

Advent 4
December 19, 2021

“Blessed!”
(Luke 1:45)

By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this Fourth Sunday of Advent is from our Gospel reading, Luke 1:45

“Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

Here ends our text.

“Blessed”. Now that’s a word that you’ll hear quite a bit. It’s common to hear someone say “I’m blessed” because one’s feeling joyful, happy, or doing well financially.

Someone might post a picture on Facebook, standing next to a new car with the caption, “I’m so blessed”. Or maybe a couple posts a picture of themselves holding each other in their arms with big smiles and again write a caption, “Blessed beyond measure”.

You might even see the word “blessed” on a t-shirt - “Thankful, Grateful and Blessed”, or “Too grateful to be hateful and too blessed to be stressed”.

Now, of course, when these kind of phrases are used passively. The person who says “I’m blessed” is acknowledging that a blessing has received. It’s always good to give credit to the One who is giving the blessing. It just takes a moment to add the phrase, “by God”. “I’m so blessed...by God.” For God is the giver of all gifts. And certainly, Mary received the gift of being the mother of the “Son of God” by believing that this unique gift of motherhood was from God.

The angel Gabriel made sure that Mary knew who was giving her this blessing when he said to her, **“Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1:28)**

Gabriel goes on to say **“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”** It is God who is bestowing His favor upon her. And Mary for her part acknowledges that this has to be all God’s doing because, well, she hasn’t known a man yet. She’s a virgin.

Gabriel is glad to give a few more details of how this will happen that she will be blessed by God. Again, only God could cause a pregnancy in a virgin so Gabriel continues, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”**

It’s God who blesses. It’s the power of the Highest that will overshadow you. Mary is the passive receptor of this great gift of pregnancy, and most especially of the pregnancy of the Son of God!

Gabriel had come to Zacharias six months earlier and told him that he would be a joyful dad too. To overcome Zacharias doubting heart, Gabriel made sure that Zacharias knew that his blessing was coming from God. **“I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings.”**

Indeed, what is impossible for man, God alone can make possible, Gabriel said to Mary as he related to her the news of Elizabeth’s pregnancy in her old age.

Well, Mary, in her humbleness, acknowledges this blessing told to her by Gabriel and believes.

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

She believes that it is all the Lord’s doing according to His word that the angel tells her.

So, Mary is blessed among women to have this honor of being chosen to be the mother of the Son of God. And she gives all glory to God. And so should we ,for all the blessings that we receive daily from the Most High! **“Blessed...by God!”**

And most importantly, we receive the blessing of faith. Listen to these words from Galatians 3.

“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

Blessed by the hearing and believing of the Gospel! Blessed with believing Abraham!

Jesus said to Thomas after His resurrection, **“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)**

The greatest blessing is to believe that Jesus is the Savior of the world who has risen from the dead!

That is why Jesus Himself is the blessed fruit of Mary’s womb. For Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, of all nations. He became a true man to give the blessing that all men need and only what God can give – our salvation.

The offerings of animals didn’t calm the wrath of God, we heard in our epistle reading from Hebrews 10.

**“Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.
7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—
To do Your will, O God.’ ”**

A body had to be prepared – a true human body, born of Mary. Jesus had to be sacrificed to do the will of God, once and for all, and remove all sin! So that, as we heard a few Sundays ago, as we looked closely at this reading from Hebrews 10, God could say that He remembers our sins no more!

““Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”

To believe, like Mary did, like Elizabeth did is the greatest blessing one can receive in this life.

For Mary said in the verses that follow our Gospel reading, her beautiful song called the Magnificat which we have been singing on Wednesdays.

**““My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”**

Here Savior is Jesus, the Blessed One, the fruit of her womb. She too was born a sinner like all of us, but God has shown mercy to her and all people by fulfilling His promise of sending the Savior. Mary understands this in her song as she concludes with these words.

**“He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy,
55 As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.”**

Elizabeth, too professes her faith in Jesus, in the 4-7 day year old embryo in Mary’s womb. For it took about that time for Joseph to take Mary as his wife according to the Jewish ceremonies and then set off with her on a 100 mile journey from Nazareth to Judah.

What does Elizabeth say to this embryo? Is Jesus a person yet? Of course, one is a person at conception! So, Elizabeth says, again with great humility,

“But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

How could she know even before Mary told her? She was moved by the Holy Spirit. How could 6 month old John jump for joy in the presence of his 6 day year old Savior? Again, the Holy Spirit caused him to believe. Yes, infants can believe! And that’s why we baptize infants, because they too are blessed with faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 8:2 tells us, **“Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants
You have ordained praise”**

It is faith praises the fruit of the womb of Mary. It is by the power of the most High that faith is given to babies in baptism and they are reborn and regenerated.

Yesterday, two infants were baptized at Fishers of Men as we celebrated the birth of Jesus. It was a holy night when Jesus was born. And through baptism, your baptism it is a holy day when your sins are washed away and you are given faith to confess the Lord. You are blessed.

One time a woman cried out to Jesus these words.

27 Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!”

28 But He said, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Luke 11:27-28)

Yes, it was a blessing, a special honor for Mary to be the mother of the Son of God. But, greater than this, Jesus says, is the blessing of faith – to hear God’s word, believe it and keep it.

James 1:12 tells us,

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

So, we continue on in faith as the beatitudes promise us that we who are poor in spirit, mourn, hunger, and are persecuted will receive the kingdom of heaven. For we are blessed ...by God!

So that finally on that last day, this will be the greatest blessing to hear these words spoken to your ears on the last day.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, `Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: (Matt. 25:34 NKJ)

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)