

The Feast of St. Mary, Mother of God, A^xD 2010

Luke 1:39-55

In the name of the Father and of the ^x Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 What to do with Mary? Is she a mediatrix, the go-between, to intervene between you and an otherwise wrathful Judge Jesus? Does she possess a righteousness beyond that of mere Christians, the kind of people you encounter here weekly? Can you pray to her with confidence, trusting her to hear? No, no, and no. So why do Lutherans join with all Christians who follow a calendar, both Eastern and Western, on August 15th to remember Mary's homegoing? Why do pious Missouri Synod Lutherans squirm in their seats when August 15 falls on a Sunday but do not hesitate to mark the feast of St. Mary Magdalene when July 22 falls on a Sunday?

2 What to do with Mary? There is no difference between a Marian feast and a feast of any other saint in Christ. The artists get it right when they put the infant Christ on His mother's lap. Mary's not interested in drawing your attention to herself. She exists to exalt her Son, to draw your eyes to Him. In this, she is the same as John the Baptist, the apostles and evangelists, martyrs and maidens whose feast days and death days we commemorate. Their only uniqueness is in how they uniquely call your attention to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Any talk of Mary that does not lead you to her Son is blasphemous. So do not balk that the Church calls your attention to Mary today. Simply follow her gaze to Christ.

3 What to do with St. Mary? Sing with her. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked upon 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. And His mercy is on 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 mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

4 Mary's Magnificat is the song of the Church, the song of every Christian. Exalted are the lowly. This is not the song of the world, not the song of those caught up in exalting themselves. Those proud of themselves cannot sing that God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts. Those who work night and day, who toil with sweat and tears to ascend to thrones and positions of honor among men, cannot match the pitch of "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones." There is no pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps in her song, no room for stanzas of self-satisfaction, no refrains of worldly glory, no choruses that permit you to think highly of yourself. Mary will not allow our talk about her to exalt her, nor will she permit your own thoughts to exalt yourself. Learn from Mary to confess about yourself that you are lowly and to sing of the God who exalts the lowly with His mercy.

5 All of her Magnificat, Mary declares after heaven has bestowed upon her an honor like none other. No other woman can rightly be called the mother of God, for no other woman has born nor will bear God in her womb. That God chose her to be His dwelling place, the temple of God for nine months, could easily have gone to her head. After the honor shown to Mary, that she should bear and give birth to the Christ, that her only Son should be the Son of God, that she should be both a virgin and a mother, all of that could have lead Mary to conclude, "I'm somebody." Instead, to Elizabeth's greeting, inspired by the Holy Spirit, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the Fruit of your womb," Mary responds with her humble praise: "I am a nobody, but my Lord is He who exalts nobodies."

6 God took human flesh in the Virgin's womb to do just that: to exalt the lowly, to have mercy on those who fear Him. Mary is saved the same way anyone is saved: by her Son. He is God in human flesh, the Divine Redeemer, who takes away the sins of the world, your sins and Mary's sins. The Word became flesh. For your salvation, God made Mary His mother, that He might be born of woman, just as you are, and yet more human than you, with His humanity unspoiled by sin. That He might live a sinless life and yet die on the cross in the place of sinners, the Word descended from His royal throne to sit enthroned in the Virgin's womb, to dwell in the midst of the people He came to redeem. So that no human being would have to endure the torture of eternal death apart from Him, "God sent His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

7 So in Holy Baptism, God has adopted you, delivered to you the forgiveness He died to obtain for you, joined you into His death and resurrection. You, yes, you, beloved, even you. Having been shown such an honor as to be claimed by God in the waters of Holy Baptism to belong to Him, we might be tempted to think that we are really something. But the Word of God in Mary's mouth simply will not permit such thinking. Rather, the magnitude of the gift given to us causes us not pride but deep humility. "Me? Really, me? This mercy is for me?" So you may join the Blessed Virgin's song and magnify the Lord who has done great things for you, who has shown you mercy when you deserved damnation, who has exalted the lowly and despised, those rejected and cast out by His perfect Law, elevating you to the place of Jesus. St. Mary does not have an unobtainable righteousness. She has the same righteousness delivered to you in Holy Baptism, the righteousness of her Son, her Savior and yours, Jesus.

8 What do you do with St. Mary? Pray with her, "Let it be to me according to your Word." Let the Word of God rightly call sin sin and drive away any confidence you have in your self-righteousness. But let the Word of the Gospel declare that you are no longer a sinner. All your sins belong to Jesus, and all of His righteousness He has draped over you in Holy Baptism. Let it be to you according to His Word of Absolution. When your sins give you alarm and a guilty conscience seizes you, hear instead the Word of forgiveness God has appointed His ministers to deliver to you.

9 What to do with Mary? Submit with her, heeding her word to the servants at the wedding at Cana: "Do whatever He tells you." And what does He tell you? "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn 6:54). What to do with Mary? Join with her. She who nursed God is among those whom He feeds with Himself, with His Body and Blood. She who gave flesh to God in her womb is among those to whom her Son, the very Son of God, gives His own flesh into their mouths. She who watched her Son's blood pour from the cross to the dirt of Calvary joins with you as He pours His blood down your throat into the dust of your flesh, recreating you with His life. Here, as He delivers Himself to you, you, like Mary, are a bearer of the Eternal Word. So sing with her. The Lord here does great things for you.

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

Soli Deo Gloria

Pastor Jeff Hemmer