

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Advent  
“God Has Done Great Things for Me”

Luke 1:39-56

12/23/18c

“For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.” (Luke 1:49)

This morning’s sermon is based on today’s Holy Gospel from Luke chapter 1, in particular that verse.

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

From time to time, perhaps for an ice breaker in a group setting, we’re asked to choose a time in history that we’d like to have lived in, or a figure from history that we’d like to meet or share a meal with. Next time you’re asked that, how about considering the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea—specifically during those approximately three months that Mary of Nazareth in Galilee resided there! Can you imagine how interesting that would have been? Can you imagine the conversations? So many miracles going on there! I mean, here you have the aged mother of John the Baptist, now in her third trimester of her very first pregnancy. And you have the youthful mother of the Son of God, herself just having recently, and even more miraculously, conceived. On top of that you have the mute father of John, who’s running up quite a bill for the family with all the note pads and scratch pads he’s having to buy in order to communicate his thoughts!

That’s the setting and situation for the Holy Gospel on this Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Let’s look and see what the Spirit is showing us and teaching us through this text this December 23<sup>rd</sup> morning...as we hang on for just a short while longer to this season of Advent...

You know, young Mary was given nine months...about 270 days...to ponder, reflect, repent, prepare, and pray...in advance of that great day when her Son, holy Lord Jesus, would be born.

Liturgical Christians, in contrast, take about four weeks, anywhere between 22 and 27 days, each season of Advent, to ponder, reflect, repent, prepare, and pray in advance of our holy Christmas celebrations.

This year is a short Advent, and on this Fourth Sunday we find ourselves with one more precious little day before the call rings out, “O come, all ye faithful! Come ye to Bethlehem!”

Though the time is short, yet it is still well that we take this morning, and this day, to reflect with Mary—and with Elizabeth, yes, and with silent Zechariah and with joyfully leaping preborn Baby John—upon the “great things” that “He who is mighty” has done for us...He, the LORD, whose name is holy (Luke 1:49).

### God’s Great Works toward Mary

It was Mary who actually spoke those words, so let us first reflect on the great works of God toward Mary.

This young Jewish virgin had only recently—perhaps just days previously—been visited by God’s great angel Gabriel, who had been sent to her to announce that she would bear a child, a Son. The meeting took Mary quite by surprise, and was shocking to say the least. Yet Mary was given great comfort by the words, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God” (v.30). The angel then made plain to Mary that her Son was to be the Jewish people’s long-awaited King—yes, the true Son of God Himself (vv.32-33). For when Mary asked the natural question of how she, a virgin, should conceive, the angel spoke of God’s miraculous involvement: “The power of the Most High will overshadow you” (v.35)—you, yes, you, Mary.

It is stating the obvious, I think, to say that Mary would spend the rest of her life trying to wrap her head around this great thing that the LORD had done for her—that she, lowly Mary, should be chosen to bear the Messiah, God’s Son, the world’s Savior.

It was her wonder and joy over this good news—together with a little nervousness, I’m sure, about it all—that propelled Mary’s feet toward the home of her relative Elizabeth that day. You may remember that Gabriel, in his message to Mary, had let Mary in on the news that her relative Elizabeth was herself with child (v.36).

### God’s Great Works toward Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John

And so let’s also consider God’s great works toward Elizabeth, and to Zechariah, and John.

Elizabeth, with her husband Zechariah the priest, were childless—not by choice, as often happens today, for that would have been unheard of then—but by sad misfortune of barrenness. Yet the LORD willed to show His power and His grace and faithfulness *just in that seemingly impossible situation*. Elizabeth conceived, and the Bible says that having conceived, “for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ‘Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me’” (vv.24-25).

As those five months wore on—you who have been mothers and fathers know this—the parents were able to see for themselves, through the changes in Elizabeth’s belly, that a child was in there. As he watched, Zechariah *daily* felt the pain of his having doubted God, together with the joy of seeing God’s faithfulness to him and his family. John’s conception was a great work of the LORD toward this couple.

Another great work of God toward Elizabeth is stated in our text: “Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (v.41). This filling with the

Spirit is the explanation for how Elizabeth was able to know a few things that she had certainly not heard or known previously:

- 1) That Mary her relative was with child; and
- 2) That Mary's child was her "Lord"

*That's what Elizabeth says! "Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me" (v.43).* Elizabeth has not heard about the angel's visit and announcement to Mary, Elizabeth has perhaps not seen her relative Mary in a good long while, and yet, here Elizabeth perceives and confesses that Mary has become the mother of the Messiah!

It was a great work of God toward Elizabeth that she was able to know and confess this!

Likewise it was a great work of God toward preborn John that he was able to know this—for the Bible says that John leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb at Mary's arrival and greeting. This leap was no mere coincidence, but the promise of God fulfilled. As Gabriel had assured Zechariah months earlier, "[Your son] will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (v.15). John—at that time probably a mere pound or two in weight—was exulting over the presence there in Mary's womb of his King and Savior, the Lamb of God who would shed His blood also for John.

### God's Great Works toward Us

But now let us bring things closer to home and reflect upon God's great works toward us, for "He who is mighty" has certainly done great things for all of us, as well.

Let us begin with the fact of our existence—our lives, which God alone has given us. "I believe that God has made me" from the catechism, Martin Luther's words about the First Article of the Apostles' Creed.

Whoever we are, this is true, that God has made us. This is a great work! “I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well”—Psalm 139:14.

But not life alone, also all its blessings. Could you, if asked, count them?

One of those blessings, highlighted in our text, is of course children. To many of us here God has willed to grant that blessing. As it was for Mary, for Elizabeth, for Zechariah, for Joseph, so also for us every single child, whether famous or ordinary, whether powerful or weak, whether well or ill, is nothing short of a blessing from the Lord—a “great thing”. “Children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward”—Psalm 127:3.

“He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name”!

And that great God with the name that is holy, He has (and this is the greatest of all the mighty things He has done for us)...He has given us salvation through the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ. God has looked upon our lowly state, our “poor, miserable, sinful” condition, for which we ourselves are of course responsible, and God has willed to save us. He sent His Son and that Son spent His life on the cross to take our sins away. God has also done the mighty thing (without which all the rest would be of no use to us) of creating faith in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, so that we can personally receive Christ’s salvation.

And connected with this there is one more thing. I hope you will not overlook this one thing, but consider it very carefully, and ponder it most prayerfully as these days of Advent come to their end.

The further “great thing” of God that He has done for us is to preserve us from impenitence and unbelief.

Christmas, the gift of Jesus for sinners, while true, is of no value to the one who hardens his or her heart against God's Word. Therefore God has brought you preachers and devotions and His Word this Advent to preserve in you a humble, contrite heart, and simple faith to cling to one Savior, one holy Name, that of Jesus.

Do you see? This is the very current, present, and relevant spiritual work that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in your life, right now and tomorrow. He is preserving you from impenitence and unbelief.

When we are thus preserved from impenitence and unbelief, God prepares us for a right and holy celebration of Christmas. (There is no other way.)

The mighty One does great things for us and we are granted repentance. (So let us repent of our sins.)

The mighty One does great things for us and we are granted faith. (So let us trust His Word, believing His promise that all our sins are forgiven on account of Jesus our Savior.)

The mighty One does great things for us and we are granted gratitude. (So let us give thanks this day, at Christmas, and all our days.)

Yes, with Mary, and with Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John, we confess today with joy that "He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name".

"My soul magnifies the Lord!" (v.46) "Emmanuel, come soon!" (from today's choir anthem)

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

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, <sup>40</sup> and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

<sup>48</sup> For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

<sup>49</sup> For He who is mighty has done great things for me,  
And holy is His name.

<sup>50</sup> And His mercy is on those who fear Him  
From generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with His arm;  
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
And exalted the lowly.

<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things,  
And the rich He has sent away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped His servant Israel,

In remembrance of His mercy,

<sup>55</sup> As He spoke to our fathers,  
To Abraham and to his seed forever.”

<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.