

Midweek Advent Vespers 1
St. Luke 1:1-25
December 1st, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Your Wife Elizabeth Will Bear You a Son

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Evangelist St. Luke in the first chapter of his Gospel presents to us several important characters. We meet in today's reading Zacharias. He is the father of St. John the Baptist, the baby that is promised to him by the angel Gabriel in today's reading. Zacharias is also the husband of Elizabeth. The angel Gabriel tells Zacharias that she will bear him a son; the same St. John the Baptist that was mentioned earlier. Elizabeth, we are told, is also the relative (cousin) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who will also bear a Son. That Son will be the Lord + Jesus Christ. He will be God in our flesh. He will take upon Himself our flesh so that He might fulfill the whole will and Law of God, and suffer and die on the tree of the holy cross for us poor, miserable sinners. We will be told about this Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary in our readings throughout the Wednesday Midweek Vespers, but we will not meet Him in the flesh until the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord; until Christmas Day.

Even St. Joseph is mentioned by the Evangelist St. Luke in passing. He is the one who is betrothed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they are both descendants of another individual that St. Luke mentions. They are both descendants of King David. King David is the same one of whom we are reading and learning about in the Book of 1 Samuel in Bible class on Sunday mornings. He was a man after the Lord's own heart. He was a great king, and led the entire nation of Israel into its greatest prosperity and devotion to the Lord. King David was not without sin, however, he committed both adultery and then murder to cover up the adultery. In spite of this, the Lord in His grace and mercy, promised he would never lack a man to sit on his throne. King David who was the picture and figure of the Christ, would have as his descendant the Savior of the Nations—the Lord + Jesus Christ—the One born of the Virgin Mary, and was under the guardianship of St. Joseph.

St. Luke presents to us a whole cast of individuals: Zacharias, Elizabeth, St. John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. Joseph. All of these characters—these historical figures—play a role in the birth of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. All of these individuals who are spoken to by the angel Gabriel (another character) play a role in paving the way for the birth of the Lord God in our flesh to redeem us from sin, death and the devil. We will get to hear about all of these individuals throughout this Advent season, as we head toward, and celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord on December 25th.

Before we can meet our Lord at His birth, we must learn the events that led to our Lord's birth in

the flesh. The Evangelist St. Luke leads us on the way to the birth of our Lord by telling us, O dear Theophilus—dear friend of God—, of the individuals who play an important role in our Lord's birth. The most important character is the forerunner of our Lord—St. John the Baptist. He is promised to us by the angel Gabriel in today's pericope. Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, who were both advanced in years would have their prayer answered, and they would bear a son. His name would be called John, which means, "Yahweh is a gracious giver." This boy would go before the Lord to prepare His way by turning the hearts of the people to the Lord God; by leading them to repentance and faith in the Lord God; by convicting them in their hearts to turn from their sins and cling in faith to the Lord God.

One of the characters that tends to be glossed over, or sometimes even forgotten, is Elizabeth. Zacharias has a big role in that he receives the vision from the angel Gabriel, and he is the one who proclaims at John's circumcision that his name is John, and his tongue is loosed so that he prophesies of the child in the words of the Benedictus, the common canticle for the season of Advent. The Blessed Virgin Mary obviously has a big role as the mother of God; who bears our Redeemer in her flesh for nine months. And even St. Joseph, even though he does not have a big role in St. Luke's Gospel, is mentioned more fully in the Gospel of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. The two main characters are of course St. John the Baptist and our Lord + Jesus Christ. But Elizabeth tends to be glossed over.

Without her St. John the Baptist would not be born. It is in her womb that St. John the Baptist leaps for joy, and she prophesies concerning St. Mary that what was spoken of by the angel Gabriel would happen, and that St. Mary would be blessed by all generations as the mother of God, and the bearer of God in our flesh; the fruit in St. Mary's womb. Elizabeth is exactly what St. Luke writes about her and Zacharias: they were both righteous before the Lord God; they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord God blameless. In other words, they had faith in the Lord God and His promises. For no one is righteous, or fulfills the Law, without faith in the Lord God.

We are told that Zacharias, however, did not believe the words of the angel Gabriel when he told him that he and his wife would bear a son named John. Zacharias has his doubts. He only sees the reality of the situation: they are both advanced in years. How shall he know this? What sign can be given as proof? He would not be able to speak until the child's circumcision and naming. Elizabeth, on the other hand, shows no signs of doubt. She rejoices that the Lord God had fulfilled her prayer with the birth of a son named John. She knew that this child would remove the reproach from her; the reproach that she surely would have received from their society as being barren.

This was often seen as indicating some sin for which the barren woman was being punished for. Clearly this is not the case, since St. Luke tells us that this is not the case. They were righteous in the sight of the Lord God on account of their faith. But this did not stop the accusations of being a sinner and deserving of reproach. This child John would remove her reproach among mankind, for she would no longer be called barren.

But Elizabeth recognizes an even greater reproach that she, and all mankind, must endure. The reproach of the Lord God on account of the sin that dwells in us, as well as the sins that we commit and the good that we omit every day of our lives. This child would remove the reproach of the Lord God, for he would serve as the forerunner of the Christ. He would go before the Lord + Jesus to prepare the hearts and minds of the people of Israel in the spirit and power of Elijah. Whoever would listen to this child John's preaching of repentance toward the forgiveness of sins, would also receive the Christ—His cousin, the Lord + Jesus—after He was baptized by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

This child John, born of Elizabeth, would prepare the way for the Lord + Jesus to remove the reproach of Elizabeth, and all mankind. Indeed, St. John the Baptist prepares our way during this Advent season to receive the Christ, and remove our reproach. For our way is once again being prepared for the coming of our Lord + Jesus on the Last Day. Just as St. John the Baptist preached

repentance towards the forgiveness of sins to all those who would listen; to all those who would turn from their sin and cling in faith to the Lord God, even today, the ministers of the Lord point out our sins, and admonish us into faith through the preaching of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus.

There is One among us Whose sandals we are not worthy to untie on account of our sinfulness, but He is coming to us to take away our reproach before mankind. Indeed, He has removed the reproach that the devil and his horde desire to level against us. Like King David, we are not without sin. Like Zacharias, we are not without doubts at times. But on account of our faith, we are considered righteous before the Lord God, walking in all of His commandments and ordinances blameless.

Just as the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel is full of many individuals important to lead all those who hear into faith in the Lord + Jesus, the Church is also full of many individuals who direct our eyes away from our sinfulness, either our despair or our pride, to the One Savior to which we may cling to in all trials and tribulations in this life. Therefore, my dear friends, whether our role is considered great or small in the Church, all of us are important for leading each other to the Christ. For, we share our faith with one another, and remind one another that there is salvation for us poor, miserable sinners in the Lord + Jesus Christ. Let us therefore believe the promise of the messenger, for this Child that was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, has come to take away the reproach of all mankind. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!