

"A Blessed Visitation"

Luke 1:39-45, Advent 4-C, December 20, 2015

You have all heard about the **"Meeting of the Minds,"** but what St. Luke is sharing with us here this morning, dear friends is the **"Meeting of the Moms!"** That's right, for here we see **two expectant moms**, one **older** who is now at the end of her second trimester, and one **younger**, having **just received the news** that she is expecting a Child! This news came to the younger mother not from her OBGYN as it used to come to expectant mothers some 40 years ago, **nor did this news come to her** from one of those **"FIRST RESPONSE"** home pregnancy tests that are now being sold the street at **Walgreens for \$16.95**; with two tests in each package to make sure that the reading is correct!

No, for the message came to this young woman, maybe some 14 or 15 years old, that she would give birth to a Son, from the angel Gabriel who told her: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:30-33)!

This historic and unprecedented "MEETING OF THE MOMS" was the blessed visitation of Mary the Mother of our Lord, who traveled **southward** from her home in Nazareth of Galilee, to the hill country of Judah, some **60 miles away**, a journey that some Bible scholars have conjectured would have taken 9 days for Mary to arrive there, to visit her cousin Elizabeth was living there with her husband Zechariah!

You no doubt remember how the news came to Zechariah when it was finally his turn to offer up the sacrifice of incense at the altar in the temple one day, some six months prior to this blessed visitation, also miraculously, when the angel Gabriel appears to him with the news that he and his wife Elizabeth would be blessed at long last with a baby boy! And yet this baby boy would be a very special baby boy; a "Prophet of the Most High God." He would be the forerunner, to prepare the way for the Messiah's own advent into this world!

Brothers and sisters the news was absolutely shocking on both accounts. For Elizabeth was at that age, when most people would have thought her **"biological time-clock" had run out!** She had been **"barren" all her married life; a nomenclature** that was given to women in her condition by those in the medical community back then, that would certainly be deemed as a horrendous violation of **"political correctness"** today. Their son, the angel said, would be a very special boy and they were to name him "John." And the angel said that **John would be filled with the Holy Spirit** even from his mother's womb! In addition to all of this **John would bear a great resemblance** to the great prophet **Elijah**, who lived in the **9th Century BC**, during the reign of **King Ahab!**

But listen up—the **KEY** to really understanding the greatest impact of this blessed visitation does not lie solely in the fact that **this was just the meeting of two moms**, but even more importantly, it was the **meeting of two baby boys**, both of whom were yet unborn; two sons that each of this expectant mothers were still carrying inside of them.

While the news that was given to Mary by the Angel Gabriel was GOOD NEWS INDEED--- AS WE CAN NOW SEE FROM OUR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, we need to pause long enough to consider how threatening this message might have been to this very young woman also! **For Mary was not only a virgin, but she was an unmarried virgin! How would she ever explain this to her betrothed husband Joseph?** If he had wanted to do so, he could have exposed her and made her the subject of much public shame, with **retributions due her** even far more severe

than those imposed upon **Hester Prynne** in **Nathaniel Hawthorne's** book entitled **THE SCARLET LETTER**, about life in the **17th Century Massachusetts Bay Colony!**

While the angel commends Mary for her faith in trusting that the LORD's Word was true and praises her because she was willingly submitting herself completely to the Heavenly Father's will for her life, perhaps Mary still made this long trip to the hill country of Judah, to see her older cousin Elizabeth because she really needed someone to talk to, someone whom she could trust; someone who could counsel her on how to best break the news to Joseph and to her parents as well! After all, the news of the angel must have completely turned her life upside down; that she would give birth to a Child by the power of the Holy Spirit! Mary must have also been frightened and confused to some degree!

Clearly her time with Elizabeth must have had a dramatic impact on Mary. With Elizabeth's gentle support and encouragement, Mary went from questioning **"HOW CAN THIS BE?"** to a point where she was now prepared to put her total trust in God! Perhaps, she was also now prepared, if need be, to face the potential rejection of Joseph and his family, knowing that God would do great things through her: **"I am the handmaiden of the Lord"** Mary said, **"let it be with me according to your word"** (Luke 1:38).

And can we draw any correlations perhaps to all of this in our world today?

It certainly is no new news to anyone that the Institution of Marriage, as viewed by society, and also as viewed by some in the Church, has gone through radical changes in recent decades. But it really wasn't all that long ago that if an unmarried woman became pregnant "outside of wedlock" as we used to say, that she was also subjected to a certain amount of humiliation and shame. There was a day when professed Christian couples in love with each other would never have dreamed of living together without being married, though it has also become the social standard today!

While our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ certainly upheld the high ideals that the Old Testament ascribed to MARRIAGE, on the one hand, cautioning his followers against taking too casual of an approach to divorce; he also made it very clear that for all people repenting of their sins—there was an abundance of mercy awaiting them though the impending sacrifice of his own perfect life undo death on the cross! You remember those words of Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees who wanted to stone that woman to death who was caught in the act of adultery! Jesus said, **"Let him who is without sin cast the first stone!"**

And I for one have always found it extremely intriguing that John tells us in chapter 8 of the fourth Gospel, that everyone dropped their stones to the ground, and that the older men in the crowd dropped their stones first!

On Christmas Day we hear again those great words from the writer of Hebrews in our epistle lesson once again: *"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his Word of power and that when he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs"* (Hebrews 1:1-4)!

And so this is where we pick up the story today: Mary goes to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth! She enters the house, and she greets Elizabeth. And when she does, **the sound of her greeting is picked up by baby John, in the womb, and he does a joyful leap inside his mother's body, or** what some might call instead into today's vernacular: **"He did his happy dance!"**

Remember, the angel had said that John would be filled with the Spirit even in his mother's womb. And so when Mary greets Elizabeth, the Spirit causes John to recognize that

Jesus was there, too. "Everywhere that Mary went, the Lamb was sure to go"—the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, as John the Baptist himself would later declare Jesus to be! **The presence of Christ among us brings us great joy. The Gospel sound that greets us still today here in the church lets us know that Jesus is here,** and so we rejoice. So the unborn baby John leaps inside of his mother Elizabeth's womb and she too is filled with the Holy Spirit and has some joyful news for Mary: **"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"**

"Mary," Elizabeth is saying to her, **"You have been given a great honor, to bear the Savior of the world!"** Elizabeth continues: *"And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

Can you 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 a great blessing to her. Such a humble faith is only and always the work of the Holy Spirit. 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 the faith of Mary-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, the 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 receive his gifts. And the good news is that the Holy Spirit will work such a Mary-and-Elizabeth faith in you and me, too.

You see, there's a whole bunch of miracles that we see in our text today.

- (1) The way that both Elizabeth and Mary got pregnant, of course—in each case, miraculous.**
- (2) 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.**
- (3) Any time anyone is given the gift of faith and joy in the Lord—this 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.**

Today we have heard the story of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. It was a meeting of the moms, yes. But don't forget those boys! They meet, too, Jesus and John do. And wherever Mary's baby boy goes, he brings blessing with him.

As with Mary and with Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit has worked faith into our hearts too, in yours and mine, through the Gospel, so that we now also trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

We also know that that little Child came among us as our brother, in the flesh, as the only One who ever walked the face of this earth that had the power to save us from our sins!

Christ Jesus came to do the Father's will, to keep God's law perfectly on our behalf. Christ came to offer the one perfect sacrifice that atones for all our sins, to suffer and die a sinner's death on the cross, taking the punishment that the law required and that we deserved. 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. Thank God for his own, blessed visitation! Amen