

Rorate Coeli (Advent 4) - 12/18/2016

Text: Luke 1:39-56; Is. 45:8a (Introit antiphon)

Note: Finley Monroe Williams and Ellasyn Reece Williams were both baptized during the Divine Service.

Every day is a great day for a baptism. Yesterday, though, as I finished up this sermon, I was marveling at what a great day *today* is for a baptism. The various readings and prayers appointed for today, while not specifically about Holy Baptism, nevertheless direct our thoughts to what the Lord did in our midst just a little while ago, and what He did for us when He baptized us and sealed us as His children with the Holy Spirit and ensured that we, his heirs, will receive our promised inheritance.

First, the antiphon from Isaiah 45, which I spoke at the start and end of the Introit:

"Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness."

Where else does the pouring out of water onto the Lord's creation give righteousness but in the blessed waters of the baptismal font? The little bit of heavenly drizzle that fell onto the heads of Ellasyn and Finley a little while ago poured Christ's righteousness all over them.

Peter tells us about this when he writes, **"Baptism...now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."** (1 Peter 3:21)

Your conscience tells you when you have done right or wrong. Baptism has given you a good conscience – a conscience that is not guilty before God – because in your baptism you have been put into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the sins of the world; in your baptism, you now have been in that death. Jesus was raised to show that sins are paid for, eternal life is given, and *righteousness* is restored to man; in your baptism, you now are in that resurrection.

Paul tells us about this in Romans 6: **"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."**

So by the shower of Holy Baptism, Finley, Ellasyn, and you are put into Christ's death and resurrection; you are righteous and holy and you can count the promise of the resurrection into eternal life on the Last Day to be a promise that is *for you*.

Second, a phrase in our Collect of the Day. The Collect of the Day is the prayer of the day that *collects* the prayers of God's people into one that follows the readings assigned for the day. Here's the phrase: "*Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy...*"

In Holy Baptism, the Lord has lifted away your sins by His grace and mercy. Do you remember the passage from learning the Small Catechism? Luther brings in this marvelous passage from Paul's letter to Titus: "**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**" (Titus 3:4-7)

So even as we pray this prayer, we know that the Lord has already answered it for us. By His power and might He has conquered death and the grave. He has helped us by dying for us. He has poured His Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we would believe that our sins are forgiven and therefore receive the promised eternal life. And He gave all that to you in the Font.

Finally – though I'm sure there's more – our Gospel reading from St. Luke. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth just after Gabriel has come and told her that she will conceive and bear a son, even though she remains a virgin. And though there's much to be said about faith being given through the word even to infants – and that certainly is an important promise for us who baptize infants as Scripture teaches! – and we have John the Baptist leaping in the womb, all that we set aside and instead consider Mary for a moment.

Mary, pregnant outside of wedlock. Maybe sent to visit Elizabeth while her parents figure out what to do. St. Joseph has already faithfully listened to the angel and will keep her as his wife. Mary, to all outward appearances, looks shameful and certainly doesn't appear holy in any way.

But what does Elizabeth tell her, from the Holy Spirit? "**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?**"

What Gabriel had already told her Elizabeth now confirms. Mary is blessed. She bears the Savior of the world in her womb. She will be redeemed from all her sins. Her shame and sorrow will be removed. She takes comfort in this and sings her Magnificat because God, in His mercy, has gifted her with faith in His promises. Though she appears shameful and unholy, her conscience has been set at peace by the Lord.

This is also true for you. Blessed are you who believe. You who have been baptized, you have faith. Ellasyn and Finley are called blessed by the Lord, and by us. The Lord's promises are true for you. You are innocent. You are holy. You are clean, pure, immaculate, complete. The life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand in your place. All His good and perfect works are credited to your account, and God is well-pleased with and delights in you.

But it may not *feel* that way. Like a woman just pregnant, it may not show. But it's true already, whether it feels like it or shows, or not. Finley will be selfish. Ellasyn will throw fits. We all have days where we act or feel like we're not worthy or don't deserve God's love and mercy. That's when we can remember that God's promises cannot be broken. He loves us and has made us His children in our baptism into Christ, the Son of God and child of Mary, our Savior from sin and death. **"His mercy is on those who fear Him, from generation to generation."** Thanks be to God for that promise. Cling to it always.

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