

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The fourth Sunday of Advent

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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

Our Lord uplifts the lowly

³⁹In those days Mary got up and hurried to the hill country, to a town of Judah. ⁴⁰She entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹Just as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy! ⁴⁵Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!" ⁴⁶Then Mary said, My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, ⁴⁸because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones. He has lifted up the lowly. ⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, ⁵⁵as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever. – Luke 1:39-55 EHV

Waiting, rather impatiently, the couple wants to know the results. Their hopes of a favorable one have been dashed from many negatives. At this point, they wonder why they still care and why they still do these tests. With little to no hope for what could be, they look once again to see just one line on the stick. The wife breaks down into tears while the husband holds her. Life has brought them down low.

The man has entered his mid-30's now. After his fiancée destroyed everything that he thought he would get out of life, things have been difficult for him. He wants to put himself back out there, but it's been challenging. He's downloaded the dating apps, but all the women that are on this app don't seem to be looking for a Christian marriage. Today, he built up the courage to talk to the woman that he often sees at the gym. His zeal in conversation did not seem to be reciprocated. He supposes it's time to give up. Life has brought him down low.

After a lifetime of love and happy memories, it seems that much of what brought joy and meaning to the elderly man's life are only memories now. He wakes up to see an empty spot in the bed. He checks his phone to see that the missed calls are all spam and the emails are junk. His life used to be full of time with children and a meaningful career. Now, this man feels that his purpose for life is gone. Life has brought him down low.

Dear friends, we live in a world that is full of pain and sorrow. Although there are many good things in this life, the tough times seem to remain as well. Do you feel like a lowly person? Perhaps you feel like you are not receiving the gift that your heart is set upon. Maybe you feel alone and just want someone to share this challenging life with. Or you once had it all but now it seems like what you had is long gone. Has this life brought you down low?

If you feel that you have been knocked down by the problems of this broken world, the Lord has an uplifting message for you. The Holy Spirit has brought a message through Elizabeth, Mary, and Luke.

This is a message for the lowly and downtrodden. This is a message for you and me. Here is the message: The Lord uplifts the lowly.

In today's message, we see two women who would have had every reason to feel downtrodden and lowly. These are Elizabeth and Mary. Their reasons for feeling lowly may have been very different however. Yet, a pregnancy may have been at the center of it for both of them.

Let's consider Elizabeth. Elizabeth was a descendant of Aaron as was her husband. Her husband, Zechariah, was a priest. Elizabeth lived a pious life along with her husband. Yet, the Lord had not given a specific blessing to Elizabeth throughout her life that she so deeply desired; a child.

In Elizabeth's day, being barren led to so many reasons for heartbreak. First, it was the loss of a desired child to love. Second, it was the loss of a potential person to care for her in the unfortunate situation that she would lose her husband. Third, it may have been perceived by people that it was somehow her fault.

After sending the angel Gabriel to announce to her husband that she would conceive a child and give birth, the Lord fulfilled this word for Elizabeth. In one sense, at that moment, the Lord uplifted this lowly person. After conceiving this child, however, Elizabeth kept herself in seclusion for five months. I wonder if she feared the worst could happen in her geriatric pregnancy. This gift from God caused her to proclaim, "The Lord has done this for me in the days when he looked with favor on me and took away my disgrace among the people." (Luke 1:26)

Now, those of you who have experienced a pregnancy, especially a long awaited one, you know that an expectant mother would not feel completely at ease about everything health wise throughout the pregnancy, especially during a time prior to modern ways to check on the child.

From a worldly perspective, Elizabeth would have many reasons to still feel lowly throughout this pregnancy. Although her husband, without the ability to speak, communicated to her what the Angel Gabriel had told her, she may have struggled with her doubts still. Elizabeth may have pondered, "Could it really be that the baby in the womb would be filled with the Holy Spirit and prepare the way for the Lord?"

Elizabeth may have felt downtrodden for not having conceived a child for many years throughout her life. Her relative may have felt lowly for very different reasons. Mary was a young woman. She was betrothed to a man named Joseph. At that time, she may have felt like things were going very well, but God had other plans.

One evening, the same angel that appeared to Zechariah, appeared to Mary. He told Mary that she was highly favored by God. She was blessed among women. God had a tremendous purpose for Mary that he revealed through the angel. She would conceive a son by the power of the Most High God. Her son would be the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Although this was wonderful news from the angel for Mary, it may have been a difficult task for her to undertake. Mary was not yet married. Perhaps she would have to deal with the social stigma of conceiving a child outside of marriage. Her betrothed, Joseph, needed a message from an angel to show him the truth about this situation.

There are other indications in Mary's life that things may not have always been easy. Some people wonder if the phrase "no room in the inn" should have quotation marks around it as there was no room for a woman who was pregnant outside of marriage. After she gave birth, we know that she had to give the sacrifice for a person that was impoverished. On top of all that, she had to raise and care for the God of the universe. That was likely a scary and daunting job. Although Mary was called blessed by the angel, she may have felt lowly.

However, lowly, Elizabeth and Mary may have been and felt. We see in this text what turns it all around. The turning point is the fulfillment of God's promise and an indication to them that it was so. When Mary came to visit her relative, Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy.

The presence of God incarnate in the womb of Mary led the baby in Elizabeth's belly to leap for joy. This was a sign for Elizabeth that the statement from the angel to her husband that her baby would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb was true. This was the case because her baby was to be the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. Elizabeth was then filled with the Holy Spirit. She had been brought to see that Mary's baby was the Messiah, the Lord himself.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth proclaims to Mary that she was blessed because the mother of her Lord had come to visit her. Elizabeth recognized that Mary was the mother of the Savior of the world. Then, Elizabeth tells Mary that she is blessed through faith in the Lord's Word.

Upon receiving this Word from the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth, Mary breaks out into the song that we call the Magnificat. She proclaims the truth that the Lord uplifts the lowly. Here is the essence of Mary's song, God humbles the proud and he uplifts the humble.

Elizabeth and Mary were humble women. Elizabeth was a barren and elderly wife of a priest in the high country. Mary was a young woman from a small town just waiting to be married. From the perspective of the world, they may have been two of the most humble people around. Yet, the Lord uplifted them. The Lord uplifted Elizabeth and Mary through the fulfillment of his promise.

How did the Lord uplift Elizabeth and Mary? Well, let's be careful to assume that they were uplifted regarding earthly prosperity. This may have not been the case in many ways. Elizabeth's son was a righteous man but he had a difficult task. He would grow up to be a wilderness preacher that was hated by many. Her son even was put to death in a gruesome way, he was decapitated by a ruler. Mary would also have to deal with the difficulty of seeing her son die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' birth, Simeon sings about Mary, "And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

The uplifting of Elizabeth and Mary may not have been regarding physical welfare. Instead, they were uplifted spiritually and eternally. In Mary's song, she recognized that she needed a Savior. The child in her womb was Mary's Savior and Elizabeth's Savior. God had remembered his mercy to his servant Israel. Through this child in Mary's womb God would uplift the lowly. He would fill the hungry with good things. He would do a mighty act by providing eternal salvation. Dear friends, the Lord uplifts the lowly.

How do you look for the Lord to uplift you in this life? My concern is that many of us can become preoccupied with our physical desires. We hear Mary sing about the Lord casting down rulers, bringing

down the rich, coming to our aid, and filling the hungry with good things, and we think this means that God should fill all our earthly desires.

What earthly gift from God has preoccupied your mind and desires? Does this distract you from the way God has promised to give the greatest uplifting? Young men, is it the desire to find a nice young woman? Employees, is it the desire to receive that promotion? Older Christians, is it the visit from your grandchildren that you keep waiting to receive? Dear friends, desires such things but do not become preoccupied with them. God can give you such gifts, but he does not have to. Any physical blessing that God gives is a gift of his grace.

If we look at ourselves and think, "I deserve to be uplifted by God in the following ways." Such a mindset demonstrates a need to be brought low. God scatters those who are proud in their conceit.

God's mighty arm works through his law to show us that we are truly lowly. Yet, it is the lowly that the Lord uplifts. The Lord uplifted humanity by sending his Son to take flesh and live as their substitute... to live as your substitute. The Lord uplifts you because this baby who was born of Mary was uplifted on a cross to die for the forgiveness of your sins. Your conceit and selfish desires are taken away. Dear lowly friends, the Lord has uplifted you. One day, he will uplift you to be with him in paradise.

If the difficulty of this life has brought you low, be uplifted by the Lord. Hungry people, the Lord sustains you with the Bread of Life. Destitute people, the Lord gives you eternal earthly treasures. Certainly, we who are lowly are uplifted by our Lord. The gifts that he gives may not be always physical, but the peace comes to us now. Amen.