

The Festival of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
St. Luke 1:39-56  
July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Greenville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

### When Elizabeth Heard the Greeting of Mary

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

#### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Around this time of year many people and businesses start to talk about “Christmas in July.” It is an attempt to capture some of the mood of the season of Christmas and bring it to this time of the year, when not much celebration is happening. I believe it is also an attempt for people to think about cooler temperatures in the midst of the oppressively hot days. In reality, the concept of “Christmas in July” begins with the Church’s calendar. Today we celebrate the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth, her relative. It is a taste of Christmas in July. Indeed, the Propers—the Introit, Gradual and Verse, the Collect, the Epistle and Gospel—all point to our Lord’s birth on Christmas Day. Even some of our hymns are taken from the Christmas section of the hymnal. So then, everything is pointing our eyes to the birth of Christ—to the incarnation of the Son of our heavenly Father into our flesh and blood.

We are reminded at the halfway point of the year (for Christmas is a little less six months away) that our Lord chose to dwell among us in the flesh. Our Lord chose to be one of us. He chose to be tempted by sin like us. He chose to endure our trials and suffering. He chose to place Himself under the Law of God, so that He might fulfill it perfectly. He chose to suffer and die at the hands of the evil men, so that He could take our punishment upon His shoulders. He was born of the Virgin Mary, so that He could redeem us from our enemies. He was born in the flesh, so that we might be free from sin, and so that we might receive His righteousness as a white robe in the waters of Holy Baptism. He was incarnated—God became man—so that He might give us His true and substantial Body in bread, and His true and substantial Blood in wine for the remission of all of our sins. This is the reminder that we receive less than halfway through the year before Christmas. It truly is Christmas in July.

This is all started, of course, by the annunciation of our Lord’s birth by the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which we heard back in March. We had a glimpse of Christmas during Lent, when we were preparing for our Lord’s death and resurrection. It was a reminder to us then that our Lord’s atonement for us and for all mankind could not have taken place unless He humbled Himself and had been born of a virgin. The Gospel for today from the Evangelist St. Luke takes place shortly after that annunciation. If we were to place ourselves into the timeline of the Scriptures we are now at the end of the three months that the Blessed Virgin Mary stayed with her relative Elizabeth, and Zacharias. She returned home after the birth of their son, John. Who we know came to be called, St. John the Baptist. In fact, the Festival of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist was a week ago from yesterday, June 24<sup>th</sup>—just a day over six months from Christmas. Which is why the Visitation is celebrated on July 2<sup>nd</sup> in the

Church's year, because it is nine days after the birth of St. John the Baptist. A day after what would be his naming and circumcision.

But our Gospel takes us back three months to when the Blessed Virgin Mary arrived at Elizabeth's home. Upon hearing the announcement that she is to give birth to the Savior, the Blessed Virgin Mary goes with haste to her relative Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant. And here is the truly remarkable thing, upon hearing the voice of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Besides the obvious statement that this is a baby, not a fetus, not a clump of cells, it is not just a realization that there is a baby in the womb of six months, but it is proof that the conception of our Lord has already taken place. For this is the reason St. John the Baptist leaps in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Lord + Jesus is present among them. He also is not a fetus, or a clump of cells, but He is the incarnate God, Who is maker of Heaven and Earth. He is a Baby Who bears the Godhead in His other nature.

St. John the Baptist cannot do anything else but leap in his mother's womb. And do make note that the word is "leap" and not "kick." This action of St. John the Baptist is not a normal "baby in the womb" action. It is deliberate leaping. This word is not used very much in the Scriptures. It is used only three times, and two of those times are in today's Gospel. The word is used to indicate that St. John the Baptist is doing something deliberate in response to the Blessed Virgin Mary's greeting—he is leaping! He knows that his Lord + Jesus is present among them. He is not just uncomfortable in the womb and happened to shift at the same time that the Virgin Mary spoke, no he leaped at the greeting of the Virgin Mary.

Her voice carries the voice of our Lord + Jesus. Her voice is filled with the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. She is filled with the Holy Ghost—and so is Elizabeth. For, she also proclaims the Gospel; the Gospel that St. John the Baptist will speak when his time comes. Elizabeth prepares the way of the Lord. She proclaims as St. John the Baptist will do, that there will be a fulfillment of the promises of God. The Virgin Mary will bear the Savior; she will give birth to the Lord of all of Heaven and Earth, and from then on, she will be honored above all women. She is honored even more so than her mother Eve. Eve gave birth to the human race, and she certainly deserves due honor for that. But, she brought forth children born in sin. We as her and Adam's descendants bear that sin in our flesh. All mankind is conceived and born in sin, and therefore are deserving of death. Something we all do on account of sin dwelling with in us.

But, the Blessed Virgin Mary is honored higher than all women, because her Firstborn Son is the sinless Son of God. She gives birth to the first descendant of Adam, who is not corrupted by sin in his flesh. This is why we refer to her as the "Blessed" Virgin Mary. It is not because there is anything in her that warrants being called "Blessed," but it is because of to Whom she gives birth. She is "Blessed" on account of her Son + Jesus. She is "Blessed," because she gave birth to the One Who would make all those who believe on Him blessed. She is "Blessed" because she gives birth to the One Who establishes eternal life in all those who believe on Him. Eve brought forth death, but the Blessed Virgin Mary gives birth to the One Who brings forth life and salvation.

Our Lord + Jesus Christ is born sinless through the Virgin Mary, and after His death and resurrection He gives all those who believe on Him His righteousness. We now, through Holy Baptism, are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We are clothed with His works. In the same way that He put on our flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we put on His righteousness through Holy Baptism, and that righteousness is maintained and strengthened through our participation in the means of grace.

It is just like the Blessed Virgin Mary proclaims today in the Gospel reading: Our Lord God disregards our low and humble estate. He does not disdain us because we are sinners, but calls all

sinners to repentance—to contrition and faith—so that He might exalt us with His gifts. He speaks His Word to us—He proclaims the Good News that He is the One, True Christ and Messiah come into the Earth to redeem mankind from all their sins. This is a message that should make us leap with joy, just like St. John the Baptist. In fact, our hearts should leap with joy whenever we hear the good news of what our Lord has done for us.

He leaves His throne in Heaven and comes down to dwell with us in our flesh. He is born of the Virgin Mary. He endured the temptations of the devil. He suffered the trials and tribulations that we endure every day. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified. He died. He was buried. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven. And now, He judges the quick and the dead until the Last Day. He called us out of unbelief through the work of the Holy Ghost in the means of grace, and gave us faith. We cling to Him in faith, trusting in Him and His promises.

He has done a marvelous thing. He is born into our flesh to remove the sting of death and give us life; life eternal with Him and all the saints of Heaven who have gone before us. This is truly a reason to leap about. It truly is “Christmas in July.” For, we get to hear at the halfway point until Christmas the good news that our Lord is conceived into our flesh, and He will be born to rescue us from death, and give us eternal life. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.