

Fourth Sunday in Advent/December 23, 2018
Luke 1:39-45/The Great Reversal
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
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“...blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Have you ever noticed how many Mary's there are in the Gospels? Besides Mary, the mother of Jesus, there is Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and even one Mary who is referred to as the “other” Mary.

Now, there is nothing about the name Mary that gives someone a particular desire to follow Jesus. The simple fact is Mary was a very common name in first century Galilee. Understand Moses' older sister was named Miriam and by the time you take that name from Hebrew to Greek to English, you end up with Mary. You can imagine the number of parents who named their daughters after Moses' big sister. Just about every family with daughters had one named Mary.

When Mary, the mother of Jesus, grew up, she was just one of many Mary's in Nazareth. Her parents arranged for her to marry a nice man named Joseph when she came of age. Her future was pretty much set. She would be known as Mary the wife of Joseph of Nazareth. She would help Joseph raise a family and grow old together. There was nothing really unusual in Mary's future.

Then an angel named Gabriel showed up with a message from God. Suddenly there was a great reversal. Everything changed. Mary was going to be a mother a little bit sooner than expected. The child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. To top it all off, the child in her womb was none other than the Son of God taking on human flesh

and blood. The great reversal in Gabriel's message turned Mary's life upside-down.

Now we know what this great reversal is all about. Mary knows what it is about too. But, Mary's community does not know. So, what would you do if your daughter she said she was going to have a baby by the power of the Holy Spirit? What about Joseph? His betrothed is pregnant and he is not the father. Mary knows God chose her for a great honor, but right now, her life has suddenly become a hassle. Her community believes she committed adultery, a crime punishable by stoning to death. There will be a time when all generations will call her blessed, but now is not that time.

Fortunately, God provided someone to help Mary deal with this great reversal. The angel Gabriel left a hint for Mary when he said, [Luke 1:36] "Behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren." In one sentence, Gabriel praised God for the miracle of John's birth and gave Mary an idea of where she might find a safe place to come to grips with the idea God was growing in her womb.

Elizabeth was probably the only other woman in the world who understood what was really happening. Just as the miracle child in Mary's womb was the Son of God, so the miracle child in Elizabeth's womb was a prophet. When Mary arrived at Elizabeth's home, this little baby prophet started doing the dance of joy. The Holy Spirit made it clear to Elizabeth that Mary's baby was no ordinary child, but was, in fact, her Lord. At that point in time, Elizabeth understood Mary's situation.

So Mary had a time of peace when she was away from the gossip of Nazareth and in the house of Zechariah, the priest. Elizabeth could mentor her and, even though he couldn't talk, Zechariah could share

God's Word with her. As she stayed with Elizabeth in the house of the priest, God would build her up for the hardships in her future.

Mary, on her part, could help this pregnant, older woman around the house. She could do some of the chores and run some of the errands and so ease the life of Elizabeth. I've been told childbirth is hard enough when the mother is young and strong. Who knows what it was like for an old woman like Elizabeth?

Undoubtedly, these two women were both much better off after their three months together. Elizabeth had someone to help her as she delivered this baby in her old age. Mary received the courage, strength, and moral support she needed for the hard times ahead. God brought these two women together to give each other mutual support.

When Mary first arrived at Elizabeth's house, she spoke one of the most beautiful poems in the Bible, the Magnificat. The Magnificat tells of the great reversal God's blessings bring to us. Even though she wasn't sure how things would turn out, even though her reputation suffered, even though her life was turned upside-down, she still praised God for all the blessings He had given her. The Holy Spirit gave her a faith that trusted God in spite of the hardships that lay in her future.

God is in the business of transforming us. He is in the business of reversing our status. God humiliates those who are proud of their own righteousness, but lifts up the humble with His grace. He weakens those who rely on their own might, but strengthens the weak with His power. He impoverishes those who worship their own wealth, but feeds those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. When God reverses our status it is a great reversal.

The nature of this great reversal is something that does not always make sense to us. God pours His blessings out on us, but those blessings don't always make our lives easier or more pleasant. The Holy Spirit touched Mary and she became the mother of God. Although this was a unique and tremendous blessing, her life quickly became more complicated.

The world tempts us to believe the right religion is the one that gives us the most power, makes our lives easier, provides the most security, or eases our lives in some other way. The world directs your attention to the here and now. It wants us to think about the kingdom of this world. The world does not want us to focus on the kingdom of our Lord, the kingdom that lasts forever.

Ultimately, that is what today's Gospel is about. The greatest reversal of all began in Mary's womb. The Son of God surrendered His glorious throne to take on human nature. He then hid His divine glory in His humanity and submitted to life in the womb of the Virgin Mary for nine months. Then, after He was born into this world, sin surrounded Him and temptation pummeled Him. However, He never sinned. Instead, He took the sin of the world, your sin and mine, He took it all onto Himself and suffered its punishment on our behalf as He suffered and died on the cross. The lord of the universe lay dead in the tomb. That is the great reversal the Son of God endured on our behalf.

The Son of God's greatest reversal produces our greatest reversal. We were dead in sin and are now alive. We were enemies of God and are now heirs of the Kingdom of God. We were destined for eternal punishment and are now destined for eternal joy. This great reversal is ours because of the great reversal of the Son of God, the great reversal that began in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

The Son of God took on humanity and died. Because He submitted to this great reversal, He conquered death. He removed the sting of death, rose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of God the Father. As He waits at the right hand of the Father, He says, [Revelation 22:20] “Surely I am coming soon.” May this season of Advent prepare you so that you join God’s people and reply, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” Amen