

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Advent 4 – December 22, 2024
Luke 1:39-56 – Blessed is She Who Believed
Rev Peter Wagner

In the name of Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Mary. Amen.

“From now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me.”

At the time Mary sang these words, the mighty deeds God had done for her were not obvious or flashy. In fact, they were invisible. God had done an invisible, secret, tiny deed, inside her body, on a microscopic level. God caused a single cell to start growing and dividing. No one could yet see that Mary was pregnant, no one knew. She herself could not even feel it yet.

But Mary believed. From the moment the angel Gabriel spoke to her, “You will conceive in your womb and bear a son,” even though she was a virgin, she had no doubt.

She was amazed, certainly, but not in doubt. “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” These are not words of questioning doubt, but shock and bewilderment. I will conceive, but I am a virgin. It’s going to happen, but how? I know your word is true, though I cannot comprehend it.

So Gabriel explained, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.”

And Mary accepted it, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” This is true faith. She simply believed the word of God. It was beyond her comprehension, utterly overwhelming. But it was true, and she believed it.

So it was – when Mary arose and went to Elizabeth, and when the unborn John the Baptist leaped in his mother’s womb, rejoicing to hear the voice of the mother of his Lord – so it was that Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Blessed is she who believed. Mary believed God’s word, that she would conceive, even though she was a virgin. She believed in a God who does miracles, who is in control of the heavens and the earth. She believed that he who fashioned us from clay is in control of our bodies, of every moment of human life, from conception until death.

Mary believed the miracle. But more than that, she believed in Jesus, the son she would bear. She believed he would be great and would be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God. Though she could not comprehend it, she accepted that the Father of her child was God himself. And if God was the Father, then his Son must also share the Father’s essence, his divine nature. So Mary believed that her son, true man, was also true God. God from God, light from light, very God of very God, begotten of his Father from eternity.

Even more than that, Mary believed that the Lord God would give his incarnate Son the throne of his father David, to reign forever. This baby would overthrow kings and emperors, and of his kingdom there would be no end. She believed he would live forever, the eternal King of kings.

Yes, Mary believed all the words of Gabriel, that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the power of the Most High would overshadow her; so that this child would be called holy – the Son of God. In other words, she believed in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit upon her, the Most High overshadowing her, the Son of God in her womb. Surrounded and enveloped on all sides by God in his favor, inside and out, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, within her and all around her.

These things Mary believed. And for her faith, blessed is she among women. All generations to the end of time will call her blessed, for she believed the fulfillment of all these things.

She believed in the Son, her King and her Lord, the Savior of the world. Jesus, who saves his people from their sins, by his death of the cross, by becoming the holy and pleasing and acceptable sacrifice and offering to God, the offering for the sins of the world. She believed that this baby would save even her, would save her from sin and death, and bring her to eternal life. For nothing is impossible with God. So she believed, and there was great rejoicing in heaven.

And therefore, filled with the Holy Spirit, filled with saving faith, this young girl from Nazareth opened her mouth and sang. She confessed the Lord in beautiful, majestic words that no ordinary man or woman could ever compose. So filled with the power of the Holy Spirit was she that she scarcely knew what she was saying.

The words burst from within her, filled with praise and joy, pouring out like an overflowing fountain of the glory of the Lord.

Heavenly, glorious words poured from her lips. How could it be otherwise? For if the Holy Spirit had entered her womb to conceive the Eternal Word, if the Word by whom the heavens were made was truly alive inside her body, how could anything now stop the blessed words of God from bursting from her mouth? And if the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork, how much more will this young girl whose body contains the living, incarnate God proclaim his mighty deeds for all nations and generations to hear?

So Mary sings. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." Nothing in me has deserved any of this. I am a mere servant, a handmaiden, a creature. Why God has looked with such favor on me, I do not know. But I rejoice and praise him, for he has blessed me with blessings far beyond any woman since the day Eve was fashioned from Adam's rib until today, or till the end of time.

"For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Holy is his name. Do not worship me or magnify me or pray to me. I am just the vessel, the recipient. Worship the one in my womb. Magnify his holy name, for he is the Mighty One, and he has done these mighty deeds.

"And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." I am blessed, but then blessing is not for me alone. His mercy is for all who fear him, in all generations. And all who believe in him, who share my faith, in him all the families of the earth will be blessed.

The blessing of God has come to me first, but he is for all the world. For I am bearing the offspring that was promised to Eve. In me is alive right now the eternal God, who will crush the serpent's head, and undo the curse of death, and bring blessing and salvation to all the earth.

In the past God has shown strength with his arm. But now he is doing something even better. Now he is alive in the flesh, as a man. Soon he will be born, to scatter the proud in imagination of their hearts. He will be born to bring down the mighty from their thrones and exalt those of humble estate. He will fill the hungry with good things, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness with his own body and blood, but the rich and haughty he will send empty away.

For he who spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and Jacob, our God has now remembered his covenant. He is born to show steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love him. He is born to remember his mercy, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

And now, today, for each of us gathered here in this congregation, let us receive him as Mary did, by faith. Believe with her. With Mary we behold it.

For Mary received the Savior by faith. And Elizabeth believed too, and John leaped in her womb. And you also, who receive him by faith, all the blessings and promises to Mary are for you. You are the offspring of Abraham, if you believe the word the Lord has spoken.

So believe in him, and receive this Jesus by faith. And declare to the next generation what God has done for you in Christ Jesus, that they too may hear and believe. Fathers, read the Bible to your children. Mothers, teach them the mighty works of God, so that your faith may be handed down, from one generation to the next.

Teach the faith. As Mary taught all generations, teach the coming generation now. Teach God's truth in Scripture, in all its depth. Not just the Christmas story, not just the cute and sentimental parts, but the whole counsel of God.

Teach them to believe what Mary believed, in the mighty God who brings to life and takes it away, who exalts the lowly but humbles the proud. Teach them of the only Son our Savior, who alone does mighty deeds, sacrificing himself for the life of the world. And teach them the whole Trinity, that God the Father, Son, and Spirit together surround and envelope all who are baptized into him. Teach them diligently. Do not fail. Do not pass off your responsibility to Sunday school teachers or a parochial school or anyone else.

You may not be endowed with gracious lips and eloquence, but if you diligently seek to teach God's word, the power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you and fill you with his words, words that you could never compose on your own, so that you will receive grace to speak rightly, to confess Christ boldly, to rejoice in his salvation, and teach the faith once for all entrusted to the saints.

Grant this, Lord, unto us all. Amen.