

St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord (8/15/10 – *Blessedness – St. Mary’s and Yours*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

It seems like *Christmas* in the middle of August ... or at least *Advent*. We are more accustomed to hearing this text from the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel at that time – as we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But it is good to hear it today. This different context allows us to consider another aspect of this Word of our Lord. So today we consider the *Holy Gospel* for this Festival of *St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord* under the theme: *Blessedness – St. Mary’s and Yours*.

Before we get into our text and our theme, perhaps it would be good simply to address for a moment the fact that we at St. John **Lutheran** Church are celebrating this day as *St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord*. Though the largest part of Christendom recognizes such a day as this – making too much of it from our Lutheran perspective – another part has just as wrongly ignored it altogether. Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Anglicans all celebrate a day called *The Dormition or Assumption of Mary*. The brief Bible Study in the most recent *Lutheran Witness* relates the fact that the stands of the Olympics were nearly empty shortly after the opening in 2004 – on that August 15. It is a national holiday in Greece and many other countries. The fans were in the churches that day. The vast majority of Protestant congregations do not even realize there is such a day as what we call *St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord* – and most likely would be offended.

Yet, it is good – indeed, God-pleasing – that the Church have a day like today to consider God’s grace in the life of Mary. As the inspired author of Hebrews exhorts: *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* [HEB 13.7] And although Mary is not listed among those whose faith is set before our eyes in chapter 11 of Hebrews, she is certainly part of that *great cloud of witnesses* spoken of in chapter 12, whose God-given faith ought inspire us to *fix our eyes on Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith* [HEB 12.2].

So let us consider the Gospel set before us – and see what we might learn

from *St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord*. The best way to do that is simply to listen to her words – what she says ... about herself ... and about the Son she carries in her womb – in that song we call *The Magnificat*:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant. 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. [LK 1.46-49]

All that Mary speaks in these Holy-Spirit-given words **brings glory to God alone**. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior*. Mary would exalt the Lord and every aspect of His gracious dealing with us – much as a magnifying glass or a zoom lens shows us wondrous detail. God is **her Savior**. This means that Mary is **not** without sin ... and needs a Savior just like all of us. This she recognizes, confesses, and declares to all generations! That is why she says that her *spirit has rejoiced in God her Savior*. And the reason for her magnifying and rejoicing is that God the Savior of us all has regarded her lowly, humble estate. She is but His maidservant – just like all of us are His servants. There is no merit or worthiness in her (or **us**) to warrant God's gracious attention. Yet He regards Mary **and us** – with love and compassion and forgiveness, life, and salvation ... because of His eternal and beloved Son ... conceived and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Do we so readily recognize our **own** humble estate? Do we confess that we are nothing but poor sinners – beggars before God? Or are we too often proud ... boastful of what we have and what we have accomplished – as if it were our **own** doing ... rather than the gracious gift of God?

In a sermon on this text, Luther says this: *The beloved Virgin adorns herself beautifully by not becoming proud of the honor she has of being the mother of God, to give birth to the Son of God. No one would have been surprised, had she succumbed to haughty arrogance and become more puffed up than Lucifer and his allies. For look how we act, bag of worms that we are!... Everybody becomes proud, and insolent, when they possess something special, be it beauty, skill, money, rank, or whatever; their*

arrogance know no limit or bounds. Yet everything is like the dust of the street compared to the great grace which the Virgin has here.... Mary will cut the ground from under all arrogant people.... She is the mother of God and the greatest of women in heaven and on earth. [Yet], she forgets all else, every good thing, and with truly humble heart sets out on her way. [The Day of Mary's Visitation, 1532]

Mary's humble, Godly example is a silent preaching that condemns our sinful pride. But then the words of her soul truly magnify the Lord ... as she rejoices in God her Savior. Through Mary's words our eyes are directed to the Holy Son she bore within her at that moment – to the One Who is the cause of John's leaping ... and of Elizabeth's exclamation: ***Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb!*** [LK 1.42] Just as all the faithful, Mary would not call attention to herself – but instead directs us to God and His gracious work in Christ our Savior. Mary is blessed because she was chosen by God to carry within her the very Son of God – Who is the truly Blessed and Blessing One. And all generations of Christians must note this blessedness – for it is a lesson and example of how our **own** blessedness occurs.

God chooses Mary – without any merit or worthiness in her ... even before she is born. Consider the prophecy given Isaiah: ***Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel*** [7.14]. In time God brings His Word to Mary's ear through His messenger: ***Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you*** [LK 1.28]. And by the work of the Holy Spirit the Christ makes His dwelling in Mary as her – and **our** – Savior: ***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*** [LK 1.35]. By the gracious work of God – in and for her – Mary possesses the ***double portion*** we heard about in our *Old Testament Lesson*. She is blessed to be the recipient of God's favor. She is blessed a second time to be the Mother of Our Lord. In fact, since the Son she bears is none other than True God in true human flesh, Mary is rightfully called – by Christendom in general and also in our Lutheran writings – the Mother of God. Blessed is she among women, indeed! As the *Formula of*

Concord – one of our key Lutheran writings – puts it in laying out thoroughly the right Scriptural teaching and faith regarding *The Person of Christ*: “Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that Mary did not conceive and give birth to a Child Who was merely, purely, simply human, but she gave birth to the true Son of God. Therefore, she is rightly called and truly is the Mother of God.” [*Epitome*, VIII.12]

Here we see in humble Mary a glimpse of our very own reality as the Church ... as children of God. In Christ God has chosen you from the very foundations of the earth – before you were conceived or born ... without any merit or worthiness in you. In time God has brought His Word to your ear through His messenger and His Means of Grace. Your sins are forgiven for the sake of the blessed Fruit of Mary’s womb – the Lord Jesus Christ. By the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you through Holy Baptism and the preaching of the Gospel, God has made **you** also His dwelling place – as the Scripture says: *your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit* [1COR 6.19]; *Abide in Me, and I in you* [JN 15.4]; *By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us His Spirit* [1JN 4.13]. These Means of Grace – the Word and the Sacraments – are the *double portion* God promises His people in our *Old Testament Lesson* from ISAIAH [61.7]: *Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.*

Through the faith the Holy Spirit creates and sustains in you by these Means, God has made His gracious dwelling in **you** and **you** are blessed among people. And now in the *Holy Supper*, our gracious Lord very literally fills us who hunger and thirst for righteousness with the truly *good things* [LK 1.53] of the very Body and Blood of Christ – to strengthen and preserve in us in humble yet magnificent blessedness ... unto life everlasting.

Blessed are **you**! For *He Who is Mighty has done great things for you. He has clothed you with the garments of salvation; He has covered you with the robe of His righteousness* [ISA 61.10]. *Holy is His Name.*

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]