

Rev. Kurt Cockran, Risen Savior Lutheran Church (Basehor, KS), C – Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 19th, 2021

Four People. Four Miracles.

Luke 1:39-56

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

We are treated this day to a dialogue between four individuals of vast different age ranges. Two mothers, two children. One mother old enough to be a great-grandmother: Elizabeth. The other mother quite young. In our day, she'd be just old enough probably to just get her driver's license. But at that age in her day the girls (as *we* might call them) were actually quite ready to get on with the cardinal vocation given to women: to be a wife and mother.

We have the quite old, and the quite young, but then we meet the two children of these mothers. If you're a fly on the wall of this scene, you couldn't see these boys with your eyes, you could only examine the evidence and trust the usual biology, to an extent. His name: John. He was already named that by the angel in the temple.

6 months gestational is John when he meets his cousin, a boy only just conceived. The angel Gabriel likewise saw fit to name him as well just days before this holiday gathering. *His* name shall be called Jesus, for He – Yahweh – will save – shua – His people from their sins.

Four individuals. Four individual miracles, you could say. The most obvious miracle to the outside observer is Elizabeth. Women just don't have babies at that age, and especially considering that she wouldn't have the help of modern gynecology. After all, it wasn't until 1900 that a woman survived a C-section.

The miracle of the second mother, though, wasn't obvious right away. It was an *invisible* miracle. Whereas with Elizabeth, God intervened in her womb, perhaps mending the old body to be able to bear a child, but otherwise using normal reproductive means. But with Mary, God's not merely mending, but creating *ex nihilo* – out of nothing. The most world-renowned of our

scientists would call this a biological impossibility, and they would be right. But with God, the author of biology, nothing is impossible. Nevertheless, to the naked eye observer, logic says that more than Mary's eye must've been naked to have caused this pregnancy. And so, like the old days when the young and pregnant might leave town to live with the aunt in Michigan or cousin in Kentucky to be spared of scrutiny, she goes to her relative Elizabeth.

And when she arrived, we find the third of our four miracles in these four individuals, **“And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.”** Many in our day might not see this as miraculous. Babies kick and punch and do all kinds of movements in the womb. He was six months, after all. Perhaps we might consider it a miracle that Elizabeth didn't groan at having John push against her diaphragm. But *this* was no ordinary kick, but a leap, and no ordinary leap, but, as Elizabeth exclaimed *by inspiration of the Holy Spirit*, the baby leaped specifically by the word of Mary's greeting, when it came through the womb and into the very real ears of John, the baby not just leaped, but leaped for joy. Imagine that. Imagine one of those high definition sonogram pictures of a babe at this age. Toes and fingers well-defined. Eyelids, eyebrows, eyelashes, nails, and hair all formed. Teeth and bones becoming denser. *We're* at that stage able to know if it's a boy or girl. For most of human history, that wouldn't come until the birth. But fascinatingly, Zechariah and Elizabeth (and Mary and Joseph) all knew they were having a boy from the first moment. So much already formed, John is still only 6 inches long, weighs only about 4 ounces. And yet... is capable of the emotion... *of joy*. Remarkable. Maybe the fact that John's own Creator and Redeemer lying only feet away might have something to do with it. Which, we see in fact, this joy is more than merely an emotion of the infant John, but a fruit even of genuine saving faith that John at this pre-born age is able to have.

But, it might be said, John can't possibly have an active intellectual capacity to affirm that His Savior is feet away from him. Okay, but the question I have for you is this: does possessing saving faith require the believer to have an active intelligence? If you were to die in your sleep, does that mean you're not heaven-bound since you couldn't have faith while you were asleep, if all faith is an act of intellectual agreement? That's of course, ridiculous. Or if you're in a coma or become suddenly mentally handicapped because of a car accident, does that mean you cease being a Christian with saving faith. No. An active intelligence reflecting on the Word certainly *helps* (especially against temptations to disbelieve), but an active intelligence is not *required* for saving faith. Those who deny infant baptism do so on the basis that faith is required for Baptism, and babies, they say, can't possibly believe. We, in response, affirm that faith is indeed required for salvation in baptism, but... babies can believe. They can have faith. We take this not from rational sense, but from the Word. Rational sense says God can't possibly be three in one and one in three or dwell fully in man, but the Word says otherwise. Rational sense says God can't create and give faith in the heart of the tiniest human, but the Word – God Himself – says otherwise. Here He shows with John, and later, with the infants who will be brought to Jesus. Faith itself is a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Whether you're a day old in the womb or 30,000 days old on your death bed, faith is a miracle worked by God.

So we look at Elizabeth, and we think “no way could someone that old bear a child.” But the Word tells us what to believe. We look at John and think “no way could someone that young have faith.” But the Word tells us otherwise what to believe. We look at Mary and think “no way could that young maiden be pregnant without the second person that it takes to tango” and the Word tells us what to believe. ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel, God with us’”

Finally, we look at the most amazing miracle of all in the fourth and final person of this scene. It's not just Mary we're looking at, but the fruit of her womb: Jesus. Son of the Most High. Son of God. Holder of the throne of David. Eternal king over the house of Jacob. Immanuel. Son of God made man. The fullness of God was pleased to dwell *not* in a fellow 6 month gestational babe like John was, but in a microscopic baby that probably only just nestled into the lining of the uterus. The angel Gabriel spoke, Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and Mary then made the 5 day trek from Nazareth to Jerusalem when this visit occurred. The fullness of God dwelled in that which was a thousand times smaller than the communion bread we use. All by the will of God, made clear to us in His Word.

Perhaps then it's not so unbelievable of a thing then when we confess that the fullness of God is pleased to dwell even in the communion bread. Our perception says to Elizabeth conceiving at an old age, "nothing but coincidence," but God says, "by my power is John conceived, Our perception says, "nothing but water," but the Word says "Baptism, a washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Our perception and the History Channel says, "there must have been a father. Let's consider the possibilities of what *really* happened with Mary," but the Father and the Holy Spirit says to the Son, pointing to the womb of the Virgin, "make *here* your home." And what God says, happens. Just like at Creation, so at the Incarnation. What the Word says, happens. Our perception says "bread and wine," but the Word says, "This is my Body, this is my Blood."

And how else does God meet our perception with miracles of His Word? How about this... Our perception says, "I am a wretched sinner who can't be forgiven for the messes that I've made in my life." But the Word says instead, "you *were* a wretched sinner deserving of God's wrath, but at the right time, God sent to you His Son, born of woman, born under the law,

to redeem *you* who are under the law, so that you would receive adoption as sons. At just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for you.” Or our perception may then say, “yes, but I’m still going to die. I’m still sinning. I don’t do the good that I want to do, but the evil I don’t want to do is what I keep on doing. Does this mean that I’m not truly a Christian?” But the Word speaks the miracle back to you, “Your identity is not your sin. Confess it. Be freed from it. Your identity is in Christ. He forgives you, and you will rise and finally be perfect totally.

Let the Word drive reality. Let the Word limit your perception. For with God, nothing is impossible.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.