

Why am I so favored?

For no other reason than Christ has come to you -- For no other reason than His Holy Spirit has made you alive in Christ.

Luke 1:39-45

TEXT: *At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"*

In Jesus' name, fellow redeemed:

Elizabeth and Zechariah had come to grips with their old age and the fact that the Lord had not blessed them with any children. But then, one day, the angel Gabriel was sent to announce that they would have a son, and a famous one at that! Their son would be the forerunner of the Christ of God! The Advent of the Lord had come!

Mary, a virgin engaged to be married, was quietly going about her daily chores when Gabriel made the announcement to her: ***Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. ... Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.*** Lu 1

The Bible then says: ***At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"*** These people recognized the great things that the Lord was doing! The Savior of all mankind was coming, and they had been chosen to be part of this great plan!

Why? Elizabeth asks the question that all of us will ask: Why am I so highly favored? If we ponder this question without Christ, there will be sins of two kinds: Pride, in thinking that somehow, we have deserved the Lord's special favors; or, Doubt, when we see ourselves as the sinners we truly are.

As we prepare ourselves for this time of the Church year when we celebrate the first Advent of our Lord, his birth, while looking forward to his second Advent, his second coming on Judgment Day, it is good for each of us also to consider this question of Elisabeth and Mary: WHY AM I SO FAVORED? Scripture gives only this answer: It is for no other reason than that Christ was pleased to come to you and to enliven you to the knowledge of the mystery of man's salvation through Christ.

Elizabeth posed the question before us this morning: ***why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*** Have you not asked the same kind of question? Why am I a Christian and not a Muslim or a pagan? Are there not also other good people in the world who are not Christians but who also do good things, work hard, raise their families to be moral people? Buddhists are very religious people who believe in peace. They literally will not hurt a fly, believing that it is life that should be preserved. Will God not take into consideration these noble efforts to live in peace and goodness? Most people in the world believe that He will save them, especially if they have not had a chance to hear about Jesus Christ.

Scripture says, NO: ***There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.*** Ro 3 This includes Mary and Elizabeth, along with all of us. They also are "become worthless..." This shocks those who believe the false teachings of the Popes who declare that Mary was never a sinner.

Jesus once told a very religious Jew: ***I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.*** Jn 3 This very religious Jew was incredulous and asked: ***How can a man be born when he is old? ... Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!*** Jn 3 "That's my point," said Jesus. Unless the Holy Spirit comes to you, and one of His means of doing this is through Holy Baptism, you cannot hope to see heaven.

In this same passage from Paul's letter to the Romans it goes on to say: ***But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, ...*** That is why the FIRST Advent of the Christ is so important. It

is God's evidence given to me that I, along with Mary and Elizabeth, are favored to know this saving truth. So are all of us gathered here this morning! God has favored us to know that even though we are sinners who deserved eternal damnation, we are, by His gracious declaration, made sinless saints through faith in Jesus. As Paul also writes in that same passage: ***This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*** Saints AND sinners at the same time! We confess to be sinners, but God, through Jesus, has declared us righteous saints! Believe this good news! Believe God!

So there is an advent, a coming to us, each and every time the Gospel is proclaimed in our ears and each time a child is baptized, and each time Jesus comes to us in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Paul said it this way to the Christians in Ephesus: ***For he chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure...*** Ep 1 There is no room for pride in this, no room for thinking that I had ANYTHING to do with any of this for Christ has come to me and he has ***made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure***, through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

"Why am I so favored?" we ask along with Mary and Elizabeth. For no other reason than what Paul reveals: ... ***he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure...*** Ep 1 How humbling this is! How humbling this is that the Holy Spirit would come to us with the gift of spiritual life and faith.

We marvel at this awesome grace revealed in the power of the Holy Spirit who created faith in the heart of an unborn child: ***When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ... As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*** Both Elizabeth and her unborn baby John respond to the presence of the Savior, who had come to them in Mary's womb.

John leaped with joy at the presence of the Savior because God the Holy Spirit had filled him with spiritual life which is faith in Jesus. The Bible says: ***no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*** 1Co 12 Here, our human reason, allied with faith in what God's Word says, must declare that the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is preached and applied to us also in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, must be given the highest priority in our lives. For these are indeed ***the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...*** Ro 1 For those who believe, there is a response. It is a powerful response. It is the power of that faith that God has given you and that is now in you, and that responds to all of God's Word and promises. It is the power of that perfect peace about which the angels sang that Christmas Eve: ***peace to men on whom his favor rests.*** Lu 2 It is peace with God and the One whose Second Advent means our resurrection to eternal life in heaven.

Recent wild fires in California are a good picture of hell. Look long and hard at the horror of those fires and know that our sins have caused that. Why am I so favored as to have peace with God? While we do not deserve it we have the Gospel in our hearts and hands. How much is it worth to us to have the Advent of our Lord Jesus among us Sunday after Sunday, when our babies are born and baptized into Jesus' name? And to have all anxiety and fear removed when we kneel before the altar and have Jesus come to us with His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins and the promise that He is with us always?

Why are we so highly favored that the Lord has come to us today? To dwell on this question without Christ leaves us anxious and uncertain. But the fact that He has come, gives us all the joyful confidence that there is in heaven and on earth. Amen.