

“Season’s Greetings!”

Luke 1:39-45

Dec. 22, 2024 (Advent 4-C)

St. Paul’s Lutheran, North Freedom

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” (Luke 1:39-45, NIV84)

Dear fellow believers in Jesus, God’s Son, and the Virgin’s Son:

“Season’s Greetings!” Hardly any of us actually say that as a greeting this time of year; we’re more apt to say, “Merry Christmas!” But we do hear the phrase in TV commercials and jingles, and we see it in Christmas cards and the like: “Season’s Greetings from the Smith family.” Have you ever wondered what we really mean by that? What’s the season, who’s doing the greeting, and what kind of greeting is it? “Season’s Greetings” is kind of vague when we think about it.

In today’s gospel reading, Mary went to her relative Elizabeth’s home and greeted her, and Elizabeth (as well as the baby in her womb) greeted her back. But as we take a closer look at this text, we find that their mutual greetings go much deeper than a nice visit between relatives. We find in their words the season of the Lord’s coming. May we also rejoice in these **Season’s Greetings: Greetings** that come from the Lord, and that are given to the Lord.

From Nazareth to the hill country of Judea was at least 60 miles, but that didn’t discourage Mary from taking the trip. She was flying on air, so to speak! Mary just found out that she was pregnant, and had to share the news with her relative Elizabeth who was also pregnant. But this was no mere get-together of expecting moms. It was miraculous! Mary, pledged to be married, was a virgin. The angel Gabriel explained to Mary what happened: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Mary accepted the angel’s word. Meanwhile, Elizabeth was six months’ pregnant with a boy they were to call John—even though Elizabeth had never been able to have a child, and by this time she was getting up there. Can you imagine, ladies, getting pregnant at the age of 60, 70 or even 80 for the first time?

As Mary greeted Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb responded with his own greeting, leaping in her womb. This wasn’t just a random “Oh, my baby just kicked” in the womb, but a response to the Lord. And Elizabeth responded by greeting Mary with a loud voice: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” She even called Mary “the mother of my Lord.”

Yes, Mary is indeed blessed among women. It was a unique honor that she was chosen to be the vessel, the body in whom the Son of God was conceived and would grow and then be born, the mother who would nurse and nurture the Savior of the world. Yet, we do not elevate Mary to a level that the Bible does not give her. Mary did not enter the world by an “immaculate conception” as

some churches teach; Mary is not “co-redemptrix,” equal with her Son Jesus. The child in her womb alone is God’s Son, Redeemer and Savior, which Mary also recognized she needed. In her song she rejoiced “in God, my Savior” (Luke 1:47) who had come to lift up the humble, like herself.

The greetings exchanged that day reflected how the Lord had greeted them. What filled them with joy was that now the Lord had come, in a most unusual way—in the womb of a humble, poor virgin from a backyards-town called Nazareth. The child that Mary bore is the Lord’s greetings to you. Like Elizabeth we have to exclaim, “But why am I so favored,” that the Lord should come to me? How undeserved we are! We sinners should be greeted by God with an angry face, with punishment for all the sins and the sinfulness in us. Instead, the Lord’s face shines on us and is gracious to us. For Jesus came in this humble way to greet us with God’s favor, to announce that the poor-in-spirit will be enriched, the slaves-to-sin will be set free, those imprisoned-to-Satan will be released! All of that and more is included in the “Season’s Greetings” from the Lord!

Let’s take another look at Elizabeth and baby John’s greeting to Mary. How did the unborn John, still in the womb, recognize Mary’s voice and thought “My relative Jesus has come. Yippee!”? How did Elizabeth know that Mary was the mother of her Lord? We’re told, “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit came on baby John and mother Elizabeth so that they recognized the child of Mary as their Lord and Savior.

Elizabeth added to her greeting: “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” She was saying that about Mary, of course, who took the angel’s message as God’s Word and trusted the Lord would accomplish the miracle. But what Elizabeth said is true for all believers. How blessed are those who take God at his word and trust that he has come to save us! And how is it that we can believe that this really happened, that the Lord has come to us by being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin? The apostle Paul wrote, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). By the gift of the Holy Spirit, which we receive when we’re baptized, we believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior.

Because Jesus has come, because our Lord has greeted us with his favor, we will in turn greet him with faith. This is certainly the season to greet him here, at church, with extra Christmas services coming up this week as well as our regular Sunday worship services. In our prayers and in our praise, we greet Jesus as our Savior; we love to sing to him with Advent and Christmas hymns. Let’s not forget to greet him in our hearts as well. After Jesus was born, after the excitement of the shepherds who came and told Mary and Joseph about the angel and worshiped Jesus and spread the news down the streets of Bethlehem, Luke reported, “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Think of the Word, ponder it, turn it over and over again in your mind. Greet Jesus in your heart, again and again.

And as we get together with family and friends this week, let’s greet them with this message. Go deeper than “Season’s Greetings” or even “Merry Christmas.” Let others know that the Lord has come to greet us and save us, and that’s what gives merriment, joy to the world. The gifts our Savior brings are more priceless than anything we can give or receive. Blessed is the one who believes and receives the Christ-child, the Savior of the world! Amen.