son of God. As Elizabeth says: "And why is this granted to me that the mother of my LORD should come to me?" Here, Elizabeth confesses exactly who Jesus is: the LORD. He is the Son of God and Mary's son in one person. God is His Father and Mary is his mother. Mary is

the mother of our LORD and for that in itself she is blessed. There's not another role quite like it.

Later on, Elizabeth says: "blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the LORD." Elizabeth is blessed because she believed the LORD's promise that in her old age she would conceive a son. Mary is blessed because she trusted the LORD's message that the Virgin would conceive and bear a son, and that she herself was that virgin. Everyone who hears the word of God and keeps it, holds onto it, believes it, trusts it, that person is blessed. In Luke 11, a woman in the crowd said to Jesus: "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" Jesus says: "Blessed indeed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" Mary is blessed because she trusts in the LORD and keeps His word. Elizabeth is blessed because she trusts in the LORD. You, too, are just as blessed when you trust in God's Word, when you believe His promises and hold onto them for dear life.

Baby John the Baptist leaped for joy in the womb of Elizabeth when she heard the greeting of Mary. He leaped for joy not because of Mary but because of the baby in Mary's womb, our LORD Jesus Christ. Mary is the new Ark of the Covenant. She is the vessel who bears the God Man. But it is the God-Man, Jesus, who sanctifies Mary, not the other way around. The gold and wood of the Ark of the Covenant were ordinary gold and wood. But the Word of God sanctified that gold and wood. It was gold and wood set apart to carry within it and upon it the presence of God. Mary's flesh and blood is no different than your flesh and blood. She is man the way you are man, sharing in human nature. But the Word of God takes her flesh and blood and sanctifies it, setting it apart for

a holy use, that God might enter creation through that flesh and blood. The Holy Spirit came upon her and the Most High overshadowed her and she conceived of the Holy Spirit. Mary became the vessel to bring the presence of God, Jesus Christ, into this world. In that sense, she is the Ark of the Covenant, the fulfillment of what the Ark of the Covenant was pointing to.

Consider 2 Samuel 6. A man named Uzzah stumbled on the Ark so the LORD struck him dead. King David was angry and afraid of the LORD. He said: “How can the Ark of the LORD come to me?” What does Elizabeth say? “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” “How can the Ark of the LORD come to me?” So David put the Ark of the Covenant in the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite. And the Ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.” Mary, the Ark of the Covenant stayed with Elizabeth and her household for three months, until the birth of John the Baptist. When David heard that the Ark of God blessed the household of Obed-edom, he brought up the Ark to the city of David with rejoicing, sacrificing an ox and a fattened animal every six steps. And David danced before the LORD with all his might, with shouting and the sound of the horn. John the Baptist leaped for joy in his mother’s womb. The parallels are tremendous. Mary is the Ark of the Covenant and Jesus is the presence of God with His people, the one who sits upon the mercy seat. Upon the altar of the cross He sacrifices for us His flesh born of Mary and He sprinkles us with the blood of God.

Jesus entered this world through Mary's flesh and blood and He remains united to us in that flesh and blood for eternity. In that flesh and blood He lived for you, in that flesh and blood He took upon Himself your sins. In that flesh and blood He died for you and in that flesh and blood He rose again from the dead. He took it with Him to Heaven, and He continues feeding you with that flesh and blood even tonight in the Lord's Supper. Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people. In Jesus Christ, God comes to visit you. He wants to be with you, not as a means to an end. You are the end itself. He wants you: body, flesh and blood, soul and spirit. He gave up His life for you. He loves you. In the bread, Jesus gives you His flesh to eat and in the wine He gives you His blood to drink. The bread and wine become sacred vessels, like the Ark of the Covenant. God takes ordinary bread and ordinary wine and He uses them to bring the flesh and blood of Jesus in a miraculous way into your bodies. That's how He visits you always even to the end of the age, when He will return to this world with that same flesh and blood to raise you up in your flesh and blood. Then He will come not for a little visit, not for a moment, or for a few months or years, but then we will be with Him always, in flesh and blood, world without end. 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.