

The Festival of St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord
15 August, Anno Domini 2021
St. Luke 1:39-55
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

The Blessed Virgin Mary - the title given to the mother of our Lord. But why? Why now do all generations call her “blessed”? Certainly, how blessed is she to be chosen graciously by God to be the mother of God. But that’s not the greatest blessing. St. Elizabeth hit the nail on the head when she said “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Blessed is she who believed that God had fulfilled His salvation promise and that the Savior of the world was now growing in her womb. Do you believe what the Lord promised Mary and the whole world in her Son? Hear again those blessed promises that you may believe (read Lk 1:31-33)

Blessed are all who believe that the Lord fulfilled the Word He spoke to Mary and, indeed, all that He has spoken in Holy Scripture. It is a strange word, to be sure - that on our own we are lost and condemned people who hate God and despise His Word, that God Almighty would offer His only-begotten Son as the sacrifice to atone for His enemies, that salvation is not something we achieve but something we are freely given. It defies all reason and sense. It is a word that our sinful flesh not only can’t understand but loathes.

But that’s not really all that shocking. Our flesh, after all, loves itself and thinks far more highly of itself than it ever should. It wants to make sense of everything, and anything it can’t it twists or rejects. It reasons that there really is no God since He can’t be touched or seen. It reasons that the notion of a loving God is little more than an opioid for the masses since everywhere it looks it sees evil and pain and sorrow. It reasons that our sins are really not that great since the consequences are not always immediate or apparent, not all that offensive to God, and therefore no salvation is really necessary, just more effort next time. It reasons that our sins are so impossibly monstrous that even the Blood of God’s Son couldn’t cover them.

All of this is because human reason is governed and limited by the Law. Reason is a legalist. If you do x, then y happens. If you’ve done x, then you must do y to compensate. And that’s fine, even necessary among men. We need laws and consequences in order to corral the wild stallion of our sinful flesh. Greed,

jealousy, anger, unchaste living - all of these things would be running rampant, far more so than they already are, if there were no laws and threats of punishment to curb them. The sinful flesh knows only one good - me. What pleases me, what is easiest for me, what elevates me, what benefits me - these are the only questions our sinful flesh actually cares about. And the only thing that will hold the flesh in check is a threat to its self-preservation. Hence, the Law.

What the flesh hates is any idea that it is not good, that its desires are evil, and that it is not permitted to do as it desires. It cares nothing for the welfare of others. If their bodies or reputations or possessions must be harmed that the flesh may have what it wants then that is an acceptable cost. The flesh knows nothing of love, nothing of self-sacrifice. And that is why the sinful flesh is absolutely dumbfounded by the Christian faith and by Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus, Mary's Son, is love and mercy and compassion and selflessness in the flesh. Nothing, absolutely nothing our Lord did was for His own good, including being born of Blessed Mary. He spent every breath, every waking moment, helping and saving the very people who hated Him, even praying on the cross that God would forgive those who were taking pleasure in His crucifixion.

Perhaps this is why we don't want to learn the Ten Commandments. If we know them, then we are confronted with the truth and our flesh has to face the reality that we are anything but good, that we are in fact evil. We think not knowing them allows us to plead ignorance. It is intolerable to the sinful flesh that it should be wrong. It will not look in the mirror of divine holiness because all that will be reflected is its wretchedness and the eternal judgment of guilt that lies against us.

Faith, then, stands directly contrary to reason. As in the case of St. Mary, faith believes what the Lord says even though what God says seems foolish, ignorant, and impossible. Mary's faith wasn't simply that God could do something like make her pregnant without a husband. Mary's faith was that in this truly miraculous child, God was fulfilling the promise of crushing Satan's head and losing us from the chains of slavery and eternal condemnation we most certainly deserve. In this child, God was promising to Mary and every other sinner that the power of death would forever be destroyed; that every sin would be fully atoned for just as God had promised the first mother, Eve.

God doesn't promise small things. He doesn't just promise to make today a little easier. He doesn't promise that you'll make no mistakes on your homework. He doesn't promise to take away your cancer or your parent's Alzheimer's today. Though we desire these things and our Lord certainly cares about them, He has

gone infinitely further. He has promised that the damnation that you and I most certainly deserve for our rebellious behavior, He has most willingly laid on His own beloved Son. He has promised that all these afflictions will have their end eternally and those who believe will rest forever. Jesus Christ, Mary's Son, has passed through death and hell and risen again victorious for you. And that you might have a share in this, Christ has joined the promise of salvation to the Holy Sacraments. God promises the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, to be given to all who are washed in Holy Baptism. He has promised that under mere bread and wine, His atoning Flesh and Blood are distributed and consumed for the forgiveness of sins. He has even promised that He Himself is present delivering His gifts to the Church through the Office of the Holy Ministry which He Himself fills with sinful men. He has promised eternal life, salvation, a clean conscience, perfect and eternal healing, victory over all who hate you, every ounce of daily bread that you need, and a share in His eternal kingdom. He has promised that the hungry, the weak, and the hurting will be filled with good things while the rich and successful and those who are full and satisfied in this life will go empty away into eternal judgment. And on top of all that, Christ promises that our sufferings for His Name are actually blessings, for they are part of His own suffering.

Reason will never tell you any of these things because they are contrary to reason. All of this is utter nonsense, just silly talk, to those who are perishing, to those who are bound up under the delusions and foolishness of reason. Reason says that salvation is earned, that God wants winners on His team. Reason says you must look out for yourself because no one else will. Reason says it is irresponsible and abusive of God's grace to imagine that it is an absolutely free gift that is given to people who haven't shown any effort. Reason says, suffering is a sign of God's anger and is only experienced by those who deserve it. Reason says that death is terrifying and is to be avoided at any and all cost.

But reason without the light of God's Word is a fool. It knows nothing of God's mercy and love in Christ. Reason alone, ruled by sin if not by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is contrary to the Gospel because the Gospel is precisely a free gift which can't be earned. Blessed are not those who are strong and wise in their own eyes and who think they have figured out the way of salvation. Rather, blessed are those who believe the gracious promises which God makes to all who trust in Christ, who receive as free gift that salvation which the Father has prepared for us through the death and resurrection of His Son. In all matters of salvation cast reason and human wisdom into the trash heap they came from. Don't listen to them or believe them. Only listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd who bids you to rest in His work and His gifts. Blessed are you who taste the sweet comfort of

your adoption into the divine family through the font. Blessed are you who believe these words of our Lord “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins” and hunger for His Body and Blood. Your salvation is accomplished. Jesus has done that for you. God has been faithful to His promises and sent the Messiah to remove the impossible burden of your sin.

That is the Gospel! That is the cause of Mary’s rejoicing. Because she believed that, blessed is she indeed! If you believe that, equally blessed are you and all generations will call you blessed with her. Let us be fools and cast out reason, leaning not on our own understanding but believing with joy that God has and will fulfill all His promises to us.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(Please stand.)

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