

Luke 1:39-55

³⁹At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

⁴⁶And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

The history books are concerned with rulers and the rich. The spotlight of news and entertainment shines on the talented and influential. The world is concerned with greatness and with following people as they try to achieve greatness. It is not often that you come across a regular Joe in the news unless he has done something extraordinary. This comes as no surprise as greatness is more compelling than mediocrity. But the Lord of heaven and earth does not concern himself only with the greatness of this world. He cares for the lowly with the grace of his presence. And he comes to the lowly with his gracious presence in simple and lowly things.

He showed his grace to his people by being present for them at the Temple. God had promised to be there. His mercy was shown and could be smelled in the sacrifices of animals. The righteousness of God was given there. As blessed were they who believed that what the Lord pictured in those slaughtered

lambs he would accomplish. But God's gracious presence in simple sacrifices would not stay at the Temple. The presence of God had moved from brick and mortar to flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin, the most blessed among women, Mary. And around that presence of the Lord in that unborn child has brought the grace of God to the lowly.

The child in Elizabeth's womb recognized that gracious presence of the Lord just at the word of Mary. John leaped at the greeting of Mary, at the word of Mary who carried the Word of Lord in her womb. The prophecy concerning John who grew inside the barren womb of Elizabeth was coming true. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. And in joy did John leap in his mother's womb, filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with faith, for there is no true joy apart from faith. This was no ordinary movement of a child in the sixth month as revealed to Elizabeth by the Holy Spirit, *"As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."* The movement in the womb was brought on by the presence of the Lord.

That same presence of the Lord brought on the beautiful words of Elizabeth, who filled with the Holy Spirit *exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"* Again this was no ordinary greeting, simple words though they were. It was not like when one sees a pregnant relative for the first time after finding out she is pregnant. This greeting was brought on by the Holy Spirit in connection with the presence of the Lord in the flesh.

And blessed among women, Mary too responded to this presence of the Lord. She proclaimed the greatness of the Lord having seen firsthand how he deals with the lowly. She saw her barren relative filled with a child and not just any child but the prophet of the Most High, whom the Most High would call the greatest among those born of women. Mary saw how the Lord treats the lowly with his gracious presence. She also saw the greatest promise fulfilled in her, *"for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed."* And indeed, blessed is the virgin mother of our Lord, in whom God chose to be incarnate of the Holy Spirit and become man. How amazing the way the Lord deals with the lowly.

The barren Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary, two empty and lowly women filled with good things, filled with the presence of the Lord, even though they had not deserved it. Blessed are these women who believed that what the Lord has said to them would be accomplished. Blessed are you the lowly whom God has also filled with good things, blessings more than can be counted. You the lowly, slaves to sin and death as so clearly shown in the reading from Genesis. Sin crouching at your door and death following after it. Who could be more lowly than you? Blessed are you lifted up from that terrible state, through the gracious presence of the Lord.

But be careful. Be always on your guard. There is the great temptation to feel that you deserve good things from God, as if God owes you health or a happy life. Run from those kinds of temptations to look at God as any other gift giver. Or to see his gifts as any other gifts, some that you like others you would return. When the Lord deals with you in your humble state he doesn't do so because he appreciates what you've done for him. He acts as he always has out of his underserved love found in his presence.

The same way God dealt with Mary and Elizabeth is the same way he dealt with the children of Israel at the Temple and the same way he deals with you. God's presence is the mercy he extends and the mighty deeds he performs.

The presence of God moved from the Temple to the womb of Mary and to where it can be found now, in the Church's preaching and sacraments. The presence of God, found mercifully in the flesh he took from Mary, was given and pierced for you on the cross. IN that forgiveness you have been lifted up from your lowly state as a slave to sin and condemned to death. The presence that caused John to leap, Elizabeth to bless Mary, and the virgin mother to glorify the Lord, is near to you. Your poetic prayer from a moment ago, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is answered. God with us truly is with us.

God is not concerned only with greatness. He cares deeply for the lowly and comes in grace to those burdened by sin. He could not be closer to you than how he has chosen to be close to you. His presence, like in the Temple and in the womb of Mary is revealed as it is according to the wisdom and grace of God. He is exactly where you need him to be in simple means, the Church's preaching and sacraments. It is readily available to you the humble who are filled with good things. O Come, O Come Emmanuel has been answered. God is with us. Blessed are you who have believed that what the Lord has said to you will be accomplished.

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

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