Mary Visits Elizabeth

1. Read Luke 1:39-45. Let's think about the moment when Mary visits Elizabeth. Both John, still in the womb, and Elizabeth have some amazing reactions. What do you think their responses tell us about how the Holy Spirit works in our lives and brings the message of the Gospel to light? And how can these reactions help us understand where faith comes from? Also, take a moment to reflect on what 1 Corinthians 12:3 says—how does this verse connect to the discussion?

For you and me, all or most of our lives have been wrapped up in ongoing proclamation and discussion of God's Word. Even right now, in Bible study, we are fitting together the bits and pieces of doctrine and theology and revelation in our minds. Faith can seem like such a cognitive process. But in this passage, we see faith at it's genesis. Not just in the reaction of Elizabeth, who would have had no idea about Mary's pregnancy and Gabriel's visit, but also the fetus John, jumps for joy in her womb—both reactions and the knowledge of who Mary's baby was, Luke clearly tells us, were from the Holy Spirit.

For us too, we must acknowledge, faith is a work that the Holy Spirit does in us and a gift that God gives. We can and should always be thankful that God has kept us in the true faith and should ask that He continue to be gracious and preserve our faith.

Another key tenant of our theology is that the Means of Grace that the Holy Spirit uses to create faith is the Word of God alone. Romans 10:8-15 says: "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: [9] If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. [11] As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
[14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15] And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

The Holy Spirit opens eyes and hearts to the truth of God's Word. In this case, the Word Made Flesh was in the room!

- ✞ Consider how this all connects with what we mentioned last time about Mary conceiving Jesus through her ear—Luther's humorous way of describing how the Word of God was implanted in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit—in the same way as the Holy Spirit uses the Word to implant in

our hearts hope and trust and faith. It's all through hearing the word. The Holy Spirit is the one that does all this work. How true this rings given Elizabeths comment in verse 45.

2. The unborn John leaps for joy at the mere presence of Christ, despite being unable to fully comprehend or articulate faith as outlined in Romans 10:8-15—where believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth are the marks of true faith. What does this passage reveal about the profound value and sacredness of human life at every stage, even in the womb? In the simplest terms this extraordinary moment fundamentally reenforces that that even at such an early stage of development, the Holy Spirit can instill a sense of joy and recognition of divine presence. Yes, indeed, Gabriel was correct when he told Mary in verse 37—nothing is impossible with God. All life is equal in God's eyes from the moment of conception onward. Jesus died for all the World – every soul!

- For expectant parents grappling with anxiety about their unborn child's safety during difficult or complicated pregnancies, what an incredible source of comfort this passage offers! What reassurances are offered here? It reassures them that even before birth, their child is cherished by God and capable of experiencing joy in His presence. The truth that the Holy Spirit is active in the womb provides hope and solace, reminding parents that their child's life is valuable and meaningful, even before they take their first breath. If John could perceive the Word made Flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit, then why should we ever refuse to think that an unborn child, whose mother is regularly in church and in the Word and regularly praying, isn't also aware of God's Word by the power of the Spirit?

- ✞ Moreover, consider how can all of this reinforce the practice of infant baptism? For if we accept that even the unborn can experience the work of the Holy Spirit, it highlights the importance of acknowledging the faith that may exist in these precious lives from the very beginning. Infant baptism can be seen as a powerful affirmation of God's grace at work in the lives of children who, like John, may not articulate their faith but are nonetheless recipients of divine love and promise.

The First Christmas Carol

3. Actually, in the bible we don't call them carols, they are canticles or psalms. Read Luke 1:46-56. What is the overall theme of Mary's canticle?

That God by nature is a God who has a heart for the lowly and the helpless. This doesn't just mean those who are physically in this condition but also this foreshadows the whole Gospel message, summarized in Matthew 5:3 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Faith is about despairing of ourselves and finding all our strength in Christ.

4. Mary's Magnificat (from the word "magnify") is the first of four Christmas canticles recorded by Luke. Mary, Zecheriah, the Angels, and Simeon all sing of the wonderous work of God in sending His Son and the implications for sinners in a sinful broken world. What different names does Mary give to God in this canticle?

A. "the Lord" (v. 46)

B. "God my Savior" (v. 47)

C. "the Mighty One' (v. 49)

D. "holy" (v 49) most specific name given.

✞ Which of these names was applied to Jesus in the annunciation (1:31-35)? "Holy".

By using this name, Mary acknowledges that the child in her womb is the divine presence through whom God's final mighty act of salvation will be accomplished.

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