

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 24, 2023
Luke 1:39-56 – A Son for All Generations
Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

Right after Luke's Christmas story in chapter 2, we find the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3. Here it says that Jesus was the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, and so on, generation after generation, all the way back to King David. And David was the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, and so on, generation after generation, all the way back to Judah. And Judah was the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, all the way back to Shem, the son of Noah, all the way back to Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Adam was the son of God? What about Jesus, the only-begotten Son, the eternal Word? How can the Bible call anyone but Jesus the son of God?

Adam was created, Jesus uncreated. But this genealogy shows God's love for his creation. God honors mankind and bestows undeserved sonship. He calls Adam his son. And how sad it is, in our lost and fallen state, to know that we forfeited this sonship and adoption. Adam turned away from God, and all his children rebelled in him. Our sonship was ended, our birthright of eternal life was cut off.

But Luke 3 calls Adam the son of God in order to teach us about Jesus. Jesus is the direct, only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father from eternity. But Luke is also showing that Jesus is God's son in another way. Jesus is the son of man after man, sinner after sinner, all the way back to Adam, the son of God.

And this reveals why Jesus came. He came to become our brother, to restore the children of sinners, all the way back to Adam, as sons of God. The generations all the way back to Adam hoped for the child in the manger, the generations all the way down to us worship him. In him alone we are blessed. In him, we are called sons of the Most High God. As 1 John 3 declares, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called sons of God; and so we are."

For this reason, right before the Christmas story in Luke chapter 1, the virgin Mary in the Magnificat sings of the generations God has blessed, the generations that became sons of God in Jesus. The angel Gabriel told her she would bear a son, the Son of the Most High, so Mary praised God for his mighty salvation to all generations. "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. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation... to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

This is the miracle of the Incarnation. The Son of God is in Mary's womb. He is born to overturn fallen creation, to bring the sons of Adam back to God. As Eve contained in her womb all the doomed children of sin, now Mary contains in her womb a new Adam, the father of all the redeemed. The mighty one has done great things for us, and holy is his name.

Elizabeth understood and rejoiced. "Blessed are you, Mary, among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" In Mary's womb the curse of all generations was being overturned.

And Mary understood and rejoiced. She rejoiced in God's wonderful grace to her, to let her become a small part of the salvation of all generations. "From now on all generations will call me blessed."

Even the infant John the Baptist understood and rejoiced. John leaped for joy in his mother's womb to hear Mary's voice. Even before he was born, he recognized the mother of his Lord. John believed this was the Son of God, come to restore the sons of Adam.

In Mary, all the earth is blessed. God honored not just Mary, but all who are born of women. He honored all of us, to be born as a man like us, to be our brother.

So when Jesus grew up, he spoke of his mother and brothers. He described all Christians of all generations as his family. "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" he asked. And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

All who believe the Word of God, all who do his will, all Christians possess the blessing of Mary, to be sons and daughters of God. Jesus came as Mary's son, Elizabeth's nephew, John's cousin. But really, he came as the brother of all mankind, the friend of sinners, the killer of the serpent, the Savior of all generations.

And how God loves to turn things upside down! He loves to reverse our expectations. The immortal Word becomes a mortal to make us sons of God. By a lowly girl from Nazareth, the Father turns the curse of Adam's sons into a blessing. God scatters the proud, he brings down the mighty from their thrones, and he exalts humble Mary. He tears down haughty kingdoms, replacing all their kings by this child in her womb.

By this baby from an insignificant town in a remote Roman province, God overturns the world. He establishes a church that will endure far beyond Rome. Within a few generations, the emperors of Rome worshipped this child. Then Rome collapsed, but the church remained. Many nations rose and fell, the church outlasted them all. It still stands today, we forget how great its glory. We see a church frail and divided. But God sees an invisible, glorious church. He sees his chosen possession, which shall endure to the end of time, never overthrown.

The church will endure, that is certain. But will our own congregation endure? Will our baptized children remain sons of God in Christ Jesus? Will you, fathers, tell the mighty works of God to the next generation? Will you make it your highest duty to teach your children the faith? Will you train them constantly in Christ, so when they grow up they do not depart from him? Teach them to believe in the God who turns our expectations upside down, so they grow up expecting from God not everything they want, but everything they need for their salvation.

Fathers, teach your children as if their lives depend on it. Because they do. Teach the coming generation that our God fills the hungry with good things, but sends the rich empty away. Talk about it in your homes, every day. God fills up those who hunger and thirst for righteousness with his holy Word. He fills you up with bread and wine that are his rich body and blood. He fills all his baptized children to overflowing with simple yet glorious sacraments.

So warn the coming generation about what will happen to those who scorn these things, who are rich in their own eyes. Those who consider themselves righteous, who do not hunger or thirst for righteousness, will be sent empty away. But praise those who come in humble repentance, who trust these simple treasures and believe in his name. These will be raised up. Jesus overturns their lowly estate. He bears away all their sin and sorrow. He bears it to the cross. In exchange, he gives them all the blessings of the sons and daughters of the kingdom of heaven: honor, forgiveness, and life everlasting.

In this way, the Son of God satisfies the poor in spirit of all generations. From Adam to Mary to us today, he shows mercy to Abraham and his offspring by faith forever. He helps his servant Israel, he establishes his church. He overturns the mighty and raises the humble of all generations, all who trust his promises. Though we deserve none of it, the infant Son makes us his brothers. He presents us to his Father and calls us sons of God.

“To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” May all generations receive this Savior, and believe in his name. Tell of his salvation from day to day, from generation to generation, to the end of time! For this child delights to overturn the world, to exchange sin for mercy, wrath for joy. He delights to be born in a virgin's womb, to make you born of God.

“Let one generation praise your works to the next, and declare your mighty acts.” Magnify the Lord and rejoice in God your Savior, for all the mighty things he has done for you. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.