

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ,

(Show painting of Mary and Elizabeth meeting.)

There are many paintings of this famous Bible event.

It is a picture of Mary and Elizabeth meeting. John the Baptist leaps for joy in Elizabeth's womb. The ladies are smiling. Their faces are full of joy. The



fact that this scene has been painted through the centuries indicates its importance. What is the significance?

We have the answer today as we take a closer look in Luke, chapter 1. What we learn is that God, the Holy Spirit, is working faith in these two women as they serve God in a special way. Both are special moms. Elizabeth conceived a child with her husband in her senior years. Mary conceived without the help of a husband. We could list some reasons why they should have been nervous and perhaps afraid. What would happen to them and their babies in the future? However, we see, as the paintings depict correctly, they are smiling and full of joy. The Holy Spirit has filled them with joy because Christ, the Savior, is coming. He will be born of Mary.

As we approach Christmas and the celebration of the birth of Christ, we could be apprehensive and afraid. Will we celebrate properly? What will happen when we meet Christ someday? We don't have to worry. Christ's coming to us now and in the future is a good thing. Today through God's word we learn that we will **Have a Joy Filled Christmas by God's Spirit!**

1. The Holy Spirit leads us to believe God's promises.

At Christmas time we think of God sending his Son into the world to rescue us. We think of Jesus humbling himself and becoming our Savior. We might easily miss that before Christmas ever happened, God, the Holy Spirit laid the ground work for this important moment in salvation history. We have a clue here in Luke 1 when we read, “...and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is so easy to pass over these words. They are important because they show us that Mary and Elizabeth's joy came from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us to believe God's promises and we have joy. A. Let's look at how this was true with Mary.

1. We hear that she went to see her cousin Elizabeth. We might think she

went to congratulate her or to help out around the house. This may be true, but there was another reason Mary went. She wanted assurance. How could she confirm the words of the angel? By seeing the elderly Elizabeth in her pregnancy. Mary went for assurance. And she received it. So she understood that as Elizabeth was carrying a miracle baby, she was too.

2. Like Mary we believe what God says, but we also seek assurance when we know the Lord provides it. For example when the pastor teaches the children and young people that Christian marriage is blessed by God, they can look to those married couples in the church who faithfully follow the Lord. They will often see examples of the blessings that the pastor speaks of. Earthly examples are not perfect. So it is important that we seek reassurance of God's goodness in the sacraments. When we meditate on Baptism, when we receive the Lord's Supper those are visible miracles accompanying God's word of promise. The greatest assurance of all is found in the reality of Jesus' manger and his cross. God's Son did come to earth. God did come to die and rise for us. We can be absolutely sure of his goodness and blessing.

B. Like Elizabeth we not only see and believe, but we rejoice in God's faithfulness.

1. Elizabeth had her own wonderful signs. All she had to do was look down and she could see the miracle. She felt the miracle every time John wiggled and stretched in her womb. Now John leaped when the pregnant Mary walked in the room. All these things reminded her of God's faithfulness.

Elizabeth was filled with joy over God's faithfulness and it shows in the words that pour out from her soul. We talk about counting our blessings. Elizabeth counts her joy. a) She rejoices that Mary, her cousin, is the mother of the Savior. b) Elizabeth rejoices that Mary takes the time to come and see her. They can encourage each other. c) She rejoices that her unborn baby is filled with joy and the presence of unborn Savior. d) She rejoices in Mary's faith that God is fulfilling his great promise. He is sending a Savior who will rescue humanity from the darkness of sin and death. More could be said, but the thing we want to remember is her joy in God's faithfulness.

2. Do you dread the holidays and all you have to do? Do you feel overwhelmed by everything going on? Some people get this way and wish that Christmas didn't even come around. We should not have this attitude. The Lord God given us a reason to be filled with joy.

We can take our cue from Mary and Elizabeth. They both faced the work of painful labor and giving birth. The way Israel had treated the prophets

could have filled them with fear for their babies. Never-the-less, they aren't thinking about themselves. They are thinking of the Lord God. He had promised that a special child would be born and that child would destroy the devil's work through the forgiveness of sin. They would be saved and live with God forever. They focused on God's faithfulness and that gave them joy. This is what we do. The Holy Spirit uses the Advent message to focus us on God's faithfulness in Jesus. It fills us with joy.

2. The Holy Spirit leads us to understand God's activity.

We are blessed with a beautiful stable and manger. Why do churches go through the trouble to represent the stable scene and the manger. It is not for nostalgia. The "good old days" under Caesar Augustus weren't so good in Palestine. The Jewish people were not free and they had to endure heavy taxation by their oppressors. What the stable and the manger do is remind us of God's activity. God's Son was born there. He had come on a mission. The Holy Spirit leads us to understand this mission.

A. The mission that Jesus, Mary's boy, had come was to rescue the enslaved human race.

1. Mary had the blood of King David running in her veins. However, there was no palace. There was no government. King David's heirs had become corrupt and turned to the unbelief of idolatry. So the Lord God had brought the house of David crashing down.

Mary is rejoicing because she understands that God is saving the house of David. God had promised a Messiah. He would sit on David's throne and reign forever. Old Testament believers understood this would be the Son of God. Mary is in awe because she realizes that she does not deserve a Savior, let alone to play the role of the mother of the Son of God. Yet, God has shown her that he is merciful and good.

We don't worship the Virgin Mary, however, we do celebrate God's mercy and goodness to her. We celebrate Christmas and we remember Mary. It reminds us that God has not forgotten the low estate that we are born into. We have sinful flesh and we are subject to death. Mary reminds us that God is merciful and for this reason he was born. He came to take away our sins.

2. In her beautiful song, Mary sings, "**the Mighty One has done great things for me.**" It is true that the Holy Spirit conceived in her baby Jesus. But the greatest thing that God did for Mary was to take away her sins. Mary with her own eyes would get to see her Son, Jesus, on a wooden cross. He

had predicted that this would happen. **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”** (Luke 9:22) God is holy and in Jesus’ blood we have washed and made holy. This is our salvation.

B. This merciful salvation extends even to you and me. Mary sings, **“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.”** (50) Throughout the years the Lord is reaching out to people with his gift of salvation. He does affect people.

1. Some people... **“He has lifted up the humble.”** and **“Filled the hungry with good things.”** (52) God has put in everyone a desire to connect with God. The proclamation of God’s word wakes up that desire. We see our sins and our need for a savior. We are humbled, but we are lifted up because we hear about Jesus. Jesus has made us rich. He has forgiven our sins. He has given us an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Other people hear the word of God proclaimed and they are stubborn. They think they are mighty without God. So the Holy Spirit tells us through Mary, **“He has scattered the proud in their inmost thoughts...He brings down the rulers from their thrones...the rich he sends away empty.”** (51-53) Those proud of their great education end up lost in their thinking. Those who are powerful and rich lose everything. *“You can’t take it with you.”*

2. All of this spiritual raising and lowering is a faithful God taking care of his family of believers, his church. He will continue to show mercy to Abraham and all believers for time and eternity, just as he has promised.

Conclusion: We will be singing the *Magnificat, Mary’s Song*. I looked up how many different musical versions of the Mary’s Song exist. I can’t count them all. In an article in *Wikipedia*, I counted over 40 musical settings listed for Mary’s words between 1900-1966. The article listed musical versions going back to 1400. The version of the *Song of Mary* in our hymnal is by Kurt Eggert and Kermit G Moldenhauer and was written in 1993.

I hope the paintings and the numerous musical settings impress on you how important this event was and how important are the words of Mary. The Holy Spirit wants us to understand and believe the inspired words. We see that the Lord keeps his promises. We understand that God works mightily for our salvation. Jesus came to save us. We are filled with joy. We sing for joy. God, the Holy Spirit, makes this happen. Amen.