

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Advent 4C
December 19, 2021
Luke 1:39-56

Leaping for Joy

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." " (Luke 1:39-45 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

To a world in need of joy, God's Word delivers it to us today. To those struggling to find any joy in the midst of trials and tribulations, the Lord Jesus visits us and brings us that joy. And that joy is found in the repentance and faith that He works in us. With His Word and His work falling on our ears, we have every reason to leap for joy. Indeed, Elizabeth knew such joy. But in her advanced age and condition, her leap probably wasn't very high. And her unborn son knew it too though his leaping was a bit confined. And their reason for leaping was a visit by a young woman who is also pregnant. And while Elizabeth and Mary undoubtedly hugged and joyfully jumped up and down, there was much more to this visit than the mere celebration of life.

You see, both of these women are unlikely candidates for pregnancy. One is old and barren and the other is a virgin. And yet both are pregnant, as promised by angels, and pregnant with the two most important figures of all time: St. John the Baptist, whom our Lord calls the greatest of those born of women, and our Lord God, Jesus Christ.

So, when Mary enters the house and greets Elizabeth, the sound of her greeting is heard by baby John, in the womb, and he does a joyful little leap! Remember, the angel had said that John would be filled with the Spirit even in his mother's womb. So, when Mary greets Elizabeth, the Spirit causes John to recognize that Jesus was there, too.

So, John leaps, and Elizabeth too is filled with the Holy Spirit. She tells Mary: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" Mary, you have been given a great honor, to bear the Savior of the world. I mean, I am honored to bear the forerunner of the Lord, but you get to give birth to the Lord himself! What a wonderful blessing!

Elizabeth continues: “And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Hear the humble faith in Elizabeth’s words. She realizes that she is not worthy of such a visitation. And at the same time, she realizes that her Lord is coming to her, bringing great blessing. Such humble faith is truly the work of the Holy Spirit.

By God grace, you too have the humility and the faith of an Elizabeth. You recognize that you are not worthy to have God grace you with His presence. You know you are a sinner—you confessed that earlier in the service. You and I don’t deserve to have our Lord come to us with His blessing. It is purely by His grace and His mercy that He does.

And you have Spirit-wrought faith, as well. As with Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart, through the gospel, so that you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. You know that that little child came as your brother, in the flesh, so that He could do the only job that would save us. He came to do the Father’s will, to keep God’s law perfectly on your behalf and to offer the one perfect sacrifice that atones for all your sins, to suffer and die a sinner’s death on the cross, taking the punishment that the law requires and that we all deserve. He came to be our peace and our life, shown when He rose victorious over sin and death, granting us blessing and joy in their place.

Yes, when Jesus is present, you get all of these blessings with Him. This is enough to make someone leap for joy, as Elizabeth tells Mary: “For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”

Then Elizabeth has one more word for Mary: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Faith—that is what we’re seeing here, all around. The faith that Elizabeth had to know that this was no ordinary child Mary was bringing into the room, it was the Lord Himself. And Elizabeth commends Mary for her faith, that she, Mary, believed the great things the angel had told her about the Son she would bear.

Dear friends, this meeting of the moms is a meeting of two great women of faith. Both Mary and Elizabeth stand out as wonderful examples for us. They believe the Lord’s words, and they joyfully receive His gifts. The Holy Spirit will work such a Mary-and-Elizabeth faith in you, too.

So, you see, there are a lot of miracles in today’s Gospel. The way that both Elizabeth and Mary became pregnant was, of course, miraculous. But also, the way that they both believed and rejoiced in the good news of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—that too is a miracle. Even little John got in on the believing-and-rejoicing act. Any time anyone is given the gift of faith and joy in the Lord—that is a miracle of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, working in our hearts, creating a saving faith and a blessed joy. And the great thing is, you and I have the same good news and the same Holy Spirit at work in our hearts today.

So today is not really about Elizabeth, Mary, and John. It’s really about Jesus. It’s about Jesus visiting with forgiveness, life, and salvation. It’s about Jesus bringing great joy. For blessed are those who hear and believe what God says, who trust God’s Word. Blessed is he who believes

that what the Lord has said to him will be accomplished. Of course, that is easier said than done.

Still, consider what the Lord has said to you. He has said: "You are Mine. I gave you My Name when you were baptized into Me - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I claim you." He has said: "I forgive you all your sins." He has said: "Take, eat this is My Body. Take, drink, this is My Blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. I am in you and you are in Me. I am with you always." He has said: "You are my precious little lamb, for whom I laid down My Life, and no one shall pluck you from My Hand." He has said: "You are my beloved child, perfect and without sin, spotless, and blameless and the gates of Hell shall not overcome you."

Yes, Elizabeth greeted Mary and called her blessed. And so she is. For God had chosen her to bear the Savior of the world. Her Savior is your Savior. He turns everything upside down as He reverses sin's curse, by taking that curse upon Himself and being the sacrifice in your place. He thus forgives your sins and gives you new life in Him. And as that Savior invites you to His table to give Himself to you, He invites you to rejoice in His mercy now and forever. His words are, and will be, fulfilled, as surely as Mary bore a Son and gave Him the name Jesus. And where Jesus is, there is joy to leap about.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener