

“Two pictures of God” Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

This is the last week in Advent, the season when we remember and celebrate the first coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and we also keep waiting for His second coming in His divine glory.

Have you noticed something puzzling about Jesus Christ? Right here, in this Advent season we have two very different pictures of the same God. One of them – a man Jesus Christ. A little baby wrapped in swaddling cloth and sleeping on His Mom’s arms. Heartwarming picture.

Other is very different - Almighty God coming back to restore His fallen creation, to gather all the nations before His throne of glory on the Last Day. All powerful, holy and just. Purging the earth from all evil. Frightening picture for all whose sins are not forgiven.

The same two pictures we actually got from our today’s readings. First, from the prophet Micah: “But you, O Bethlehem [...] from you shall come forth ... one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. [...] And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, and he shall be their peace.”

Micah speaks about someone whose origin is in ancient times, who possesses the strength of God and the name of God Yahweh. He will shepherd His chosen people, and they shall dwell secure, for He will have all authority, and He'll be their peace.

How comforting is to hear a promise like this. This is what your God is like. Eternal, Almighty, with all authority. And He uses His authority to protect His chosen people, to shelter them, He is the only One in whom we can find true peace.

However, this is little puzzling a prophesy. This Almighty One, of whom Micah speaks, He will be born in Bethlehem, in a little village. How is this that someone whose beginning is in ancient times, will only be born later?

The message of Micah tells us that something beyond our comprehension is going on here. Today's Gospel reading from Luke continues the same line. When we look at his account, Luke tells about very ordinary things.

A young pregnant mom travels to spend a time with her relative. She carries a baby under her heart. He will be born just a few month later. Helpless. Totally dependent on His parents.

But then there is something unusual about this baby. The angel announced that this baby will be the Son of God the Most High, that He will receive the throne of the king David, and that His Kingdom will have no end.

But He was just a baby! Just a man. Like us. How can you call Him in all these majestic names and titles, and prophesy eternal future? It is mysterious. It is beyond our comprehension. We can say, it is offensive to our reason.

This is why so many can't handle these news. They are too wonderful for us to grasp them. How can it be that God the Creator, the Eternal One, how can He be the same baby Jesus, one of our own kind?!

If you are serious about your relationships with God, then you will ask these questions - where is my God? Where can I meet Him? Often people say, that God is everywhere. Sure He is.

But where is He available for you, where has He revealed Himself to humanity, where can we have access to Him? Everywhere? Of course, not. The true God has revealed Himself hiding Himself right before our eyes.

First, remember the Old Testament. God's glory, His very presence indwelled in the Tent in the midst of the Israel, and later in the Temple. And today we read that God was present in... yes, God's glory indwelled in Mary. For nine month Mary was God's temple.

After that people saw God's glory, God's very presence in Jesus from Nazareth. In a man like us. This is how God made Himself accessible to humanity. Hiding and revealing Himself in the first century Jewish man Jesus.

The God of Bible is not some kind of distant God, who doesn't care about what is happening of Earth, or in your life. He is present with us. He lived as one of us. He experienced all that we experience.

He struggled with all the temptations and difficulties that we struggle. He knows what it is like to be tempted by the world, by temptations of power and money and sex, how it is to lose your loved ones, be thirsty and hungry, be tired till death, be betrayed, suffer rejection and ridicule, and so on.

If you need someone who can understand all your struggles, here He is, Jesus Christ, true man. How is He present with us today? He speaks to you through His Word, He comes to forgive your sins in the Divine Service, He comes to heal your soul and to strengthen your faith in the Lord's Supper.

Where is your God? Where can you be in His presence? Here, yes, right here. It is God's mystery. We may only wonder why He has chosen so strange a way to come to us, but this is how He does it.

The Almighty and Eternal One hides Himself under the most ordinary things. He came a baby. Now He comes hiding in His Words and in His Holy Meal. It is such a mystery that these two so different pictures of God merge together is one person of Jesus Christ. But this is how it is.

The last question today is, - who can receive Him? Who can have access to this God? Today's reading gives us the answer. Yes, God came and comes to us in very ordinary way.

Putting aside His glory and might. Coming as a humble servant. We may wonder why? Why not to come in glory and mighty? It's much more appealing. No. Because if He came as a mighty ruler, so many would be afraid to approach to Him.

But Jesus wanted to be accessible to everyone. Even to the lowliest among all people. He came to the humble, to the outcasts, to the rejected, to the poor, to the despised. He became one of them. He welcomed and still welcomes them all.

But because Jesus came and comes to us in such ordinary and humble ways, still not everyone can come to Him. Only this time it is not because of Jesus.

If you are proud in your own thoughts, Jesus is not for you. If you think you are so good already, then Jesus is not for you. If you are healthy enough in spirit and soul, righteous enough, wise enough, then Jesus is not for you. If you think that all you have and all you are you have achieved on your own, Jesus is not for you.

He was very clear saying that He didn't come to save the righteous, but the sinners. So, if you are a sinner, if you need and desire God's mercy and forgiveness, if your sins and shameful thoughts trouble you, then Jesus is here to forgive you.

If you are broken, abused, rejected, despised Jesus is here for you, as your greatest support, to exalt you, and to heal you. If you are lonely and abandoned, then Jesus is here to be with you as your best and the most faithful friend.

If you have a great life and realize that it is a gift of gracious God, then Jesus is here to accept your gratitude and to continuously bless you. He is here for everyone who realizes how much we need Him.

He is here for everyone who is not perfect. He is here for each of you, to restore you, and to take you to His eternal Kingdom. This is what our God is like and this is how He comes to us.

Keep these two picture of God in mind. He is as close and empathic as anyone could be. He can understand your struggles and pains better than anyone. He is here for you.

On the other hand, He is the God Almighty. He has all authority in His hands. He is capable of keeping all His promises. There is no doubt about it. And He is your God.

This is why we can say together with Mary and Elizabeth: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. And his mercy is for us from generation to generation."

Amen.