

**Beloved in the Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

**Let us pray: These are Your words, holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth.**

Have you ever tried to imagine, what it would be like to live 2000 years ago in Jerusalem? I don't mean those quick day dreams, about going to work on a camel or wearing these cool robes in fifty shades of brown. I mean the whole shebang. As in really trying to put oneself in the sandals of a person who lived at that time. Let us try this for a second.

The sandals we will be filling are those of a Jew who lived about 2000 years ago, in a village about a day's trip from Jerusalem.

Ok. We slip into his sandals. We're in a stone kitchen. A simple table is standing in the middle of the room. It's surrounded by four sturdy stools. On the table hot leavened bread, fresh out of the oven. A pot is steaming on the fire. A promise of a good breakfast.

You go to the front door to pick up the morning paper... you take it to the breakfast table and sit down... you unfold it and the headlines jump out at you: **“EMPEROR AUGUSTUS DIVORCES THIRD WIFE”** and at the bottom of the page three further headlines promising just the right amount of negativity that one needs every day:

**“HEROD - FRIEND OR FOE?”**

**“ROMAN BARRACKS UP IN FLAMES!”**

## “CENSUS COMING UP”

Yes, that about does it. The front page has done its job. This morning you woke up happy. These headlines have definitely realigned those feelings.

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Still sitting at the table, you close the paper and reflect on what you have just read ... An Emperor who lives more than two thousand miles away dictates how you must live your life. If he decides that he wants to know how many subjects he has, then you better jump and get counted... The worst thing is, he follows none of the Lords commandments.

Well at least the puppet king Herod is a Jew. Or half-Jew. He is renovating the Lords Temple. But the longer he is in power, the more it feels like he is just doing this to keep us from rebelling, while he and his minions, the tax collectors, suck us dry. And then they are just using our money to curry favor with the Romans.

Ahh the Romans... our favorite topic to complain about... they are taking over everything. Just yesterday you saw Benjamin - who comes from a good traditional Jewish family - wearing a toga! And you are quite sure that he was sneaking into that new bar, owned by the priests of that god Mars. Or was his name Bacchus? With all these foreign gods – you can never keep them apart.

This village is going to the dogs. Well not only this village. The whole country. With those Zealots openly antagonizing the Romans and burning down their structures the imperial fist will come down on all of us. It is only a matter of time. Any day now this will end badly.

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We leave Juda and come back to Topeka 2018... We take this Jews life and compare it to our own... Not much different, is it?

Politicians with their own selfish agendas are everywhere.

Depraved celebrities dominate the headlines and assume the role of idols.

Fear of the next big sickness is always at the back of our mind...

and the number of gods and religions one can choose from is virtually endless.

Same thing different day!

Remember being a child and not really having any worries at all? Mommy and daddy took care of everything for me. But the older we get, and the more we learn about the realities of life – the more scared we get.

There is just so much that could go wrong. How many freak accidents could happen right at this moment? How many sicknesses do we know about that could change our life forever.

Every day just bring new worries. Life is wearing us down and we are losing hope.

But we fight on! – well we try to...

We try to use this very limited intellect we have to master our fears. We take control of our life. We spend our money on insurance for anything that could go wrong. We try new diets, new medicines, new lifestyles – all in attempt to make this life a bit more bearable.

“I will be quiet and trust the Lord”. We gladly say this. But in that quietness, we are actually thinking: “I will be quiet and trust the Lord. But, as far as my happiness is concerned ... God needs all the help I can give him”.

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Let us jump now to the Gospel of Luke. In the opening chapters, Luke shows us two different examples of how two individuals react in a very similar situation. The first is Zechariah. The second Mary.

Regarding Zechariah: He is a just and righteous man before the Lord. He has the opportunity to go into the holiest of holies as a representative of Israel and burn incense – A sign of the Lord's presence. So Zechariah is standing in the Lord's presence. And the Lord decides to speak to him. And as if his presence is not enough, the Lord sends an angel to Zechariah.

This angel tells Zechariah: “everything that you have learnt and everything that you have taught to others - the whole Old Testament - is about to be fulfilled with the coming of My Son. But before this happens you and your wife will have a son. He will be the one who will prepare the way for My Son.”

And Zechariah visibly struggles to believe this. But just like he has guided the Jews as a priest, he attempts to guide God and help him by pointing out the flaws in God's plan... His wife cannot have a son - she is too old. - “I will be quiet and trust the Lord!” He says, “But I need proof so that I can believe it and adapt my plans accordingly.”

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Let us reflect a bit on this first example – How does it apply to us?

We have such busy schedules. How would we react if one day the Lord came to us and said that everything that he has promised will be fulfilled? The end-of-times is here! The situation we as Christians have been waiting for, for 2000 years, has finally come. No longer: **It will come!** But: **It has come!**

Most of us would hesitate and look around at this ugly world we are living in. We need some proof before we can be sure.

Let me reformulate this. Not “how would we react?” but “how do we react?” ... Because the Lord does come to us continually in His Word and in His Sacraments. And He does not say “It will be fulfilled” but “it has been fulfilled!”: “I have given My Son to humble Himself and become human. To die for you on the cross so that you can be saved and reconciled with me.”

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This is the best thing that ever happened to you. There is nothing that your creative brain can think up or do to influence this fact or make it better.

But our brain just struggles to accept this.

It is like God telling us at the beginning of a baseball game: “Guys, don’t worry. You have already won this game. Nothing will change that. You can just enjoy it.”

We reply: “Ok. That’s cool. Thanks God.” But still we think we need to fight as hard as possible and be the ones to get that winning home run.

We just cannot grasp the reality of what he has given us through His Son.

God says: “You cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, your Lord. But do not worry I will help you.”

And we hear this promise from God the whole time. But we still struggle with it. We are constantly confronted by our own sin. We try to assist God in attaining his already achieved goal. We fail. And the truth remains – we cannot do anything.

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Now let us turn to the second example Luke brings up. Mary.

Mary recognizes her incapacity immediately!

About three months after the angel approached Zachariah, he goes to Mary and tells her: “you will bear the Lord, everything that the Lord has promised his people will be fulfilled!”

And Mary responds: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.”

She recognizes her inability to grasp what is happening. But the Lord gives her exactly this ability!

He arms her with the Power from on high – the Holy Spirit. And through Him Mary can understand the significance of this massive event.

She has been chosen to bear the Lord.

For nine months she will be the tabernacle!

She drops everything and takes up this role. Jesus’ time as a human on this planet begins after Mary’s conversation with the angel. And get this: His journey towards Jerusalem to die there for us on the cross commences with the trip to Elizabeth, who lived in the hill country of Judea surrounding Jerusalem.

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Mary takes the trip. She arrives at the house of Zechariah and meets Elizabeth who is pregnant with baby-Jon.

Jon the three-month-old baby still in the womb of his mother, filled by the Holy Spirit is able to recognize the presence of the Lord and rejoice in it by dancing in the womb!

And Elizabeth feels the excited dancing of the child in the womb, but only when she also gets filled with the Holy Spirit, is she able to recognize what this means and what the baby is making her aware of. - She is in the presence of the Lord.

And she reacts automatically by using the words that the Lord has given us.

- The words that have been used from the beginning of time to celebrate the presence of the Lord.
- The words that Moses and the whole of Israel used in their joy after the Lord brought them through the Red Sea and saved them from the Egyptians.
- The words Hannah used when she learnt she would have a son.
- The words Israel used around the tabernacle.
- The words That Luther sang with his congregation in every Divine service.
- The words that WE sing in every Divine service.

The words of the liturgy.

She joins in with the saints of all time to celebrate the presence of the Lord.

And Mary responds, using the words you know as the Magnificat – you know: “My soul magnifies the Lord...” and so on.

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Let’s take another trip in time. But this time into the future. If the world still exists in a thousand years, I can promise you that there will still be corrupt politicians, immoral celebrities, fear and uncertainty about tomorrow, a plethora of idols and religions. The world will still be going to the dogs.

But we can rejoice. For it will be fulfilled everything the Lord has promised and Jesus will come again to gather his flock and reunite us with our father.

And this? The Visitation of Mary? It's just one more in a long line of God's saving acts and the Lord fulfilling his promises. Let us rejoice in this fact every day! Let us join with the saints of all time and sing his praise. Especially in a few minutes when we will once again be invited to his table. The Lord is really present, and he is doing exactly what he did when he came in the womb - namely saving!

**The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.**