

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Perhaps you recall a word from last week or hearing a word from last week, though it was a Greek word: *Theotokos*. The word means God-bearer, though it is often translated, for the sake of simplicity and impact, Mother of God. Did you cringe at that at all when any of that was said, last week or this week?

It was at the Council of Ephesus in AD431 that this title for Mary was decreed. This is a council in our history, dear Lutherans; that is to say that we confess the same faith as the Church when it convened in council in Ephesus (as well as other councils), and so for us, then, Mary is *Theotokos*, the bearer of God.

But, as I said last week, this title says more about her Son than it does about Mary. Mary is the bearer of God, the birth-giver of God. Whom she bore in her womb is God, but He is not simply God, He is man, flesh like yours, bones like your, blood like yours, but conceived and born and lived without sin. Jesus is man and God, and that is why the Council of Ephesus decreed that Mary is to be called *Theotokos*. Jesus is unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably God and man, and the title *Theotokos* confesses this in opposition to teachings condemned at Ephesus, namely that Mary is the mother only of the human nature of Jesus Christ.

So, if we confess that Jesus is God and man, and if you believe what you say when you recite the Creeds, then you do confess as much, and for you Mary is *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. There is no need to cringe or shy away from such a title, because it confesses what you believe regarding her Son, Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man.

In announcing that she would bear God, Gabriel also tells her that, “Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.” (Luke 1:36) So, having conceived in her womb the Savior of the world, Mary packs up and heads to the house of Elizabeth. Upon entering the house, she greets Elizabeth, and John leaps for joy in her womb. Then Elizabeth says,

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Now, most who call themselves Lutheran would like to skip over this passage. You see, not only does Ephesus declare Mary to be the Mother of God, but so does Elizabeth. Make no mistake about it, Elizabeth is using a word that many in her time used in place of God’s name. Even today, there are many who, when reading the Hebrew Old Testament, when they come upon the letters Yod, He, Waw, He, say Adonai instead of reading God’s name, YHWH. In fact, in your English translations of the Old Testament, you’ll see the word “Lord” (or sometimes “God”) in all capital letters—this is a carry-over from this practice; what the Hebrew has there is YHWH. So, Mary walks in the house, greets Elizabeth, John leaps for joy at Mary’s words, and Elizabeth essentially calls Mary the Mother of YHWH.

If that doesn’t cause you to cringe as a Lutheran, then you are more orthodox than you think. Elizabeth simply confessed what the Church of all times and places has confessed regarding Mary and, more importantly, her Son. He whom Mary bears in her womb is YHWH in the flesh. There, growing merely as a clump of cells these first few days or week after being conceived, is the One who made the Universe and holds all things together. He who is ageless is now is now younger than Elizabeth, developing and growing in the womb of a young maiden, taking on flesh and blood like hers, attached to her via umbilical and completely dependent on her for sustenance and life—the Lord of Life requires a young maiden for life! YHWH assumes flesh and blood in order shed that blood and give that flesh over to die as the propitiation for the sins of the world. Jesus is Mary’s Savior, Elizabeth’s Savior, Zechariah’s Savior, John’s Savior...your Savior!

And John is there preparing the way for Jesus. Mary greets her relative, and John proclaims for his mother that *Theotokos* is in her presence, that her Lord, her Savior, her God is in her midst. John points Elizabeth to Mary as the bearer of God, and she replies, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

Why? Listen to what *Theotokos* says following Elizabeth's Spirit-filled words:

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.  
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth 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 on those who fear Him  
From generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with His arm;  
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
And exalted the lowly.  
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 seed forever.

Mary's song, the Magnificat, is a song sung by the Church, now, because what she said of God is true of Him still, to this day:

- "God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5) So it is that the Lord has regarded your lowly state, under the law, under the yoke of the law, weighed down by its accusations and condemnations and removed them from you by bearing them for you in His Son, Jesus Christ, as He died on the cross.
- He has shown strength with His arm by rising again from the grave, sanctifying the graves of His saints, victoriously rising to life over death, and giving you that victory over death. You will rise from your graves just as Jesus rose from His because you are baptized into His death and resurrection. (cf. Romans 6:4-5)
- Jesus scatters the proud, sends the rich away empty, and puts down the mighty in the imaginations of their hearts because in those hearts they proudly imagine that they have no need for Jesus and the redemption He has won for them; for them, the way to God and salvation is in their own works, their own status, their own possessions, their own standing in society. But the lowly He exalts; on the Last Day when Jesus returns, having ascended far above all the heavens (cf. Ephesians 4:10), your resurrected flesh will be exalted like His as He takes you to be where He is (cf. John 14:3), while those who refused Jesus will rise to eternal torment.
- In the meantime, He fills the hungry with good things as those who hunger and thirst for righteousness receive Him in Word and Sacrament for the forgiveness of their sins, life, and salvation.

God in Jesus Christ remembers the promise of mercy that He made to His servant Israel, helping them to newness of life and righteousness, giving it to them as a gift on oath, just as He has promised through Moses and the prophets to Abraham and the fathers. We heard one such promise this evening:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, he Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. (Isaiah 11:1-5)

Those promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who at just the right time was conceived by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and given over to die for your sins. He has promised to return for you, His children, just as He ascended. God is faithful to His promises, as He has demonstrated by the birth, life, death, and resurrection of His Son, as sung by *Theotokos* herself. He will do as He has said, and bring you and the whole Church into the new creation because He has forgiven you for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.