

Midweek Advent Vespers 3  
St. Luke 1:36-56  
December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021  
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

### When Elizabeth Heard the Greeting of Mary

*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.

If you have been paying attention during the Midweek Advent Vespers, you will notice that all of the titles for the sermons so far have mentioned a particular individual from the narratives in the first chapter of the Evangelist St. Luke's Gospel. That individual is Elizabeth, the cousin of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has borne in her womb the forerunner to the Christ—St. John the Baptist. Elizabeth is a sort of forgotten character, as I mentioned in the sermon on the first Midweek Advent Vespers. She is forgotten because there are more important characters in these narratives.

Zacharias, her husband, has a big role because he is the one to whom the angel Gabriel appeared and proclaimed the promise that they would have a baby boy and name him John. He also prophesied about John at his circumcision that he would be a prophet. Certainly, the Blessed Virgin Mary has a big role, as she does today when she sings the Magnificat for the first time, and she carries in her womb the Savior of the world. The baby in Elizabeth's womb is also has a bigger role than she does, for he is the forerunner of the Christ. He is the one who will prepare the way of the Lord + Jesus by preaching repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. And the Baby Boy in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary has the biggest role of all the characters in the narrative of the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. He is the Christ, the Anointed One of the heavenly Father Who has come to Earth and has taken upon our flesh, so that He might fulfill the Law of God and offer up His life like a spotless Lamb to buy us back from sin, death and the power of the devil.

Since all of these characters have bigger roles, it is no wonder that Elizabeth gets forgotten; gets pushed to the back burner. But without her, St. John the Baptist would not be born. Zacharias would have no wife in which to receive a promise of a long-awaited son. Without Elizabeth we would not have this exchange in today's Gospel reading between the mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her cousin Elizabeth.

When the Virgin Mary greeted Elizabeth; when she heard the greeting of the Mother of God, the baby in her womb leaped for joy. This was not just because the baby, and Elizabeth, were glad to see their relative, but it was because of Who the Virgin Mary carried in her womb—our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. The baby rejoiced, and Elizabeth rejoiced, because the Virgin Mary entered into their home and brought with her the Lord of all of Creation, the Maker and Redeemer of the world; she brought into their home the Savior of the world—the One Who would redeem mankind from their sins—our Lord +

Jesus, the Christ. What a great joy! What a cause for rejoicing! Indeed, in this week of Gaudete—this week of rejoicing—what better reason to rejoice! For, our Lord has come into the world! The Virgin Mary comes to her cousin Elizabeth bearing the best gift anyone can receive at Christmas—or anytime of year. She comes bearing the gift of a Savior—of the Lord God dwelling in our flesh; of the Lord God, the Creator and Maker of the world, dwelling among His creation in our flesh.

This is what this season of Advent is leading up to: it is leading to the birth of our Savior. It is leading to the birth of our Lord. It is leading to the reality that our Lord God dwells with us in our flesh to bear our sin, and face our punishment, and to redeem us once and for all from sin and death, so that the devil no longer has any more power over us. My dear friends, unlike others in this world, we do not celebrate this high Feast Day coming up for any other reason than to rejoice that our Lord God dwells among us in our flesh and without sin.

The world wants to direct our focus away from the Christ by making this holiday something which it is not. The world wants it to be about being good, or kind, or about the “magic of Christmas” (whatever that is). It wants to make this holy day about receiving stuff and decorations, and the like. None of these things matter, for they are not what this coming Feast Day is all about. This coming celebration is not a celebration of the birthday of our Lord + Jesus as if He is getting another year older. There is no place in our celebrations for singing “Happy Birthday” to the Lord + Jesus. He is not aging like we are; He is not getting a year older like we do. We do not celebrate His birthday; we celebrate His birth. We celebrate the Lord taking upon Himself our flesh to redeem us from sin.

This is why all the other trappings of Christmas detract from the true reason for the season. Family gatherings, food preparation, wrapping of gifts, putting up Christmas trees and decorations all direct our attention and focus from the true and only reason for this holiday coming up. The Mass of the Christ—Christ’s Mass—is the only celebration that is truly important. Christmas has always been a Church service, and it always should be. All those other celebrations and preparations are certainly fine in themselves, but they should not take the place of the worship of our Lord coming to us in the flesh. We should not neglect the worship of our Lord + Jesus on the night when He comes to us.

This is why Elizabeth and the baby in her womb are so excited to see the Virgin Mary, for she brings to them the Lord of All Creation. Such should be our expectation on the Vigil of Christmas and on Christmas Day, when the minister brings to us our Lord + Jesus entombed in the womb of His holy Word, and in His holy Sacraments. Holy Mother Church bears in her womb the gifts that make for our forgiveness, life and salvation, for she brings to us our Lord + Jesus through the means of grace which she gives to us abundantly. When our Lord + Jesus is brought to us through the means of grace, we should like Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist leap for joy and proclaim the good news of our Lord’s arrival for us. He comes into our home brought by the means of the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments.

It is not just Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist who are rejoicing when the Virgin Mary enters into their home with the Baby + Jesus in her womb. The Blessed Virgin Mary also rejoices with her cousin Elizabeth at the gift that she bears in her womb. For she sings for the first time the Magnificat. Her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God her Savior. We sing this same song every time we gather for Vespers. We are singing the same song that she sang on that day. We join our voices to the voice of the Blessed Virgin as we echo the same joy that she felt on that day. Our souls also magnify the Lord and our spirits also rejoice in the Lord our God—our Savior. For He does not consider how sinful we are—how much of a poor, miserable sinner we are—He only considers His great love for us, His creation.

It is this love that prompts Him to leave His throne in Heaven and come down and take upon our flesh, in order that He might be a part of His own creation; that He might be our brother. In our sinful

flesh we are unable to fulfill the whole will and Law of the Lord God, but our Lord + Jesus is without sin, and fulfills the Law perfectly on our behalf. We deserve only pain and death on account of our manifold sins which we commit daily and often, but our Lord + Jesus pays the penalty of all of those sins by offering His life as a ransom of the tree of the holy cross. He suffers and dies, and we go free.

We are now free to rejoice with Elizabeth, St. John the Baptist, Zacharias, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the Baby Boy in the womb of the Virgin Mary has been born and has entered into the home of our hearts by the working of the Holy Ghost Who creates faith in our Lord + Jesus in us. Therefore, my dear friends, when we hear that our Lord + Jesus has come into the Church—and taken up a dwelling place in our hearts through faith—let us rejoice greatly, for He has come to take away all of our sins, and give us an eternal home in Heaven with Him. Thanks be to Him alone for our salvation! 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!*