

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Miracle upon miracle is piled up in this first chapter of Luke. They begin with Zechariah and Elizabeth who were without child. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, and Elizabeth's barrenness would depart from her. God would ensure that she would bear a child in her old age. He would be great, filled with the Holy Spirit, even in his mother's womb; he was the Elijah prophesied to herald the coming Messiah, "*to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*" (Luke 1:17). It happened just as God's messenger said it would.

The angel Gabriel wasn't done. He appeared to a young virgin in Nazareth — Mary was her name, and she had been chosen to become the mother of Christ, a king. The angel announced to her that she too would bear a son. He would also be great, and greater than the herald. He would be "*the Son of the Most High*" (Luke 1:32). He would sit on the throne of His father David, ruling an everlasting kingdom.

This was a miracle, too, for Mary, though betrothed to her husband Joseph, had not yet known him. And so, God made this pregnancy happen, sending the Holy Spirit upon Mary, conceiving in her womb the holy Son of God, whom she would call Jesus, as the angel also told Joseph, "*for he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21).

Luther points out another miracle, perhaps not so apparent, but just as extraordinary ... Mary believed it. Saint Bernard also declared this miracle: "that Mary should have such a faith as to believe that this mystery would be accomplished in her" (Roland Bainton, *Martin Luther's Christmas Book*, p. 15). To be sure, she questioned the angel, but her question was different than Zechariah's "prove it" challenge: "*How shall I know this?*" (Luke 1:18), asked in unbelief — Gabriel scolded him for that. Mary's question didn't arise out of unbelief, but of inquisitiveness about the process: "*How will this be, since I do not know a man?*" (Luke 1:34) And with the angel's explanation, she humbly accepted this honor: "*I am the [maid] servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38).

Which is where our Gospel text picks things up. Mary travels quickly to see her relative Elizabeth to share with her the marvelous news and to rejoice with Elizabeth about her own good fortune. But as soon as she greeted Elizabeth, more of God's miraculous power was displayed.

Elizabeth's infant son John leaped in her womb, but this was no ordinary leap. Skeptics want to make this nothing but an ordinary kick in the side that infants might subject their mothers to. But that's not how Elizabeth would describe this leap. She would explain to Mary that this was a leap of exultation! Moreover, the evangelist himself emphasizes how special this jump for joy was. The ESV just passes over an

important word when it translates it “*And when Elizabeth heard the greeting*”; but the missing word draws our attention to this event. We usually translate the word with “it came to pass” — “And it came to pass as Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting” You know another place where Luke uses this word, even more famous: “*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed*” (Luke 2:1 KJV). But we don’t want to get ahead of ourselves — let’s save the rest of that for Christmas Eve.

This leap is no ordinary leap, for Elizabeth connects the timing of the leap with Mary’s greeting. This is a miraculous leap caused by hearing the voice of the Blessed Virgin. Indeed, unlike the enthusiasts who hold that “they have the Spirit without and before the Word,” Lutherans continue to hold fast to the Biblical truth “that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word” (Luther, Smalcald Articles, 3rd Part, Article VIII:3). And so when the word reached Elizabeth’s ears, the angel’s word to Zechariah was fulfilled: “*he will be filled with the Holy Spirit*” (Luke 1:17). Filled with that Spirit John then preached to his mother Elizabeth in the only way he could . . . with this leap of faith.

Thus, again, we confess with Luther that this is how God deals with us, in no other way than “through the spoken Word and the Sacraments,” for “[w]hatever is praised as from the Spirit, without the Word and Sacraments, is the devil himself” (SA, 3rd, VIII:10). Luther even offers up the example of John the Baptist: “John the Baptist . . . did [not] leap in his mother’s womb without Mary’s voice.”

This was no ordinary leap in the womb, for consequent to it, Elizabeth herself was filled with the Holy Spirit, and before Mary could even share her amazing news, Elizabeth knew it. She knew already that God’s favor rested upon Mary. She exclaimed: “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!*” Elizabeth didn’t have to be told by Mary; the Holy Spirit revealed to her that the Lord Himself was in Mary’s womb. Mary had become in Elizabeth’s words, “*the mother of my Lord,*” but with all orthodox teachers, we would say even more — Mary was the Mother of God.

This was another miracle, for none of this was shared with Elizabeth; rather, by the Holy Spirit, she just knew that Mary herself had received a Divine revelation and Divine favor, and that Mary believed it. Miracle upon miracle.

Still filled with the Holy Spirit herself, Mary then proceeded to tell Elizabeth what the Lord was doing through her! She sang of God her Savior — mighty, holy, and merciful, scattering the proud and bringing down the mighty while exalting the humble, filling the hungry while sending the rich away empty-handed.

And yet, the Spirit seems not to have revealed how all this was to be done; Jesus Himself would later reveal that. Not by priests offering up sacrifices and

offerings would the world be saved, but by Mary's Son doing the Father's will and offering up His own life unto death, the lamb without blemish or spot offered up once for all on a cross, for which we now, like John the Baptist, leap for joy, and with Mary, our souls magnify the Lord. Our sins are forgiven by Jesus' blood. We are set free.

Indulge me for one moment more, please. We have talked today about the miracles of Luke chapter 1, especially in the conceptions first of John and then of Jesus. And in this Gospel text, the word "womb" figures prominently, too. It seems opportune to talk about life.

Even in ordinary times, that women bear children is a Divine blessing — the fruit of the womb is a reward, the Psalmist says (Ps. 127:3). Whether you want to call it a miracle or not, God is at work in the bearing of children. Again, the Psalmist says, "*For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Ps. 139:13-14).

Mary went with haste to see Elizabeth; so even if it took say 4 weeks to get to the town in Judah where Elizabeth was, Jesus would have only been the size of a poppy seed. And yet, Mary knew: she was not carrying only a bunch of tissue. Elizabeth was starting her third trimester with John as Mary came; she knew that John was not brain dead tissue, as Justice Sotomayor regrettably compared babies to — brain dead tissue moving as a result of some stimulus. John was a living child.

This is an added reason why we are supporters of life in the womb — God effected His plan of salvation using the wombs of these heroic women: Elizabeth and Mary. They were sanctuaries for the forerunner and for the Christ. Women's wombs still are meant to be sanctuaries for children today where they can be safe from those who want to do them harm. O Lord, hear our prayers on their behalf.

And God grant that we may continue to speak out for life and labor for justice for the little ones whose lives are taken from them unjustly by abortion. Pray that the Supreme Court will come down on the side of innocent infants. And speak to your legislators in Indiana about writing laws to protect the unborn. I have. The time, I believe, is ripe.

And as you do, think not just of those you may be saving now, but of your salvation come from the blessed fruit of Mary's womb.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.