

“Leaping for Joy”

I ran into something quite fascinating as I studied this text. St. Luke – when speaking of Mary going up “into the hill country” to visit Elizabeth – uses words/phrases that parallel the movement of the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem in the OT.

You may recall that the ark of the covenant was that box-like piece of furniture that was placed in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, and then the Temple. It was the place where the Lord promised to dwell in the midst of His people – and so it was carried before Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness – and it went before them to drive out their enemies as they entered into the Promised Land.

Now, here in our text, Mary is like the ark of the covenant – the place the Lord has chosen to dwell. You see, the Son of God has become incarnate – God has taken on human flesh as Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. In other words, God is present in the midst of His people – the Son of God is the baby in Mary’s womb.

When Mary goes up to visit Elizabeth – it is a picture of God dwelling in the midst of His people. Look at Elizabeth and listen to her, and she is like the Church – gathered around the ark, gathered around the Lord – rejoicing that the Lord is with her.

Jesus, the Christ, the Promised Savior – comes into the midst of His Church, and Elizabeth’s baby “leaped in her womb.” Elizabeth, the Church, is “filled with the Holy Spirit.” The Church sings, “blessed are you.”

The Church’s song is full of the blessings that come from the Lord – chief of which is the blessing of sins forgiven. This is why the Savior comes. This is why our Heavenly Father sends His only-begotten Son into the flesh – to bear the sin of the whole world to the Cross of Calvary – and there, once and for all – pay the price to redeem sinners.

And where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation! Indeed, blessed are those who’s sins are forgiven!

The Church, Elizabeth, sings that Mary is blessed. “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” The blessing of Mary’s womb is the blessing of the Savior – Mary’s Savior, Elizabeth’s Savior, the Church’s Savior – your Savior! Blessed are YOU that the Lord should come to YOU. But there’s more!

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” The Lord’s word spoken to Mary was unbelievable – that she, a virgin, would conceive and bear a child. That’s a miracle in and of itself – but this is no ordinary child – this is the fulfillment of the Savior promised already to Adam and Eve after the fall into sin (all the way back in Genesis 3:15).

Mary is blessed – not because she is some kind of a super-Christian – but because the Lord caused her to believe the message delivered to her by the angel Gabriel. In the same way, God the Holy Spirit enables all Christians to believe what is spoken to them by the Lord.

You are blessed to hear, and believe the Lord’s promises – that you are born again through the water and Word of Holy Baptism – that in Christ, you are redeemed – that even though you die, yet shall you live – that when the Savior comes again on the Last Day, He will resurrect your body and take you to live with Him eternally in heaven.

You are blessed to confess, and live, like Mary, who said – “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your Word.” (St. Luke 1:38)

Mary and Jesus enter into the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth sings: “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.”

Two women, Elizabeth and Mary – and their two sons, still in the womb – John the Baptist and Jesus. This reminds me of two other boys in the womb – Esau & Jacob. Their mother was also barren when the Lord blessed her with twins.

It's interesting that the word used here when John the Baptist "leaped" in Elizabeth's womb, is the same word used for Esau & Jacob as they "struggled" in Rebekah's womb (Gen. 25:22). Not knowing what all this "leaping" was about, the Lord revealed to her that she was pregnant with twins, and then adds – "the older shall serve the younger."

Normally it is the older son who receives the promised inheritance – but the Lord chooses Jacob to be the one through whom He will send the Promised Savior. The Lord often does things in ways that we don't expect. Choosing Jacob shows that this promise is not a matter of obligation or rights – but His working by grace – in unexpected, and undeserved ways.

And so, it is that John the Baptist (the older) will serve the younger (Jesus). John is the forerunner of the Christ, preparing His way – and the way of the Lord is one of grace. His way is miraculous, and unexpected, and undeserved.

Man has the notion that we should have to climb the ladder to reach God – but God descends to dwell with us. Man thinks that God should choose the elite, the best – but He chooses the lowly and the despised.

Mary is blessed – not because she is a super-Christian – but because the Lord has chosen her. Elizabeth is blessed because the Lord has come to her. You are blessed – because God descends to dwell with you – because He chooses you, a poor miserable sinner, to be His beloved child.

The lesson for us today is that like Mary we believe what the Lord has promised us – even when it seems impossible. And that we, the Church, like Elizabeth – rejoice that the Lord comes to us and showers us with His grace.

This Christmas we will once again sing praises to God that He has kept His promise and sent our Savior to be born for us – for our salvation.

With John the Baptist we leap for joy – because the Lord has not abandoned us – He comes to us. He doesn't give us what our sins deserve – but He graciously forgives and restores us. He gives us our Father's inheritance. He comes to save us and bring us to our heavenly, and eternal home.

Blessed are you who believe that the Lord fulfills all His promises to you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.