

Sing With Joy of Mary

St. Mary, Mother of Our Lord
Luke 1:39-55; Galatians 4:4-7

#1109
15 August 2007

Tonight we celebrate the Feast of St. Mary, Mother of our Lord. A more ancient name for this day is “The Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Mother of God.” Eastern Orthodox Churches celebrate this as they focus on Mary’s falling asleep in death and then being taken straightway to eternal bliss with her Son Jesus. Roman Catholics call today “The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.” It’s really a “Johnny-come-lately” teaching that says Mary was bodily assumed into heaven without passing through the grave – much like Enoch or Elijah in the Old Testament, I suppose. However, Holy Scripture is silent on what happened to Mary at the end of her time on earth. Early Church writings do describe how Mary fell asleep in death, and how the Apostles gathered from the ends of the earth to praise God for His gift of Mary, because she gave birth to the Savior.

So, how do we Lutherans celebrate this feast? How do we celebrate the Blessed Virgin Mary? First, let’s be clear: we do not worship the Blessed Virgin. Worship belongs only to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Neither do we call upon her to beg for her mercy in the face of a strict judge named Jesus. But we do honor St. Mary, and we do thank God for her example of faith and her devotion to His promises. Most especially, tonight we take the opportunity to magnify the God who saw fit to take on our human flesh by being born of the Virgin. You might say that tonight we get a little bit of Christmas – the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus – in the middle of August. Thus we see white on the altar. It was through Mary that the Son of God took on flesh to redeem us, restore us, and return us to life with the living God.

We first meet Mary when the Angel Gabriel comes to her to announce that she will conceive, carry, and give birth to the Son of God Most High. Her response of faith to the Angel’s announcement is both a summons and an example for all believers: “*Let it be to me according to your word.*” And it was so. And the eternal Son of God was conceived in the

Virgin’s womb at the hearing of God’s promise. And it was very good.

Our Gospel reading, then, shows Mary going to visit her relative Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist. When Mary entered the room, the Son of God also entered. Baby John leaped in his mother’s womb at the very presence of Baby Jesus in His mother’s womb. Elizabeth called Mary “*blessed...among women,*” and she also proclaimed, “*blessed is the fruit of your womb!*” Yes, St. Mary receives due honor, not for herself, but for the Savior-Son whom she bore. Notice how Mary sings. Not only did she humbly receive God’s promise through the angel, but she also sings in humble faith: “*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*”

That’s why we honor St. Mary – she points us to God our Savior. That’s why we thank God for the Blessed Virgin – from her flesh and blood we receive the flesh and blood of God Himself, the Son of God, that is. Humanly speaking, Mary has given us God our Savior, “*and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*” Mary may be “*blessed...among women*” for generations, but God’s mercy comes from her only Son for all generations.

We cannot have Jesus without His mother, and we cannot have His mother without getting Him, completely divine and fully flesh and blood. It’s no wonder, then, that our Lutheran Confessions can’t help but talk about Mary when they exalt Jesus’ “divine majesty”: “[Jesus] showed His divine majesty even in His mother’s womb, because He was born of a virgin, without violating her virginity. Therefore, she is truly the mother of God and yet has remained a virgin” (FC SD 8:24). Yes, Mary gives us our merciful Savior, our God in the flesh.

Our second reading tonight tells us why this is so joyously important. “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth 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.” We might say it this way: When Mary gave birth to God our Savior, God opened the way for our return home to His family. We had wandered and strayed – run away from our true home with God. We had decided that we creatures matter most and that God matters least. We had decided to ignore God and His way of life given in His Commandments. And yet God, in His mercy, sent His Son into the world to rescue and restore us. To do this, He became fully flesh and blood human as we are. He lived as we live in every way, except without sin. He lived perfectly and showed us God’s way of life. He even showed the great extent of His mercy and love by suffering at our hands on the cross to forgive our sins and to reunite us with our heavenly Father. And in His Resurrection, He gives us His new life, even down to the resurrected, glorified flesh and blood, the same flesh and blood that He had received from His mother.

So, we really do celebrate more than St. Mary tonight. We also celebrate – and, more than that, we worship! – her only Child, the holy Child who makes us children of God Most High. We even celebrate the joyous truth that, in Christ Jesus, our Brother, we too can call Mary our mother – our mother in the faith. After all, she teaches us to say, “*Let it be to me according to your word.*” She teaches us to sing, “My soul rejoices, My spirit voices—Sing the greatness of the Lord!” (LSB 933:1). After all, at the Table here this evening, we get to receive the very Body and Blood of our Savior, the same Body and Blood that He received from His mother, the same Body and Blood broken and poured out for us on the cross, the same Body and Blood resurrected to give us eternal life as the children of God. His greatness and mercy come to us in this Holy Meal. This meal unites us with Him, with His mother, and with each other.

So, tonight we honor St. Mary and join her in worshiping her only Son. “We sing with joy of Mary, / Whose heart with awe was stirred / When, youthful and astonished, / She heard the angel’s word. / Yet she her voice upraises /

To magnify God’s name, / As once for our salvation / [God’s] mother she became” (LSB 518:22). Amen.