

The Feast of the Visitation—July 2, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

This day in the Church Year, the Feast of the Visitation, is a day of confessing the faith. There are three great confessions made in this Gospel reading. One is by John the Baptist, one is by Elizabeth, and the third is by the Blessed Virgin Mary. What’s miraculous and wonderful in all three of these confessions is the object and substance of their confession. It’s Jesus and not Jesus as we normally picture him in the Gospels but as a very young child in the womb of his mother. And that really is quite something, isn’t it?

Luke, the physician was inspired by the Holy Spirit to record this event and reveal it to you. The first confession of this visitation is made by John the Baptist. Listen again to the beginning of the Gospel reading, “In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.”

This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. God gives you a glimpse of John in the womb of his mother Elizabeth and he leaps for joy over the Lord, in his mother’s womb coming to visit them. Life in the womb is life. This is the first confession of Jesus made in the reading. An unborn baby confesses Christ. John is a person in the womb. Not only that, but he is also a Christian. In this, along with his confession we see something important. There are no mincing words or trying to put the obvious away when it comes to this and what you see as well, there is life in the womb. God values life and so do his people. This is good for us to remember and see as we are now one year after the Dobbs decision last summer which overturned Roe vs Wade.

God, who is our Father, has created the universe and all that is in it. He has established and ordered it according to his good and gracious will and himself as the loving Creator. All that is good, true, and beautiful reflects and points us back to the Lord who created the heavens and the earth. God is the God of life. He is life and he creates life. Not only that but being our Father who created us he also sustains and protects life. He uses us as his instruments to do so as he has given us parents and others or made us to be these vocations as well.

Each baby in the womb is a testament to this fact that God creates life through a man and woman and reminds us as well that the womb was also once the dwelling place of God himself. God is the God of life. He gives life and protects life. He has given you your life. That’s why something like this issue of abortion is so important and goes to the very nature of God’s creation, care, and redemption in this world. It gets to the very core of God’s person and creative work.

The devil knows this is absolutely the case. He knows this truth about life in the womb along with other things like marriage. The devil is no dummy. He knows exactly how God operates in this world, so he attacks and perverts what God graciously does and gives. The devil lies and tries to get us to see through these things and rather than receive and honor what God gives to us he wants us to be critical and create chaos out of the order God has established. The devil attacks life just as Herod tried to kill the boys in Bethlehem in order to try and kill the child Jesus. The devil tries to get us to believe that men and

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women are interchangeable and there is no difference between them and what one can do the other can or there are no differences between them. The devil wants us to call evil good and good evil. He wants us to call what God has created by another name. He wants us to be at the point where we start asking the questions like, is this “thing in the womb” really life or does this life matter if there is some defect, disability, or terminal issue? The devil is a liar and the father of lies. God is the God of life even as Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

John the Baptist was alive in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth and he confessed Jesus by his actions. And this shouldn't surprise us because his parents were Christians. They were righteous people who heard the word of God. Yes, they were sinners, Zechariah, his father who was a priest, was struck mute after doubting the word and until John was born. Nonetheless his parents heard the word of God and kept it. They would have been confessing, speaking, singing, and praying this word in their homes as John continued to grow in his mother's womb and even after he was born and he was given the name, John. He learned of Jesus more and grew in this faith and into the purpose he was sent to prepare the way of the Lord and, finally, in the ultimate confession he confessed Jesus by his actions again as he was killed for the faith. All throughout his life, John the Baptist confessed the faith.

The second confession of faith in the Gospel reading is made by Elizabeth. Luke goes on to write, “And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.’”

Elizabeth and John were visited by Mary and Jesus. Elizabeth confessed the blessing of being in the presence of her Lord as he was brought to her by his mother as he himself was in the womb. Elizabeth saw this as a gift given to her and she confesses a blessing to those who hear God's word and believe it. She believed what was spoken to her would be fulfilled. Mary believed and said to the angel earlier in Luke 1, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Elizabeth is an example of faith for you. She is a saint, just like her son, who shows you what a faithful confession and life looks like. It's a life lived by faith and this faith has its object and fulfillment in Jesus who is the author and perfecter of your faith just as he was for them.

The third confession is the confession of Mary. Her confession is given at great length here in this reading and throughout Luke's Gospel. She is the mother of God. In her womb is God in the flesh, Jesus. That's nothing insignificant. She was blessed, as Elizabeth said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” Her blessing, though, was not found in herself rather it was found in the one whom she bore. The fruit of her womb was her Redeemer. Her Son is the only begotten Son of God. It is right to honor her. Our Lutheran Confessions rightly confesses her as the “Blessed Virgin Mary.” They rightly confess her as the mother of God for Elizabeth's Lord and your Lord was in her womb.

You learn from Mary and see in her a great example of the faith and unique as only she bore the Son of God. Every Christian is called, you are called to have that same mind and faith which when you hear God's word responds, “let it be to me according to your word.” Mary is your sister in the faith who has gone before you. Mary is a saint, and you are to look to her as an example of the faith to mimic and

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follow in that same faith. Yet she is not to be worshipped or prayed to as she herself testifies and points you to someone outside or herself. Her confession is a confession of her Son. Mary's visitation to her relative, was all for the sake of the child in her womb and all three of these confessions were a confession of Christ.

Dear people of God there is one more confession in all this today. It's your confession. Take all of this in which you have heard proclaimed to you by St. Luke and ponder it in your heart. Consider your place in all of this and what this means for you as you live in this world. In the Epistle reading God, through St. Paul, exhorts you. "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."

God's word is for you. "Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." What is evil? Listen to God's law and see where you have sinned against him. Examine the world and see where it tries to steal you away from Christ and try to persuade you in to loving what is evil and abhorring what is good. Fight against the crafts and assaults of the devil which try to get you to look at this event of the visitation with disdain rather than rejoicing with John the Baptist, Elizabeth, and Mary that God is the God of life who has come and dwelled with his people and who, for a time, had his throne in the womb of the virgin. Do not be haughty. Do not be wise in your own sight. God chose what is lowly and despised to shame the world and its wisdom. See your own sin and confess it. Repent.

The Visitation of Mary is what is good. Rejoice in it and see your consolation, confidence, comfort, and peace. Your Lord, Jesus Christ, was in the womb of Mary. The reason why he was there was to save you and he has done it. He didn't stay her womb but was born and lived his life perfectly in obedience to his Father and fulfilled all that was commanded of him. He is one promised of old. He is one prophesied by the Prophet Isaiah who said, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins."

This is your Lord who has fulfilled all that was spoken of him. This is he who shares your human flesh and blood only is without sin. He is the one who went on to suffer in your place and satisfy the wrath of God by his death and pay the price you owe for your sin. The fruit of the womb of Mary is the crucified Lord, Christ crucified for you. He is the Lord who is risen and promises you that you too shall rise and live just as he has and is risen. Just so, God used these three people who were lowly to confess Christ and be revealed to you in his word as examples of faith for you today. In the Collect of the Day you prayed, "Grant that we may receive Your Word in humility and faith." That's who you are in Christ too as you, a sinner, have been brought low and raised up in Christ who forgives your sin and gives you a new life in him.

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See also this glorious truth on this Feast of the Visitation. Jesus visited those people that day and Jesus is here now as well. But you see dear Christians, Jesus is no visitor in your life who is here for a time or season and then is gone. No, your Lord is here and is with you for all eternity. He promised at his ascension that he is with you always even to the end of the age. You have been clothed with him in the waters of your baptism. You confess this as St. Paul does in Galatians 2, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” As if that wasn’t enough your Lord gives you himself, his own body and blood for your forgiveness, life, and salvation in his Supper. You take into your mouths the same Lord who was in the womb of Mary, walked on this earth, hung of the cross, and rose from the dead. This is the faith you confess in this life. This is the faith you confess with all God’s people as it has been handed down to you and given to you as a gracious gift by the Holy Spirit. John’s confession is your confession. Elizabeth’s confession is your confession. Mary’s confession is your confession. Join with them and all the saints speaking, living, and singing this confession every day. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” Rejoice indeed in God your Savior. “For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

The day is coming too, and will surely come soon you pray, when you will rise from your grave. Your Lord will come in all his glory and take you to be with himself. You will not visit but dwell with him and all his saints. What a glorious day that will be indeed. Until that day cling to your Lord’s word and sacraments and know that you are his for your sin is forgiven and you have been called his own. Confess and rejoice. Leap for joy. Blessed are you who have believed that word spoken to you.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.