

Minor Festivals: The Visitation, May 31

Every Christmas we hear the account of how *"God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledge to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgins name was Mary"* (Luke 1:26,27). The angel Gabriel's visit to Mary was of greatest importance. Gabriel came with the wondrous news that God was about to fulfill his age-old promise by sending a Savior into the world. A Savior who would be conceived of God, yet born of the virgin Mary. Mary was about to become the mother of the promised Messiah. It was a visit from the angel Gabriel that Mary would never forget.

We celebrate the *Minor Festival: The Visitation* not because of the visit Gabriel made to Mary, but because of the visit Mary would make soon after, to her cousin Elizabeth. Mary's visitation to Elizabeth would reveal one of faith's greatest mysteries – Why would the Lord show his grace and mercy to a sinner like me?

After the angel Gabriel left, Mary wasted no time in heading to the home of Elizabeth. Gabriel had made known to Mary that Elizabeth was six months pregnant with a son, who would be John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. As Mary entered Elizabeth's home, the wonder of their greeting caused the baby in Elizabeth's womb to leap for joy, causing Elizabeth to exclaim *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!"* (Luke 1:42). Both Elizabeth and her unborn child knew they were standing before the mother chosen by the Lord. But it is the words Elizabeth would speak next that brings us to the wonder of this minor festival. *"But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"* (Luke 1:43).

As Christians, we ask the same question when it comes to the Lord's grace and mercy. Why are we so favored that God would send his own Son to die for me? By our sinful nature we are not deserving of any blessing from the Lord. We are only deserving of his wrath and eternal punishment. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians, we once lived as enemies of Christ, hence *"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things"* (3:19). As sinners we cannot stand before the holy throne of God and live. What would God ever want with a people like us?

"But while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Grace and favor had descended upon the home of Elizabeth with the visitation of Mary. God's grace and favor continues to descend upon us as Christians, as our Savior comes to us with his forgiveness. Christ comes to us through baptism as the Holy Spirit washes away sin and plants a saving faith in our hearts. Christ comes to us through the Lord's Supper, giving us his very body and blood once given on the cross for the assurance of our forgiveness. Christ comes to us through his Word, through which he strengthens our faith and keeps us in faith until life everlasting. Through Word and sacrament Christ continues to come, living and reigning in the hearts of his people. Why are we so favored that God should send his Son to me? Because God's love is greater than our sin. Again, God's love is greater than our sin.

Mary's visitation to Elizabeth also led Mary to burst forth in a song of praise. As part of our liturgy, we call the Magnificat *"to magnify, to give great praise."* It is truly a song that all Christians may sing, knowing the child soon to be born - was Mary's Savior - is our Savior - and is the Savior of the whole world.

Read...**Luke 1:39-56** as today's Scripture Lesson.
Blessings to you and your families,
Pastor Matthew Guse