

Luke 1:39–45 (46–56)

“The Best Gift”

4th Sunday of Advent

December 23, 2018

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

[Introduction]

Women in our culture are too often celebrated for what they look like,
instead of for who they are.

The airwaves are inundated with ads for diet pills and plans,
 cosmetics and calisthenics,
 collagen and cosmetic surgery,
all aimed at showing women what they can truly be
if only they would improve their appearance.

In today’s text, we meet two women.

Luke never bothers to tell us what they looked like.

He doesn’t mention their high cheekbones or their hourglass figures.

He pays no attention to their sense of fashion.

Nevertheless, he shows them for what they truly are: beautiful women.

[Mary]

The first of these women was probably quite young, perhaps just a teenager.

Her name was Mary.

And as was the custom of the age,
she was engaged to a somewhat older man,
a carpenter by the name of Joseph.

And, as you know, she found herself to be with child.

Not because she had put the cart before the horse.

No, no, no! Her child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Mary, a virgin, had been chosen to be our Lord’s mother – theotokos – the bearer of God.

And she received this news with beautiful humility, saying,

“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38).

The angel also told Mary that her barren cousin Elizabeth would bear a child.

And no doubt young Mary knew that Elizabeth would be a good mentor.

So, bursting with youthful energy, Mary hurried up into the hill country
to visit with Elizabeth and to tell her the good news.

[*Elizabeth*] Now, Elizabeth was married to Zechariah,
a distinguished priest who served in the temple.

Unlike Mary, she was advanced in age. But she was no less beautiful.
Luke tells us that she was a righteous woman, blameless in all her ways.
This kind of beauty is more precious than gold or silver.

As soon as Mary entered Elizabeth's house,
she excitedly told Elizabeth all that had happened:
about the angel,
about the conception by the Holy Spirit,
and about the child whom she would call Jesus,
which means, "The Lord saves."
Yes, she had good news in every sense of the word.

And at this greeting, how did Elizabeth react?
Was she perhaps a little jealous that Mary's news was greater than her own?
Was she put off by the fact that this young girl, and not she,
would give birth to the Savior?

After all, Elizabeth was married to a respected priest who served in the temple.	Mary, on the other hand, was only a simple girl, set to marry a simple carpenter.
--	---

But no.
There was no jealousy in this beautiful woman. In fact, she was honored, saying,
"Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (v 43).

At Mary's good news, Elizabeth's heart was gladdened, and she exclaimed,
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (v 42).

Then, wonder of wonders, Elizabeth's child got into the act. As Elizabeth added,
"For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (v 44).

In exceeding great joy, John the Baptist was already pointing to the Lamb of God, who would take away the sin of the world.

Yes, here is a picture of infant faith and a vivid reminder of why we baptize babies.
The child of Elizabeth was already looking forward to what
the child of Mary would accomplish.
The infant John was rejoicing that our Lord
had become a little babe, just like him.

Yes, in today's Gospel we see that human life – in all of its stages –
has been sanctified and touched by the beauty of our beautiful Savior.

Yes, there is ...

Beauty in the unborn child.

Beauty in the godly mother.

Beauty in the one who grows older in the wisdom of the Lord.

All human life is made beautiful by the Lord
through whom the world was created,
by whose death the world is redeemed,
and by whose incarnation the world is sanctified.

Compare this beautiful biblical scene with the ugliness of sin.

The ugliness of sin is constantly lurking in our thoughts, words and deeds.

Constantly lurking and telling us we should get our ways, our desires, and get them now!

[Trust the Lord]

Consider Mary. At hearing that she would be the mother of our Lord,

Mary did not succumb to vanity or engage in empty boasting.

She has no intent of self-promotion or self-fulfillment.

Instead, she finds herself raised and graced by what the Lord has done.

She finds her fulfillment in what the Lord has promised.

Yes, Mary's beauty is in her humility and trust.

In response to the angel's word, she simply said,

"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (v 38).

This was not blind obedience or passive ignorance.

No, Mary trusted in the Lord because she knew that he is, in fact, trustworthy.

Throughout the ages, our Lord had kept his promises.

He has a long history of raising the lowly and showing kindness to the poor.

Mary knew that through her child, God would do great things.

And so in great joy, Mary began to sing her wonderful song: ***"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed"*** (vv 46–48).

Yes...

In her Son, she would see the proud scattered and the mighty knocked off their thrones.
In her Son, she would see the humble exalted and the hungry filled with good things.
In her Son, she would see the salvation of Israel and her own exaltation as well.

Maybe that's the point of all of this. Mary had the right point of view.

[Conclusion]

Society teaches young women
 (and really isn't any different for young men)
 to look in the mirror and judge themselves by appearance.

But what's the result? Either vanity or despair.
 Because, finally, there's nothing there.

Mary and Elizabeth, on the other hand, did not vainly look in the mirror
 but were happy for each other,
 and more important, they put their focus on Christ.

Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist,
 was most excited by the fact that Mary would give birth to the Savior.
 And because of that, Elizabeth could rejoice with Mary.

Nor was Mary vain.
 Rather than look at the mirror of her own loveliness,
 she looked at what God had done for her
 and saw the One who would come forth and save her.

Yes, the attention of both Elizabeth and Mary was on our Lord.
 Because they were focusing on Christ, they were beautiful women.
 They looked into the face of the Lord and reflected his beauty.

So let us stop looking in the mirror.

***WE SHOULD BE THE MIRROR
TO REFLECT CHRIST TO THE WORLD.***

Let us reflect Him in thought, word and deed.

After all, that is the best gift you can give this Christmas!

Amen.

REJOICE always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. AMEN! (1 Thess. 5:16–18)
