

Salvation's history was about to occur, the long-awaited time of hope and redemption of God's people just waiting to come and go, and it's star and central figure was gestating. He was being fed and protected, kept warm and housed in the womb of a virgin. The anticipated Messiah, the new King David, was reliant on the nutrients passed onto Him from His lowly mother who herself was completely reliant on those who would care for her. She wasn't the daughter of the great Annas or Caiaphas, High Priests at the time, or of anyone else with status in the community who could guarantee a nice home and good friends or a secure future for her unborn Lord. No, she was an unwed child herself, one dependent on the good faith of her fiancé who seemed to be committed, thanks to the encouragement of an angel

Thankfully this wasn't the first time God cared for the least of these. Throughout their history the Israelites had been commanded to care for the widow and the Fatherless, the sojourner among them and all those with great needs. They were commanded to show mercy and compassion just as they had received it as a nation tiny among its neighbours, weak among the world powers, yet kept by the goodness and promise of God.

Mary recognizes that she is just like Israel, favoured because of God's goodness towards those who need Him; she knew that He cared for the least of these, as her hymn makes as clear as day. And for us, she is a picture summarizing everything that is about to happen. The great Reversal is coming to its high-point, when the power of God will be made known in weakness, His wisdom made known in the world's folly; when He Himself will be seen in warm, tender, mortal human skin. He is about to save in a way no one thought possible.

In her womb matures the God-made-flesh; fully reliant on her is the one who would save the world. The God of the universe decided to take on finite and mortal life just to give it up, the merciful and just dying on behalf of the unmerciful, unrighteous ingrates who rarely gave God a second thought.

In Mary we see the picture of how God has always chosen to work and she sees it as well, as does Elizabeth. Even John in the womb seems to understand what's going on and jumps for joy at it! They understand what God is doing—maybe not the specifics, not yet at least. But they know God is up to something and it's going to be so big, it'll be small.

And they respond in praise because they rightly get that this is *for them*. Elizabeth is aghast that she should be greeted by the mother of *her Lord*, and in fact by Her Lord Himself.

And Mary recognizes that *she* is the Lord's humble servant, the one for whom God has done great things – “for me!” she says.

She is the lowly, one among Israel to whom redemption has been promised, the hungry yet despised by any who are in power; for her this Christ child has taken flesh to save the desperate and helpless. And she sets the tone for all who would follow her. She is the first in the Church of Christ, in the Way, as Christians were first called.

In this reading we see that she is the Church, the new Israel. Because inside her she carries Christ. And to the Word received from God regarding Him she has said a hearty, if confused and unsure “Amen.” She has allowed her Lord and God to speak truth and she believes it, and in response to His word and presence she rejoices just as the Church would and will for all time after her. For all He has done, for what He is doing (as unclear as that is at the moment for her) and for what He will do, she believes His promises and responds with great praise, magnifying the Lord.

In Mary we see a faithful response to God in line with the second commandment—she is certainly not misusing the name of her Lord but fully and properly utilizing it. She is recognizing all that her Lord has done and is faithfully attributing the work to Him alone.

We follow in her footsteps. Whenever we hear the Gospel and comprehend what that means for us miserable sinners, we magnify the Lord for what He was doing in the womb of Mary, what He was doing in His time on earth, in His time on the cross and in the tomb and what He has been doing in heaven and in our midst ever since. We praise the Lord because like Mary we are called blessed by all generations. Certainly she was peculiarly and specifically blessed for no one else has ever carried Christ in their womb, but even more than that she was blessed because she heard the Word of God and believed it. To have carried Christ but not have believed would not have done any good for Mary, but to have believed the Words of the Angels and to cling to the Words of Christ in His ministry and to hold fast to the Word of His Gospel life that brings salvation to her and us alike means to be blessed beyond comprehension. And you and I share in that blessedness without one doubt.

Now certainly there are more than a few times when we do not magnify the Lord alongside Mary. Whenever we magnify ourselves, lifting up our own name and accomplishments, or when we downplay our need for a saviour, we are neglecting to bring glory to God by failing to trust in Him for what we truly need. In these moments we become like the proud, those whom Mary declared would be humbled, brought down, sent away empty. When we are in this state, I pray that the Lord does just that.

I hope and pray He makes it painfully clear that we are not quite the hot-stuff that we can think we are; we are not quite as rich or full or satisfied or ale as we like to appear. If He is so merciful as to bring us low, then He may show His mercy upon us and lift us up, to fill us with that which satisfies, and to keep us close to Him who truly cares rather than being sent out on our own. This is His promise. To you and me, when we forget our need, He will make it known. So when we forget that we are sinners in need of a saviour, when we forget that we are needy humans who need God to send rain and provide family and to build community, when we lose sight of the fact that we are mortal and cannot escape death, may He remind us. Whether by His Law in His Word proclaimed like a spear to the chest, or the working of the Law in the world—sickness, pain, shame, or the like—He has promised to remind us that we do need Him, so that we do not go astray on our own way. As Luther has said, “all His works are such that out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched and dead, He makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living. On the other hand, whatever is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living, He makes to be nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dying.” When we believe we are something, He makes us nothing so that He may truly make us wonderful and living. When we are nothing He bestows upon us grace upon grace.

He reminds us so that when we are brought low, we may cling to Him, just as Mary did. Just as He promised to hold us, so He invites us to boldly ask for what we need, to plead for what our minds, bodies, and souls truly crave, so that He may be glorified as the provider and protector, the life giver and life forgiver. To call upon Him and rely on Him is to magnify His name among us and so to fulfill the second commandment, which is there not only to condemn us and show us our need for our saviour but also to guide us to trust Him—He’s told us to trust Him so why on earth wouldn’t we?

In this Christmas season we see His care as Christ takes on our flesh. In this act of God He has shown that our enemies are no match for Him and His grace is all sufficient. He will raise up those who have heard of His mercy and trust in it; He will care for those who have been welcomed into His loving arms just as He promised. Our God has made remarkable promises, and He is faithful.

He has promised to care for the little ones, and this is His Church. He is with us, living in our midst, just as He was living inside and then dwelling with Mary. And with us He is giving us His Word to care for us, His body and blood to sustain us, and His grace, which He won for us, to give us life. And for all of this, we praise Him, first and foremost by calling on Him just as He has invited us to. We call upon Him to take care of each of our members, that we would be provided for in all our needs; we call upon Him for forgiveness just as He has implored us to, for to receive the grace won by Christ truly glorifies and magnifies God; and we call upon Him as we give our thanks for all the ways which He has faithfully cared for us. You and I, the church today, are united with Mary and every other member of the Church of the past, as we receive the gifts of God, the gift of Christ Himself and are stirred to a response of thanks and love.

Let us, today as always, rejoice that we have been called the blessed. We have been brought low from our sin so that He may raise us up in His grace, that He may care for us all of our days, until at last we are raised, literally, from the dead to see Him face to face.

Keep us, O Lord, in the faith of the Church, in the faith in You.

Amen.