

ADVENT MIDWEEK VESPERS 1

Luke 1:39-55

From now on all generations will call me blessed.

How many of us when we get something new or accomplish something can't help but prance like the peacock with feathers in full regalia? How often aren't Pastors like myself a little too concerned with the number of "nice sermons" we get after the service? How often don't we as a church body look for glory in numbers, good press, or some other visible sign? We all want to be members of the body of Christ, but who here seeks to be the parts that go unseen and lack glory? Mop the hall, mow the lawn, stuff the mailbox—I won't get in *Forward in Christ* or the bulletin for that, give me something a little more visible and worthy of my talent. We are by nature arrogant, superficial, hams for attention. It didn't take long for either Magdalen or Nicholas to figure out they'd rather shake hands with me after church than sit unseen or unheard.

But see Mary today. Remember, she is the mother of God and knows it. She has Jesus within her in a way no one else ever has or will—they are in a sense one. And what does she do? She goes a great distance by foot to care for Elizabeth as she carries the baby John. Oh the humility in that room: humble unborn John who would later point none to himself but all to Christ, humble Elizabeth who praises her teenage cousin for the child in her womb, and humble Mary who acknowledges all generations will call her blessed, but gives all glory God alone. Most importantly, there is the humble unborn Christ-child, the God of the universe, now a fetus in the womb of a common, unimportant woman; the one who makes Mary and the whole world truly blessed.

Remember humble Mary, who quietly "*pondered all these things in her heart.*" Mary to whom Simeon prophesied, "*A sword will pierce your own soul too.*" Mary who unashamed stood in sorrow at her Son's side as our sins and hers pierced His hands and feet. Humility is what Mary teaches us. She never felt entitled to preach as an apostle or to usurp any role the Lord had not given her, but was content to be the single most influential person in the life of her Son, God's Son, our Savior. And what could be more of an honor than that?

Watch Mary. Paul wrote to Timothy, "*But women will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*" My sisters in Christ, this is not a put down or a degradation of your person or role in life. This is one of the highest honors a person can have. It is a thing that us men will never be blessed to experience. You have the joy of populating heaven. The bond between you and your children, like the bond between Mary and Jesus, is a bond to be cherished and nurtured with joy and humility, a bond used in Scripture as a picture the intimate and unique bond between God and the believer. It is no coincidence that, after Christ, one of the most famous and revered saints of the church is a woman. The apostles had important roles to fulfill. They did things no one else could do; but so did Mary. She was no less important, although her role was less visible and perhaps sadly less appreciated in the eyes of the world and even many in the church. Mary is womanhood in all its splendor, and in her humble submission to the will, design, and plan of the Lord, she puts many a man, St. Peter included, to shame. As Christian men and women, our goal is not always to be what we want to be, to be what someone else is, or to be what we are told we ought not to be. Rather, like Mary, our goal is to be what

God asks us to be, to say with Mary: *“I am the Lord’s servant. May it be done to me as you have said.”*

Humility, however, is not the only thing Mary was blessed with by God. She was blessed with and by the fruit of her womb, Jesus. Here we see our humble Savior descended from His heavenly throne, now growing in the womb of Mary. Why? He was the blessed fulfillment of God’s promise. In her song, the *Magnificat*, which we sing today, Mary said God *“has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”* And now this same Jesus, who made Mary blessed by His presence in her womb, also makes us blessed by His presence in our hearts through faith. And really this is what made Mary most blessed as well. For Elizabeth says to her, *“Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”*

We, like Mary, have Christ within us. He dwells in us through the Word that we study and hear preached. He came to live in us in our Baptism. In Holy Communion, He comes to live in us with the same body and blood that lived in Mary. Mary sang, *“Blessed is the who has believed that what the Lord has said will be accomplished!”* And we do believe, not because we deserve to, but because God has revealed it to us as He revealed it to Elizabeth and to John in the womb.

The Greek word used for John’s leaping in the womb at Christ’s presence is no simple kicking or turning. This was leaping for joy. The Greek word even sounds like our English word “skip.” This is the youthful, innocent skipping of a child with no troubles in the world. This is the joy of a forgiven Christian, a joy that shines through the darkness of the trouble of the world, and skips, by God’s grace, always nearer to the life to come. This is a joyful skipping of faith, which tears of remorse and death and pain may slow, but never stop. It is a joy that cries out and shouts with Mary, *“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”* *“My soul,”* *“my spirit,”* and not just the mouth, the head, or the pages of the hymnal; our entire being glorifies the Lord and rejoices in God our Savior.

Blessed Mary. Blessed me. Blessed you. Through Word and Sacrament, Christ lives in us just as He lived in her, not as an infant, but as crucified and risen Savior who has finished what He was born to do. He lives in us and, most importantly, He lived for us so that now we are released from all the sin that would control us. Rejoice with Mary as she would rejoice with you. Be blessed, like her, with humility from God, so that you may serve joyfully and willingly wherever and in whatever role God has placed you. And say of her with Elizabeth, *“Blessed is the fruit of her womb, Jesus.”* Amen.