

Last Sunday night the confirmation students were assigned parts and ran through those parts in class. By time that was finished though there was opportunity for instruction not enough time was left for teaching a lesson. So here is what I proposed: I invited the students to open their Bibles to Luke chapters one and two and Matthew 1 & 2 and ask me any question (except for names in Jesus' genealogy). If they stumped me they got a cookie. Here is one that I did not get right: What happened to Elizabeth when Mary entered the house? Who knows the answer to that question? Now that is exactly the answer I gave and the student who asked it said, "Wrong." The Bible translation the students use said the child kicked in Elizabeth's womb. I gave away a cookie.

Now we all know that is what happened, mother's feel that sensation again and again during pregnancy. A big deal that there is life, but not uncommon to feel a kick. But Luke tells us that Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit exclaimed with a loud voice: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb and why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy!"

All that the world could see were two women, both pregnant – one pregnant long after she had given up hope of ever having a child – the other pregnant before she should be as the world sees things. But Elizabeth and Mary were given hearts to know what the world could not even imagine. Mary, blessed among all women of all time, and Elizabeth, the first human to speak of this blessing. And then Mary spoke: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty one has done great things for me and holy is his name."

Mary knew that God was acting through her, bringing forth a human son who is God's Son also. She praised God for what God was doing through her. It was a surprise to her – she spoke of her own lowliness – not of her deserving. Jesus was a gift of God to her and through her to all.

Mary said, “His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich empty away.”

In choosing Mary to give birth to God’s Son the whole world was changed. Mary, the lowly one blessed above all women, above the daughters of the powerful and the wealthy. Those daughters are honored in this world, only the best for them – the finest gowns, the best teachers, the healthiest foods, the most skilled physicians, no cost spared for their blessings. Maybe we have tried to imitate them in seeking every advantage for our daughters. But Mary had nothing but what God was doing in her. In God choosing Mary the proud are scattered, the humble lifted up.

At EMH Health and fitness Center a man with Down’s syndrome has been working out in the morning lately. As he dresses near the locker I have chosen I find my heart having trouble thinking that he is worth as much space and consideration as I. He is just one of a multitude that my heart might judge as less important. For people like us the government ought to be doing its very best – for people like them – well, whatever the society does for them should not cost people like me too much. But Mary sings of what the birth of her child means: the scattering of the proud in the thoughts of their hearts and the lifting of the lowly.

In the first two chapters of this gospel Luke takes titles that were claimed by the Emperor Augustus and applies them to the child that will be born of Mary. Son of God, Savior – these are not new titles as angels spoke them to Mary and later to shepherds. Augustus Caesar, the one who was on the throne of the mighty Roman Empire was spoken of as son of God, as savior. But now these titles would be applied to the one born of a peasant woman, lowly Mary. Luke tells us that these titles are being bestowed on Jesus by the almighty God.

Everything was changing. The Holy Spirit enabled Elizabeth to see as God sees, Mary Blessed among all women. The Holy Spirit in you and in me allows us to see as God sees, that his world does not belong to money or privilege but to God. In Jesus God is sending the rich empty away and filling the hungry with good things.

Is that a vision we will celebrate or resist? It is a question that our hearts and our words and our deeds answer every day. Faith is not simply believing that Jesus is God's Son and then living our lives by the wisdom of the world but by God's wisdom. God is even now scattering the proud and lifting up the lowly. The crucified one, the one put to death by the soldiers of an emperor is Lord. Amen.