

## MARY, MOTHER OF OUR LORD –AUGUST 15, 2010

Today we think about Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. It isn't only Roman Catholics who honor Mary. This festival - with different names and different meanings - is celebrated by Lutheran, Episcopalian, and Orthodox Christians as well as by Roman Catholic Christians. And that celebration of Mary is one thing that holds us together, which was an objective of Martin Luther's when he *recommended* the observance of four "Mary festivals" in churches of the Reformation. So we Lutherans think about Mary not just at Christmas but also on February 2 (The Presentation of Our Lord), March 25 (The Annunciation of Our Lord), May 31 (The Visitation), and August 15 (Mary, Mother of Our Lord). This year, August 15 happens to fall on a Sunday, so it gets extra attention among us (\*).

Notice that our titles of the festivals emphasize Mary's relationship to Jesus. Even the Annunciation (when the angel Gabriel announced that Mary, a virgin, would have a child) is in the Lutheran Church *not* the Annunciation to Mary but the Annunciation [or announcement] of our Lord. This is a way in which Lutherans retain the festivals of Mary: by honoring her because of what God's grace and power did in her life, because by God's grace she was open to God's will, and because she has a unique role to play in the salvation that is ours only because of Jesus Christ.

In a recent conversation, a former Roman Catholic remarked that we don't give Mary the same *place* she holds in the Roman Church. And that's true: the same *honor* but not the same *place*, because *not the same power*. We Protestant Christians do not ask Mary for her mercy and her help in the same way that we ask God for mercy and help. But we are inspired by Mary and aspire to be like Mary in her faithful reply to the startling news of her pregnancy: "Let it be to me according to your word." We aspire to be like Mary when her relative Elizabeth shouted out "Blessed are you among women,"

and she replied, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.” Our souls, like Mary’s, should proclaim the greatness of the Lord – should “magnify the Lord.”

Mary’s *magnifying the Lord* is shown in her willingness – as a young, unmarried woman – to bear the Son of God. It is shown in the way she and Joseph brought Jesus up in the religious traditions of Judaism (having him circumcised on the eighth day and presented at the temple on the fortieth day). It is shown in her continued presence in the story of her son: at the foot of the cross when Jesus died, in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost. Out of all that, today we honor Mary particularly as mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of us have been mothers, and all of us have had mothers; so we know what mothers do. They wipe dirty faces, kiss skinned knees, and teach their children to say Thank You. In the gospel that I just read, Mary understood what God would do through her son. And her Song, the Magnificat, lets us know what she may have taught him – besides to say Thank You – when he was growing up.

If we think of the Magnificat as simply the sweet song of a mother-to-be, we miss the point. Mary sings about God scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, feeding the hungry and sending the rich away with nothing. Mary’s song is about the great upset that God works because God loves justice and achieves it by turning the tables, upsetting the apple cart, watching the proud stumble and the powerless stand tall. Jesus’ teaching was right in line with his mother’s teaching, right in line with the prophets and psalmists who would have inspired that teaching in her.

Whatever is hurtful and unfair in the world, wherever the powerful take advantage of the powerless, God plans to set things straight. God has turned things upside down in Jesus and will continue to do so until the rich do not step on the poor. Because God

loves justice, God makes things right. Mary magnified the Lord by singing that to her relative Elizabeth, no doubt teaching it to Jesus, and also teaching it to us.

We usually don't like God upsetting things. What if we're the ones that God will knock down rather than the ones God will boost up? Many times we feel we have *not enough power and influence*. Yet every one of us can slip into proud thoughts that God would scatter like dust; every one of us can act high and mighty when we're struggling for control. A happy interpretation of Mary's song is that God's raising the lowly and lowering the higher-ups need not be seen as a punishment for those who have succeeded in worldly terms. This raising and lowering is *less for the punishment of some as for the good of all* – sufficient power **and** sufficient humility for all. That will be justice in the reign of God, inaugurated by Mary's son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Bob and I were on vacation two weeks ago, we spent three days at a monastery. Every night after the service of Compline, the brothers went into an underground chapel, dark except for candles, and sang around a statue of Mary in words that some of you may know: *Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy; hail our life, our sweetness, our hope. To you do we cry... Turn your eyes of mercy toward us*. Bob and I observed and appreciated this nighttime ritual. It was very lovely and peaceful, but it was not our prayer. Our prayer is that we, like Mary, might be magnifying glasses for God's presence and power in the world. And that we, like Mary, would love justice even when the toppling of systems and reversal of powers is unsettling. When stability and calm are brought by God, and when change and upset are brought by God, may our souls magnify the Lord. In every circumstance, may we magnify the Lord. Amen.