

7 December 2016  
Advent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Magnificent Magnificat Verbs: He *brings down* and *exalts*”

Text: Isaiah 2:11-19; Luke 1:46-55

*Mary said . . .*

*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.*

God sometimes works His greatest good when He tears down, takes away, sends away, and humbles you.

We don't usually think that way. Those things seem not good to us. But Mary is telling us tonight: that is how God works.

If you think you are strong, He might humble you that you learn to rely on Him and His strength.

If you are clinging too tightly to the things of this world, He might take them away that you cling to Him alone.

If you are full and satisfied, He might make you empty and without that you turn to Him for what you need.

If you think you're not that bad a person, He might let your sin bear its awful fruit in your life, that you repent of who you are and receive His forgiveness.

For if you think you are something or have something for God or come to Him full of yourself and your accomplishments, you get nothing. For you want nothing. You want to give. But what do you have that God needs? What can you do that God cannot do? What are you that God hasn't made you?

So God tears down, takes away, sends away, and humbles, *that He might give*. Not so we. We tear down, take away, send away to exalt ourselves. But He *to give*. That you might receive. He doesn't need us. We need Him. And to know that is life. To come to Him with an empty sack is exactly what He wants. Or maybe better to say: to come to Him with nothing but our sins, our weakness, our lowliness, so that He can fill us with His forgiveness, His strength, and His beauty. That is what He wants. And nothing makes

Him happier.

Again, we usually don't think that way. Our world today tells us that growing up and maturing means becoming less and less dependent and more and more independent. Stand on your own two feet. Be less needy and more self-sufficient.

We should not be surprised that, once again, the world's thinking is exactly the opposite and the reverse of God's. For growing in faith means becoming less and less independent and more and more dependent on Him. Growing in the faith means becoming more and more aware of our sinfulness and our need of His forgiveness. And being a child of God means not being self-sufficient, but relying on the all-sufficient merits of Jesus alone.

To those who would be independent, those who would rely on themselves and what they have done, Isaiah speaks tonight, and says this: **the Lord is against you**. Ten times he uses that word in these verses. And, he says to them, you will be brought low on the Last Day, the Day of the Lord. For ***the Lord alone will be exalted in that day***. Everything and everyone else will be brought low. And this too: For those brought low, it will be a day of terror.

But that is not what God wants. For anyone. He warns so that it will not happen. That we change our thinking and be humbled in repentance. For better to be brought down and humbled now rather than later. Brought down now and humbled now not in judgment, but *to where Jesus is*. For where He is, there is what we need. There is the forgiveness and life we need.

For it is not in our power and strength where Jesus is, it is not in our successes and accomplishments, but in our weakness and failure, in our lowliness. For that is where Jesus came for us. In Bethlehem. In the manger. In Nazareth. With no place to lay His head. And finally to the rock bottom of the cross. He came all the way down into the depths of our sin and death, that we, like Mary, might ***be called blessed***. That we, like Mary, might have ***great things done*** for us. That we who are nothing might be mercied and receive everything.

And so Jesus was lifted up on the cross, so that He might also then be lifted up in His resurrection. And lift us up with Him. To ***exalt those of humble estate***. You and me. That we not be ***sent away empty***, but ***filled with good things***. His things. Divine things. Eternal things.

Now, this is all hidden from our eyes. Lowliness doesn't look grand and humility does feel glorious. We don't look exalted and filled with good things. But Mary's words remind us of the truth and call us to believe not what we see and feel, but what we hear. The Word that came to Mary from the angel Gabriel caused Jesus to be conceived in her womb, and that same Word causes faith to be conceived in us and be strengthened in us.

And by such faith, all the gifts of God are received. And when Jesus finally comes again in glory, the Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church, all that is now hidden will be revealed, and we will finally see what we now believe.

Until that day, we take our place with Mary and marvel at the verbs of God - all that He is doing and has promised to do for us. That in all things we are blessed. When He casts us down, we are blessed. When He lifts us up, we are blessed. When faced with trials and struggles, we are blessed. And when at peace, we are blessed. In all times and in all places, we are blessed because Jesus is the Immanuel, God with us. With us even in the lowest places, that we may be with Him in the highest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.