

And There is Joy

Luke 1:39-45

The Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2015

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

John the Baptist is different from other babies. Our babies received the Holy Spirit when Jesus baptized them. John the Baptist had the Holy Spirit from the womb of his mother. In Luke, chapter one, he records that the angel Gabriel told Zechariah that his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from the womb of his mother. Therefore even while John the Baptist is in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, he has the Holy Spirit.

It is not like John the Baptist could see Jesus when they first encountered each other. It is not like John the Baptist could hear Jesus when they first encountered each other. When John the Baptist and our Lord first encountered each other John the Baptist was in the womb of his mother and our Lord was in the womb of his mother.

It is not like John the Baptist could hear Jesus when he first encountered Him. It was the mother of our Lord who spoke. It was the mother of John the Baptist who heard. Nevertheless even though it was his mother who heard and the mother of our Lord who spoke, John the Baptist leapt for joy. He leapt for joy at the word of the mother of the Lord.

The Holy Spirit grants the power to perceive Jesus wherever He is. Therefore since Jesus is in the womb of his mother and the Holy Spirit fills John the Baptist, John the Baptist recognizes his Lord even when he is in one womb and his Lord is another. It does not matter that John cannot see the Lord directly. It does not matter that John cannot hear the Lord directly. By the power of the Holy Spirit John perceives that the Lord is there. And there is joy. John leaps in the womb of his mother.

Now whether or not any of you were filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb of your mothers is irrelevant. The Holy Spirit filled you when you were baptized. Therefore you have the power to perceive Jesus wherever He is. You have the power to perceive Jesus wherever He is even if you cannot see Him directly. You have the power to perceive Jesus wherever He is even if you cannot hear Him directly.

And so you stand for the Holy Gospel reading. You stand for the Holy Gospel reading because on the average Sunday the Holy Gospel reading contains direct quotations of your Lord. And even though it is the minister of the Word who is reading the direct quotation to you, since it is the Lord's word and not the minister's own word, you recognize Jesus because you are filled with the Holy Spirit and you stand. You did not think that you were standing merely because the screens told you to, did you? And when the word of the Lord is read to you Jesus has spoken to you. When Jesus has spoken to you, you have heard from the Lord and there is joy. It does not matter what He said. That the Lord deigned to speak to you at all should be enough. There is joy. You stand and you sing.

In fact you rejoice at any proclamation of His word no matter where it takes place. You rejoice when the sermon is preached in His name and according to His word. You rejoice when any of the words of the apostles are read because the apostles heard and saw Jesus and bear witness to you about Him. You rejoice whenever the word of God is in a song. You rejoice whenever the word of God is broadcast throughout the world no matter what the medium may be. You rejoice when the word of God is spoken whether it attracts large crowds or does not matter. You rejoice when the word of Jesus is spoken, because there is where Jesus is speaking. And since you believe in Jesus you rejoice when He speaks. When He speaks there is joy.

And so you rejoice at the baptism of your children. At the baptism of your children all you can see is water. It is from the tap in the sacristy. All you can see is pastor pouring the water over your child's head. Pastor is from the womb of his mother the same as you or your child. But you have heard the voice of your Lord. You have heard Him say that this action along with instruction in His word makes this child a disciple of Jesus. The disciples of Jesus are the ones to whom He entrusts all of His words. His disciples are the ones to whom He entrusts knowledge of His heavenly Father. His disciples are the ones that He calls friends. His disciples are the ones who are saved. Baptism now saves you. And when your children are baptized, there is joy.

And so you rejoice when you attend the Sacrament of the Altar. When our Lord instituted the Sacrament of the Altar He said of the bread that it is His body. He said of the cup that it is His blood in the New Testament. The Sacrament of the Altar is the supernatural means by which our Lord brings His sacrifice upon the cross to us. After all, the most important thing that a sacrifice in the Old Testament makes is its body and its blood. Its body is cut up and burned in a prescribed way. Its blood is poured out or thrown against the altar in the Old Testament or it is put on the horns of the altar. Therefore when Jesus offers you His body and His blood He is offering you His sacrifice. The sacrifice that He offers is the one that He made on the cross. The sacrifice that He offers is His own death. The sacrifice that He made is the sacrifice that takes away your sins, all of them, even the most troublesome. Since that is the sacrifice that He is offering to you in the Sacrament of the Altar, then your Lord is offering to you the forgiveness of all of your sins in the Sacrament of the Altar. And if He is giving you the forgiveness of your sins in the Sacrament of the Altar, then He is saving you at the Sacrament of the Altar. Salvation is given out from this table. It is therefore a holy table and worthy of our reverence.

This is why the cup is the New Testament. In the Old Testament Jeremiah predicted that there would be a New Testament. Some translations call it a New Covenant. It amounts to the same thing. Jeremiah predicts that the Old Testament under Moses at Mount Sinai would pass away. He predicts that there would be a New Testament in which the Lord would no longer remember the sins of the people. Our Lord forged that New Testament with His sacrifice upon the cross. All that is left for you to do is to eat the sacrifice. It is a miracle that He makes possible in the Sacrament of the Altar. By eating such a sacrifice you make yourselves the priests of God for only the priests of God may eat His sacrifices.

And you walk away from the table of the Lord and there is joy.

Now all of the forms of seeing Jesus that I have just described are not direct. When you behold your Lord in the Word and in the sacraments it is not the same thing as Peter and Andrew, James and John mending their nets when our Lord walked by and summons them to follow Him. When your Lord presents Himself to you in the Sacrament of the Altar it is not same thing as when Mary Magdalene saw Him crucified or when she saw Him raised from the dead. And beholding Jesus in the Word and the sacraments is certainly not like beholding Him when He comes to raise the dead with power and much glory. Beholding Jesus in the Word and in the sacraments is like John the Baptist perceiving Jesus in spite of the fact that they were both in the womb of their mothers. Their separation in space and in time did not matter. John had the Holy Spirit and anyone with the Holy Spirit will perceive Jesus wherever He is. Simeon in the temple had the Holy Spirit and of all of the babies that were brought to them temple over the years that Simeon was there He perceived which one Jesus was. No one had to tell him.

In the same way anyone today who has the Holy Spirit can perceive where Jesus is. They can perceive that Jesus speaks in His word. They can perceive that Jesus saves in His baptism. They can perceive that Jesus forgives in His Sacrament of the Altar. The people with the Holy Spirit can perceive

Jesus dwelling in the midst of His congregation and they know that if they do something for the congregation they are doing it for Jesus. The congregation is the body of Christ.

And when they perceive Jesus in these places there is joy. It is spontaneous joy. And I suppose whether or not you leap for joy like John the Baptist did in the womb of his mother depends on whether or not you like to leap. It is a spontaneous joy. It is not a contrived joy. It is not a forced joy. It is not a joy that is experienced simply because the preacher told you that you had better experience joy. It is a joy that comes from perceiving where your Lord is and what He is doing. It is a joy that comes from a proper understanding of the sins that you have committed and what they deserve and what the Lord has done to take those sins away from you. It is a joy that comes from a clear conscience that is not troubled or disturbed by its sins. It is a joy that expresses itself in whatever form the joy takes when it hits you. It is a joy that expresses itself in accord with God's will.

It is the joy of Christmas because what is the joy of Christmas if not Jesus coming to you.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.