

Festival of St. Mary the Mother of Our Lord (theotokos)
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✧ Jesu juva ✧

THEY SHALL CALL ME BLESSED

Isaiah 61:10-11; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 1:46-55

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Today is one of those days many don't expect to ever see in the Lutheran Church - a celebration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be specific, the Dormition or "falling asleep" of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To many even the phrase "Blessed Virgin Mary" smacks of papistic Romanism. Add the term "Mother of God" and you run the risk of having people up in arms against you. And yet it is right to honor the Virgin Mary and to call her blessed. She, moved by the Holy Spirit, confessed at the Visitation: "behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed..." for she bore in her womb the very Son of God, and would bring Him forth into this world. And so it is also right to call her not just the mother of Jesus, but the mother of God. For it was not just the humanity that was enshrined with her womb, but the whole Christ, God and Man inseparably united in one person. No, she did not produce His divinity. Only His flesh came from her substance. Yet she bore the one Man who consists of both natures.

Nevertheless we must be careful to honor Mary rightly, and not as the Romans do, and not as the East, to a lesser extent, does. For they seek to make of her something which she herself would disdain. Rome honors Mary as an intercessor, second only to Christ Himself, who receives the prayers of the Christian, pleads for them to her Son, who must then dutifully perform that which His mother has bidden. Pointing to the miracle at Cana where our Lord turned water into wine, they say "See how Christ always obeys His mother! Certainly He will also now do what she asks." Some even place Mary alongside of Christ as co-redemptrix, one who for the sake of her own motherly suffering, the sword that pierced her heart at the suffering of her Son, also has earned god's favor for us. Today, they say, Mary was assumed into heaven, carried like Enoch to the side of her Son where she was crowned. Mary, the Queen of Heaven: some look to her for divine revelations; some for healing, some for grace. All of this does dishonor to the Mother of God. For all of it is contrary to Christ, and contrary to her own faith.

And this is why we honor her, as an example of proper faith and right belief. She is blessed not because of her high heavenly status, but because of her humility under God's Word. Yes, we honor Mary as the Mother of God, but that fact can be learned from the Christmas story and is celebrated on the Feast of the Annunciation, without the necessity of setting aside an additional feast day. It is not only her maternity that causes us to call her blessed, but also her faith in Christ! Today, as on all days when we remember saints, we remember her faith and look to her as an example to emulate. None of us will ever bear God as she did, physically as a mother. But all of us can share in her faith and bear Christ spiritually in our hearts and souls.

So, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, what is so extraordinary about Mary's faith? Let's look again at the example she puts before us. We first meet Mary as a young maiden who is confronted by the angel Gabriel. He announces to her that she is the virgin of Isaiah's prophecy,

the girl who will give birth to the Divine Savior. She is startled by the angel's revelation. And yet she submits to the Word of the Lord, and says: "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And these were more than idle words. For upon seeing her cousin Elizabeth, who is also miraculously pregnant with the prophet John, and hearing Elizabeth's inspired confirmation of the angel's words she says the words of our Gospel today, the Magnificat. And what does this song of Mary indicate? That she believed in all God had promised, not just to her, but to all Israel, and to the whole world. She confesses not only that she is herself blessed, but also that God is, through her unborn Son, showing mercy to every generation, is working redemption, and fulfilling the promises given to the patriarchs.



At Christ's birth when she is told by the shepherds of the angelic revelation given them concerning her Son, Luke tells us she, "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." Later when the boy Jesus explains His staying behind in the Temple to instruct the rabbis, and says: "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" We see a glimpse of Mary's faith again, for she: "kept all these things in her heart." And again as Jesus is beginning His ministry, we meet Mary at Cana, where, contrary to Roman belief, she does not order her son around, but submits in faith to His will, saying to the servants: "Whatever He says to you, do it." And finally we find Mary faithfully at the foot of the cross during her Son's crucifixion, and numbered among the believing after His resurrection. Throughout her entire life, she clung to the Word of the Lord, and to the promises that were being fulfilled through her Son. She believed on Christ; and like Abraham, Isaac, David, and all the saints, it was accounted to her for righteousness.

Her song, the Magnificat, while based on the Old Testament song of Hannah, also reminds one of the words of Isaiah read today. For this is what Christ means to the faithful, this is what the Savior born of Mary, brings to the those who believe: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness... the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." The praise is not of the Virgin, but of Christ who brings forth righteousness in the earth.

St. Paul tells us today: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Indeed by Christ, you are just as blessed as was that woman! For the salvation which caused her to rejoice is also bestowed upon you! God sent forth His son to take your place under the Law, to suffer the death you and all mankind deserves, to redeem your life from the bonds of slavery to sin and death on account of sin. In His crucifixion and death your freedom is won. And in Holy Baptism that freedom is bestowed. In the font you are made the highly favored one, the one who is adopted by God as His own son and heir. You are given the honor that rightly belongs only to Christ. You, though a sinner, are called righteous and given a voice fit to praise God, a voice which cries out "Abba, Father". All of this, and so much more, God gives to you through Christ Jesus.

It is sometimes difficult to believe it! Indeed there are those who hear this Gospel, who then refuse it, denying the Lord who has suffered and died for them. These are set in contrast by Mary to the faithful. These are those who are proud in the imagination of their hearts, who deny that they need to be saved, who seek only their own pleasure and live in self-affirmation, not fearing the Lord their God. These are those who seek to be mighty in this world, who seek the riches of this life. But these will be scattered, put down, and sent away empty.

But for those who fear God there is rejoicing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness." "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded [my] lowly state." For those with the faith of Mary, a faith that clings to the Word of the Lord over all else, a faith that believes that which seems implausible, or impossible even, because God has said it is so, there is mercy. These lowly and humble in heart, confessing their own unworthiness and sin while clinging to Christ, are exalted by Him. These who hunger for His Word and righteousness, are filled with good things. These who fear the Lord receive mercy and blessing in abundance.

So as we honor this day of the Blessed Virgin Mary let us emulate her faith, that when the day of our dormition arrives we may be found alive in Christ Jesus and live with Mary and all the saints in His presence. Indeed He who is might has done great things for us! Let us cling to Him and keep His words in our hearts. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, to life everlasting.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠