

Sermon

I was debating to use one of Martin Luther's sermons from this Christmas book. It's a collection of sermons where Martin Luther contemplates the events of Christmas. One of the sermons is on the Visitation. I mean the visit between Mary and her cousin Elisabeth. That's what our reading is about...

I love this Christmas book, and we've been using it for a few years in our Advent devotions. But I decided not to use Luther's sermon today—just a few quotes. So let us start from the beginning. *“In those days, Mary went with haste,”* or as we would say today, Mary hurried to visit her cousin Elisabeth. Everyone knows about Mary the mother of Jesus and her story. But let's just remind ourselves what exactly happened in those days. Well angel Gabriel came to Mary one day and said: *“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”* This was quite an unusual greeting even in Mary's time, but if you think about it, it's not a bad greeting. Which one of us wouldn't want to be greeted with words: “Hello, God is pleased with you and is with you.”

Hearing these kinds of words one could say: Yes, that's awesome. God is great. But we hear that Mary was troubled with this greeting. Well she was troubled probably because she wasn't greeted by angels on everyday basis, or we believe she was just a very modest and humble girl. Why would someone greet her so nobly?

I'd say from a human perspective that Mary had plenty to worry about. For what the angel had to say, I bet none of the girls in Mary's position would want to hear. *“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.”* (pause) **Boy... is this a good news or a bad news?** Let's see, Mary was most likely a poor orphan, without father and mother, about fourteen years old. She was engaged to Joseph but had not gone to live with him and was still a virgin. Now she was just told that she's pregnant, with a child and his name is going to be Jesus. (pause) **Good news or bad news?**

One could say, it was still good news for the whole world... for Mary, not so much. Why not? Well because of the consequences. Engaged girl, a virgin not living with her husband to be, found pregnant... the most severe consequence would be death by stoning. I think that Mary

had a different idea about her first year of marriage. No wonder she ran in haste to her cousin Elizabeth's house. ☺

And yet is this really what's happening? Is this what Mary is thinking? Is she running away because her situation could not be possibly worse? Is she so troubled that she can't handle it anymore? (pause) No of course not. Why? Because in the midst of this absolute mess, she picked up on the good news. She captured the words that were spoken to her and realized their meaning, but most importantly she believed in them.

And so what were the words that Mary heard? What are the words that we so often overhear because we're thinking about the mess Mary got herself into? (pause) The angel said to her: *"Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."*

Now let me ask you again: **Is this good news or a bad news?** Of course it is good news. God is sending his Son to be born into our world, who will be more powerful than anything else on this earth, more powerful than death itself. He will rule forever and his kingdom will never end. That's my friends good news, that's the good news of Christmas.

In the midst of our business, our everyday struggles, our worries and fears, the chaos in our lives there is a Christmas message spoken by angel to us all: *"Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God."* (pause) Now let us just pause and listen to these words: *"Do not be afraid. No matter what is going on, do not be afraid, for I your God am with you, through that child of Bethlehem whose name is Jesus, I am with you."*

See Mary heard this good message. She got it and she accepted it in faith. She put her whole life into that one simple message. *"May it be to me as you have said,"* she replied. And then with haste set out and went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. And as she meets her, Elizabeth exclaims with a loud cry, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."*

Was Mary truly blessed? Well some could argue that being pregnant and single in her society wasn't a blessing. Some could say that to deliver a child out in a cold stable without proper help wasn't a blessing. Some could say that have to run to a foreign land because being persecuted wasn't a blessing. And mostly seeing your son dying on the cross, certainly we wouldn't consider a blessing. And yet we hear: "*Blessed are you among women.*"

In our human eyes, we see blessings in many different ways. Most of the time we consider ourselves blessed when we have everything we need. When our tables are full and cars and houses new, when our jobs are stable and when we're all healthy and well. **These things my friends are blessings, but will not mean anything, if we won't have in our lives the biggest blessing of all, the child of Bethlehem born to us all, Jesus Christ our Lord.** It is through him that all the blessings flow and only the one who can put his faith and trust in this child will find the true meaning of the word blessed.

Mary wasn't blessed because she had it made, because she was well off and without worry. She was blessed not because she was better than all the other women. **What made Mary blessed, was what was in her womb.** It was the baby Jesus that made her blessed. She was blessed because she believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord. (pause)

Do you believe, (my friends,) that there will be a fulfillment of what was spoken to you by the Lord? Do you believe that God send his one and only son to be born into this world, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life? Do you believe that to you a child is given, that to us a son was born? If you do, you are more blessed than the richest, prettiest, and happiest people in the world. For you have something that this world cannot give.

Mary believed and she was truly blessed. **And it was as she believed this powerful message, as she was willing to make this leap of faith and trust that God is with her despite all the horrible circumstances, as she realized these things, she started to sing:** "*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*"

God has looked with favor on all of us. God still looks at us with all his love, mercy and compassion. God sees our lowliness, our pain, our sickness, and our doubts. He's here for us to do great things for us. He's here to lift us up. He's here to help us. He's here to make us blessed. Not in the riches of this world, but in the light of Christmas, in the promise of a new and everlasting life in his son Jesus Christ. It is in him that we can find true blessing.

And so no matter what you're going through right now, know, believe and trust that you're in God's hands. (pause) That is what Mary did and her life was changed forever. And this change began with a magnificent song. I would like to end this sermon with a song as well and I'm going to invite all of you to sing it with. And as you sing, please pay attention to words, for that's what this message is all about. It's the hymn 763 My life flows on in endless song.

Amen