

I'm curious whether any of you leaped into church this morning. And if you did, it might actually have been more that you tripped and it just looked as if you leaped. That's not our style, is it? We might run here and there for this and that. But we walk in church. And especially the more we age.

Maybe this explains why John is leaping within the womb of his mother. He is six months along. At the time when babies are starting to become active. This is how most mothers might explain it. But we're told that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit reveals to her not only that the baby is leaping within her at Mary's greeting, but that he is leaping for joy.

This is the very same joy that you have, and for the very same reason. Both John and you are in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus is barely a week old within Mary's womb. She comes with haste, it says, after Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit. Her baby is maybe 1/100<sup>th</sup> of an inch in size. There is no baby bump. No evidence at all that Mary is with child. And yet John leaps for joy.

Now even though you are not leaping here and there this morning, you and John are quite similar. John is within Elizabeth's womb. Jesus is within Mary's, unseen by John, therefore. And still, John has joy. You cannot see Jesus either. As with John, He is hidden from your sight. But that does not prevent John, nor you, from rejoicing in the presence of the Lord.

Now had Mary come a few weeks before this to visit Elizabeth, we can be certain that John would not be leaping. He leaps not because of Mary, but because Mary carries Jesus within her.

Just so, if the church does not proclaim Christ; if there is no Baptism, no Lord's Supper, no absolving of sins in Jesus' name, no preaching of the Gospel, and no liturgy filled with Christ, then there is nothing here to give you joy. A church without Christ is Mary without Jesus in her womb. But the church that proclaims Christ is the Mary here at the house of Elizabeth. And then, all within that house, and in this house, are filled with joy.

And here's something else to consider. Jesus doesn't speak. Mary does. Mary greets Elizabeth with her voice. And even though John in the womb hears Mary, and not Jesus, he leaps. But he does not leap until Mary speaks.

This is why our liturgical worship, from beginning to end, is the proclaiming of Christ. For the worshipers to have joy, Mary must speak. The church that is pregnant with Christ can do nothing else than speak the living voice of the Gospel. Here in church, you hear the voice of Mary, the voice of men. Do not think little of coming to church because of this. For it is the voice of Mary that carries Jesus to those who hear.

So, you are much like John. But you are also like his mother, Elizabeth. She was the first one to worship the Christ Child. But she was not the last. For you, now, follow her with your worship of the Christ. And listen carefully to the way in which we must follow: "*Why is this granted to me,*"

she says, *“that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”* This is humility. Elizabeth humbling herself before Mary and the child she carries. Elizabeth is much older than Mary. She has a husband who is a priest. And Mary? She is nothing but a poor peasant girl. On a normal day, Mary would humble herself before Elizabeth.

But this day is far from normal. Within Mary is the Creator of the universe. And Elizabeth, believing this, takes the lowest seat. There is nothing about herself that she points to as to why she deserves this visit from Mary. Rather, she humbly cries: *“Why is this granted to me?”*

True worship can only be done with such humility. Who are you, and who am I, to assume, and even with pride, that we deserve to have the Most High God come to us? What we deserve, on account of our sinfulness, is to have God visit us in judgment.

But look how He comes. As a tiny embryo within a virgin’s womb. A child, a *brephos* in the Greek, an infant who needs the shelter that His mother’s womb gives Him. This is your God within Mary. There is no humbler way for God to come to you and me. And this is why John, and you, can leap for joy.

Your God comes to the womb of a peasant girl. He comes to be wrapped with rags in His birth, and to be buried with such rags in His death. He does not elevate Himself above you. He lowers Himself beneath you. And in such humility, He is willing to cover Himself with your sins and mine.

Here is your joy. The joy that caused you to leap when you were baptized. For leap you did, even if it went unseen. As the Holy Spirit caused John to leap for joy, so the same Holy Spirit brought the same joy to you. For as your pastor was baptizing you in the Name of the Triune God, it was as if the voice of Mary was greeting Elizabeth. And though you could not see Jesus, you rejoiced in Him, hailing Him, by faith, to be your Savior.

John did not leap for joy because he had no sin to give him grief. His joy was that his Savior had come; He who was forgiveness for his sin. And also with you. Whether you leap or not, rejoice in your heart. For Jesus’ sake, God forgives you. Even within Mary’s womb, your sin was placed upon Jesus. And since your sin is on Him, it is not on you. Each and every day you can leap for joy because each and every day your Lord Jesus is your forgiveness. Amen.