

14 December 2016
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Magnificent Magnificat Verbs: He remembers”

Text: Isaiah 49:5-16a; Luke 1:46-55

Mary said . . .

*He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.*

Forgetting is a common problem. Sometimes we forget because as we get older our brains don't work as good as they used to. Sometimes we forget because we're busy and what we wanted to remember gets pushed out of our minds.

And maybe you're like me in this too: there are some things you want to forget that you can't. Past sins, failures, mistakes, bad decisions, hurts and pains, that you don't want in your brain any longer, that you wish would never come to mind again, but there they are. And they never seem to go away. Often causing regret, anger, bitterness, despair, and a whole host of other feelings and actions in our lives.

But there are a few people in this world who do not forget - anything. They have something called hyperthymesia. It's kind of a super memory. They can remember almost every day of their lives in enormous detail - what they wore, what they ate, where they were, what they did. No matter how long ago it was. That may seem like a blessing - it sure would make school a lot easier! But I think it more a curse. For as I said, there are many things I want to forget. And so to remember everything? No thanks. Maybe forgetting isn't so bad after all.

But that's us. We whose minds have been effected by sin just like the rest of our bodies. Minds that do not work as they were created to work, as they were meant to be, because sin has infected them. Making us forget what we want to remember and remember what we want to forget. And often at the worst possible times.

But what about God?

Tonight Mary said: *He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.* God had promised to be merciful. He promised Adam and Eve in the Garden. He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised David and Solomon. He repeated that promise to Israel in exile through the prophets. Over and over again, God promised. And He had it

written down for us in His Word. That's what I do when I need to remember something - I write it down. That's more reliable than my memory. And so God had His promises written down.

But not so that *He* would remember. Not to remind Himself. God isn't the one who forgets. We are. God doesn't forget to be merciful. We forget that He is. So He wrote it down to remind us. That we remember who He is and all that He has promised to do for us.

So when Mary says that God is now *helping his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy*, it isn't that He forgot before and suddenly now remembered. *Oops!* It is that now is the time **to act**. Now is the time for Him to fulfill His promises. Now is the time - just the right time - to send His Son to be our Saviour. When God remembers, it means He goes into action. And so the angel Gabriel came and told Mary. The Holy Spirit works through that Word of God to conceive Jesus in the womb of Mary. And Mary goes to her cousin Elizabeth and speaks these words.

God remembered. All is now coming to pass. God is faithful.

Which is good for us to remember. Because it seems, doesn't it, that sometimes, perhaps, *God forgets us?* When troubles are overwhelming us. When our prayers seem to be getting no response and it feels like we're praying to a brick wall. When it seems like others are getting blessed, and we are getting passed over. And we think: *God, what about me? Don't you remember me?*

Old Testament Israel often felt that way. Christians through the ages have felt that way. But God does not forget. Perhaps it is we who are expecting the wrong things or looking for Him in the wrong places. And so if He is not doing what we expect or He is not where we think He should be, we think He has forgotten us . . . when really it is we who have forgotten. Forgotten what He has promised to do and where He has promised to be for us.

So at just such times, it is back to the Word. To where it is written down. To be reminded. To remember. What God has *spoken to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever*. We heard some of those words tonight from the prophet Isaiah. How God had promised to act. *Forming His servant in the womb*, Isaiah said - that's Jesus now in the womb of Mary. And what would He do? Save Israel? No, that was *too small a thing*. He would be *a light for the nations* - for all people. His salvation would reach the ends of the earth. Even to a little classroom in an adult care community in Springfield, Virginia.

And in sending His Son, God has answered the prayers of His people. Their prayers for help, for saving, for forgiveness. How often it had seemed that all was lost. In Egypt, in Babylon, when Jerusalem was surrounded by her enemies. Yet God was faithful and

merciful always. Even when He had to remind His people of their sins by allowing them to be defeated in battle.

Maybe that's why God allows me to remember what I want to forget. For when I remember my past sins, my failures, my mistakes and bad decisions, I am reminded that I cannot rely on myself or what I can do. It doesn't take long to see where that will lead. I must rely on Him and what He has done and will do for me. What He has promised to do for me. And what He has promised to do is forgive. *To remember my sins no more* (Jeremiah 31:34). Which means that He will not act on them. He will not hold them against me. He will not punish me for them, or reject me for them. Because He *remembered* them on His Son. He held them against Him, punished Him, and forsook Him on the cross *in our place*.

And so the words of Isaiah are fulfilled, that *the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted*.

And then knowing who I am, my past, and remembering who my Saviour is and all that He has done for me, makes Mary's words my own. And you too. *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior . . . for he who is mighty has done great things for me*. He helped. He remembered.

And He won't stop. Ever. Even when you're in the grave and the world has long forgotten you, He won't. As Isaiah said: you are *engraved on the palms of His hands*. He baptized you as his child, born from above by water and the Spirit. He fed you with His Body and Blood. So, Isaiah also said: *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you*.

I will not forget you. Or as Mary said: He remembered. His mercy. His promises. To you. For you. *Emmanuel has come and ransomed captive Israel* (LSB #357). And as He came then, and as He comes now, so He will come again, for you, and raise you to life everlasting.

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