

The Festival of the Visitation of our Lord
8 July, Anno Domini 2018
St. Luke 1:39-56
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Most of the time we look forward to family visits. We get the opportunity to catch up, to remember the good stories, and, of course, share a good meal. Many times such visits are precipitated by particular events - some joyous, others times of sorrow. Yet even and especially in the times of sorrow it is good to be with family - to mourn together, to support and encourage one another. And even if we can't be there in person, when there is big news, we are eager to share it - we pick up the phone, we text, we email, we post cute video reveals. We just have to get the word out!

Like Zechariah, Mary was bursting at the seams with joy. In faith, she had received Gabriel's message that she had been chosen by God's mercy to be the mother of God's Son, the Messiah, Jesus. Gabriel visited Mary to share good news of great joy and in the very sharing of that news, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity passed from Mary's ears to Mary's womb. The promised seed of Genesis 3:15 began developing in the normal way - cells dividing and multiplying, genetic details finding expression. The God of all creation was growing in Mary's womb just like you did in your own mother's. The Gospel was taking shape.

Knowing this, Mary wasted no time visiting the Judaeian countryside and her elderly expecting cousin. And let's be clear. Mary didn't open the front door and say "Hi, Elizabeth. I hear you're having a baby!" John the Baptist didn't leap in his aged mother's womb because he liked the sound of Mary's voice. When Mary burst into Elizabeth's house, like Zechariah, she could not help but burst forth into song - the glorious canticle known as the Magnificat. This hymn is filled to overflowing with the incomparably joyous news of the Gospel. Elizabeth understood exactly what Mary was telling her. The Lord, YHWH, who created all things and rules over all things, was growing in Mary's womb as a little child. He who dwelt between the cherubim, who descended upon the temple in a cloud, had wrapped Himself in the weakness of human flesh. Here before Elizabeth stood the woman and growing insider her was the Seed who would crush Satan's head. There would be no more speaking from burning mountain tops, no

more veiled theophanies. Now there would be only the voice and the face of a man like us. A voice that is filled with consolation for the weak and humble, a face that shines bright with the favor and pleasure of God Most High.

A joyous family get together indeed! No longer is the presence of God a thing to cause fear and trembling. God's presence is a presence of forgiveness and life. No longer does man have to hide from God because of his wretchedness and guilt. No. The visitation of the Son is cause for great rejoicing. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world but to save it. John leapt for joy, not because Jesus was just a few inches away, but because of Mary's greeting which proclaimed the mercy of God which had long been foretold by the prophets. Salvation in the flesh had visited that house. Mary's heart was filled with such joy because she believed that God would, just as He had long ago promised, deliver her from the condemnation of her sin. The fulfillment of that promise was now in her womb.

The world, we, don't need any more condemnation. The Ten Commandments are more than sufficient to cast us into the fires of eternal hell. Our hearts are thick with pride and a desire for what is evil. We are not filled with love and humility. We are certainly happy to outdo one another in receiving honor. But we loathe the idea of humbling ourselves and submitting ourselves in love to the needs of our neighbor. And how can we get ahead if we associate with the weak, the foolish, the unsuccessful, and the broken? We kick against the will of God which would bring us to nothing, which shows our will and our desires to be filled with selfishness. We would much rather breathe out murderous threats against our persecutors than pray for them and bless them. We want God to visit us and make us strong and mighty and rich. Those are the kinds of blessings we like, the things that make our hearts rejoice and sing for joy. This is how the world thinks. This is how our sinful flesh thinks. That's the whole reason for this visitation.

And to those who will not humble themselves under God's mighty hand, who will not confess that they are but poor, miserable sinners in need of God's grace and mercy, who grow cold to God's gracious visitation and presence for our salvation, there will be a visitation but it will not be filled with joy. It will be filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth. He will scatter

you and bring you down low into the pits of eternal judgment. He will cast you down from your self-made thrones.

But God would not have it so. God desires your salvation. God took no pleasure in casting Adam and Eve out of the garden. He did it because He loved them. He did it so that He might walk among us again to redeem us from the death which had been ushered into the world. He did it so that we who know and live in the midst of such agony and sorrow and chaos might have hope. The Lord Jesus has visited you who you have been pulverized into a pile of dust and ashes and feel completely smothered by death. And He visits you with hope, with peace, with forgiveness, and with compassion. He visits you with life and healing. He visits you as the one who has offered His flesh, his life for yours, who died under God's wrath on the cross and who now lives, seated at the right hand of God.

This day is the day of God's visitation for your salvation. This day the incarnate Lord visits you as He visited Elizabeth and John, in Word and Body. He proclaims the day of your salvation. He comes still in Flesh and Blood but now as food that satisfies the soul which hungers for righteousness. The humble have cried out "Lord, have mercy" and He has heard and He has answered. Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord with healing and mercy in His hand to bind up the brokenhearted and bring comfort to the distressed.

And how is this visiting Lord to be received? As Mary received Gabriel's word - in humility and faith. Blessed are all who hear the Good News of salvation, who believe that there would be a fulfillment of the Holy Absolution of Christ, who receive in repentant faith the Lord Jesus Christ who comes under bread and wine for Christians to eat and to drink. Blessed are you now and blessed will you be when the Lord Jesus visits us again in great power and glory to receive His dear Christians into the eternal joys that have been prepared for them.

In the Name of +Jesus.