

Sermon for the Festival of the Holy Trinity and the Visitation May 31, 2026 jj  
Rev'd Mark B. Stirdivant, Christ our Savior Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Augustine, Florida  
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It's been three weeks since Mother's Day, but in the Church Calendar there is another kind of mothers' day. Today is the commemorative day of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, the meeting of the mothers, you could call it. At the same time, this is the holy visitation of Our Lord who is the little baby inside the womb of the Virgin Mary, to the less little baby John in the womb of his mother Elizabeth. And in a rare concurrence of events, which is likely to happen only 3 or 4 times in any single human being's lifetime, today is also the Festival of the Holy Trinity, a day that has been historically marked by the common confession of the Athanasian Creed, which we will recite together after the sermon. And in the Athanasian Creed, there is so much to keep track of that it could be overwhelming, so in light of this rare combined festival of Trinity and Visitation, let's narrow our focus today when we revisit that ancient confession. For instance, we will say in the Creed, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped. Not understood, not comprehended, not argued so skillfully that human wisdom will finally give up its idolatry and succumb to the mystery—God the Holy Trinity desires to be worshiped, that is honored as the God whom He reveals Himself to be, by those whom He has saved. And I think one of the best illustrations of what our Magnificent, Highly Exalted God desires from us, His lowly creatures, can be found right here in the report Luke wrote about the Visitation.

First, we have Mary showing honor to Elizabeth. This is much more than a young woman respecting her elder relative, like we were supposed to honor our mothers back on

Mother's Day. This act of Mary's is signaling an important initiative that our Savior God has chosen to take with you. Mary had just heard from the Angel Gabriel that she will conceive and bear a son, while still remaining a virgin. Rather than choosing to bask in the glory of that unique honor, sitting enthroned in glory as the Queen of the Angels in Heaven, as today's Roman Catholic version of the holiday suggests, instead of bidding all who adore her exalted position as Mother of God to come to her, Mary instead gets up herself and hurries to the hills to stay with Elizabeth. She portrayed a picture of our Lord Jesus who got Himself out of heaven and hastened to put Himself into and a part of our world, to take the first step to come to us sinners, rather than wait for us to come to Him, showing how sorry we are and we'll try hard to earn our Lord's forgiveness, do better next time. Nothing of the sort! He also headed for the hills of Judea, one in particular, the hill called Golgotha, place of the skull, so that He would offer up His life as the payment in full for all that had separated you from God's love and had separated you from one another. He visited you to reconcile you, to bring you close to Him again. Though you had nothing honorable in yourself, your Savior came to you and honored you, much like Mary (Blessed Mother of our Lord that she was) honored Elizabeth and came to her, and greeted her with her voice. That voice of greeting was filled with the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who had visited Mary and gave her conception in her own womb, man, born from the substance of His mother in this age, perfect God and perfect man, composed of a

rational soul and human flesh, as we will confess in the Athanasian Creed.

Second, in response to Mary's visit, Elizabeth honors Mary's salute with some profound words of blessing. Whereas the holy Angel had said, "Hail Mary, highly favored one (NOT full of grace, that's the wrong translation, highly favored one) the Lord is with thee," Elizabeth's words continue the angelic beatitude in the same vein: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." And Mary is indeed blessed, she receives the honor of being blessed among all women not because she was allegedly born perfectly sinless or she attained some worthiness far above all of us mere mortals. No, the Mother of our God and Lord was one chosen by the Lord's undeserved mercy and grace, as her ancestors Abraham and Sarah were. From her body would come the human nature of our Savior-God who must become one of us in order to ransom us and reconcile us to the heavenly Father. Blessed is that fruit of Mary's womb, and centuries before the Athanasian Creed was written, Elizabeth the priest's wife could say with confidence that the tiny baby inside Mary is her Lord, the one true God! There was no concern in her mind that she might be at risk of speaking blasphemy—God's promise is a promise! Notice also the virtue Elizabeth extols in her younger, motherly relative: Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what the Lord spoke to her. Those words are not in the rosary's collection of prayers and recitations, is it? If Lutherans ever come up with a rosary, I would like to see that part included in it. Blessed is she who believed takes the focus away from Mary herself and places it solely on the One whom she believed, the One inside her who is the ultimate Blessed One.

She herself said, My spirit rejoices in God, my Savior—I need a Savior, Mary said, just like everyone else does. Just like you do. And when the Lord's announcement came from Gabriel's lips to her ears, faith sprung up in her heart, thanks to the Holy Spirit. Her God-given faith trusted everything she heard, everything that was promised to her, and Mary believed God would do what He said He would do. The same Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God you hear today, will do the very same thing—forgive you, renew you and continue leading you in the way the Father created and designed you to go, patterned after the steps of Jesus. There's how you can grasp the mystery of the Holy Trinity!

Third, I had already said that this pivotal meeting of the mothers from our Holy Gospel today was at the same time the meeting of the unborn babies they were each carrying in utero. Already in the embryo state, our Lord and Savior was true God and true Man. Jesus occupied and blessed every stage of our human body's development, growing in size from speck of dust to grape to orange to grapefruit and melon, before His birth occurred that miraculously preserved Mary's virginity, as we confess, Born of the Virgin Mary. Embryo Jesus blesses fetus John, who is a mere few months ahead in his development, but how is Jesus going to let John know that He is visiting him? He will do it God's way, of course, He will use means. And since He is the very Word of God coming among us, He will use the means of a voice, that is, Mary's voice as I just mentioned, to announce His gracious presence to John. Our Lord uses a voice with you, dear believer, so that even if you find yourself in a dark place like John did, you will hear the voice of your pastor who proclaims Jesus and His forgiveness to

you to take away your sins and hurts, and you will know for certain that Jesus is with you, and will never forsake you. Though you may be humbled and laid down in low estate, whether it's come upon you from your own guilt, or by sins and hurts you have had to suffer, no matter what, you will be raised, filled with good things, and exalted, just as Mary sang about in the Magnificat, her song of praise.

Then, in fourth place, John rejoices in Jesus by leaping (or the original says "skipping") in the womb of Elizabeth, who then reports what had just happened. Neither one is born yet, neither John nor Jesus have seen the light of day nor had yet breathed Earth's air into their lungs, but one fully human being rejoices in the presence of another fully human being who is also fully God. What a strong testimony this part of the story is to the value of every human being as he or she develops before birth! It's also full of the mystery that only our Triune God can reveal to us—upon hearing the words ordained and sent by God, even a tiny baby in the womb can respond in joy to the Lord who quickens the dead and gives life to what had been presumed to be lifeless, or at least thought to be unable to understand. Faith is there, though, and it can be expressed in more than just spoken words.

We place ourselves in each of these four facets of this pivotal meeting of the mothers. Jesus came to us, rather than waiting for us to come to Him. He blesses us with His chosen voice of forgiveness and absolution. We bless Him and marvel that our merciful Savior should come even to the likes of us, and along with fetus John we skip and leap as the Holy Spirit has placed the joy of the Lord in our hearts. Read or sing a version of Mary's song the Magnificat so that you can

get God's own insights on how to understand the whole Bible's central story, and what God has in mind for us in our lives. It's the same as using your Catechism to help you better understand the teachings you come across in your Bible study. You might agree that it would be much easier to tell this story rather than attempt to memorize the Athanasian Creed.

Then we follow what Paul instructs us to do, that is, outdo one another in showing honor, remembering that Mary honored Elizabeth in her visit; Elizabeth honored Mary and paid homage to the Lord whom she was privileged to carry; Jesus honored John, designating him as the messianic forerunner even before he was born; and John leaped for joy in honor of Jesus, upon hearing Him through the means of a greeting from the Virgin Mary. Whatever your vocation or place in life, you can show honor to others in a friendly competition to treat each other better than they can honor you, for that is keeping the visitation of Jesus Christ going among us and then from us out into our lives, our neighbors, family, community and world.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.