

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Imagine a young girl between the ages of 12 and 14. This young girl is engaged to be married. Her social status at the time was not so great. She's considered to be inferior and poor. And yet, God chooses her, a young girl of low social status to do his work. God chose the Virgin Mary to bring Jesus into the world.

Mary had an angel of God appear to her to tell her that she had found favor with God and that she would give birth to God's Son, Jesus. Mary asks how this could happen because she is a virgin and the angel tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her. The angel also tells her that a relative named Elizabeth, who was unable to have a child, was now six months pregnant with a son in her old age. The angel told her that nothing is impossible with God. Mary was accepting of what the angel had spoke to her and was ready to be God's servant.

I'm always amazed at Mary's response to the angel. She is so willing and accepting of what the angel tells her. On one level we can look at it as a child's faith since she was so young...children generally believe what they are told until they reach a certain age. But, on the other hand, it's hard not to imagine what may have run through this young girl's mind. She could've thought, why me? Why now? I'm not even married yet. I could get in so much trouble. I could be a social outcast and life would be an uphill battle if Joseph dismisses me.

We don't get any inkling of a response like this from Mary. Rather, it is the exact opposite. Mary praises God for choosing her to be the mother of Jesus. After Mary hears the news from the angel about Elizabeth, she decides to go and visit with her. Mary greets Elizabeth and the child that she was carrying, who happens to be John the Baptist, leaped for joy in his mother's womb when he heard Mary talk. And then Elizabeth's response to Mary is about the child that Mary is carrying is her Lord. Elizabeth also tells Mary that she's blessed because she believed what the angel spoke to her.

It's amazing to hear this interaction between Elizabeth and Mary. I don't know of too many people who would praise a 12-14 year old for being pregnant and unmarried.

Elizabeth talks of Mary being blessed because she is the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth's joy for the child in Mary's womb is overwhelming. She is honored that this unborn child, the Lord is honoring her with his presence at her house.

Elizabeth's reaction is a lesson for us. It would be great if we were filled with the Spirit Sunday after Sunday and each day of our lives. God comes to us in the Word, the Holy Scriptures and in the bread and wine during Holy Communion. God comes to each of us in different ways in our daily living. He may be there in the relationship that we share with others. He may be there in the creation that surrounds us. How wonderful it would be if we would rejoice at his presence in our lives. God comes to us. The Holy Spirit comes to us and fills us with God's peace, joy, and presence.

Mary rejoiced because she believed that God's word would be fulfilled through her. She is a model for each of us. At different times in our lives God calls each of us to do something, whether it be giving food to the poor, a teacher helping a student, a neighbor helping a neighbor, a young person helping an elderly person, praying for brothers and sisters in Christ, or simply just doing whatever God has called us to do with our lives we should rejoice and praise God for choosing us to do God's work in the world. Sometimes it's hard to have the same response as Mary and say, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

In fact, I know many pastors, including myself, who may tell you that God called them to the ministry and they kept looking for the person standing behind them. They didn't feel that they were equipped to be pastors. I remember one of my classmates saying, God, you want me to do what?

Mary is an exceptional example for us. She rejoices and accepts God's call to her. Mary also gives us hope as she describes what the Lord has done for her and what he will do for generations of people. Mary gives us hope in the mighty acts that Jesus will perform. Her song tells us that his mercy will reach those from generation to generation who fear God, that he will make us equal, the powerful will be taken down and the lowly will be lifted up, the hungry will be fed, and that God will keep his promises that he made with Israel.

Martin Luther wrote about Mary's song in response to learning the news of being the mother of Jesus. He wrote in a letter to Prince John Frederick,

“In order properly to understand this sacred hymn of praise, we need to bear in mind that the Blessed Virgin Mary is speaking on the basis of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit. No one can correctly understand God or His Word unless he has received such understanding immediately from the Holy Spirit. But no one can receive it from the Holy Spirit without experiencing, proving, and feeling it. In such experience the Holy Spirit instructs us as in His own school, outside of which nothing is learned but empty words and prattle. When the holy virgin experienced what great things God was working in her despite her insignificance, lowliness, poverty, and inferiority, the Holy Spirit taught her this deep insight and wisdom that God is the kind of Lord who does nothing but exalt those of low degree and put down the mighty from their thrones, in short, break what is whole and make whole what is broken.”

Luther raises up for us the importance of being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit guided Mary in her response to God's call ~ just as the Spirit is our advocate and guide today. He also reminds us that Jesus is coming to turn the world upside down. The lowly will be lifted up and those who are elevated will be made low.

We have many things to be joyful about. Mary accepted God's favor and believed that the word of the Lord that was spoken by an angel would come true. She also had insight from the Spirit that Jesus would do great things for generations to come. Let us be open

to the Spirit. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with insight as we anticipate Christ's coming.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding be in your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus the Lord. Amen.