SERMON · MT. CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH, SANTA CRUZ AREA

Blessed Are You: Recognition in a Time of Visitation

Visit of Mary to Elizabeth · May 31, 2026
Readings: 1 Samuel 2:1–10 · Psalm 113 · Romans 12:9–16b · Luke 1:39–57

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1. Opening: What are we doing when we gather?

There is a question underneath every gathering of the church, whether we name it or not.

Why are we here?

Some assume we come for inspiration.
Some assume we come for comfort.
Some assume we come for music, or teaching, or community.

And all of those matter—but none of them go deep enough.

Because something more serious is happening here.

Annie Dillard once wrote about worship in a way that refuses to let us be casual about it. She says:

"Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke?
Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?
The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning."

And she continues with imagery that is almost shocking:

"It is madness to wear straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets.
Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews."

Her point is not fear. Her point is **attention**.

Something is happening here that is not casual, not ornamental, not consumer-driven.

The question is not:

What did I get out of worship?

The deeper question is:

Did I recognize what was already happening here?

That is the lens for today's Gospel.

2. The Visitation: God arrives in hidden form

Mary goes "with haste" into the hill country.

No public moment. No platform. No institution.

Just a young woman carrying a promise she does not yet understand.

She arrives at Elizabeth's door.

And before anything is explained, something happens.

Elizabeth speaks:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

No argument.
No proof.
No delay.

Recognition happens.

Then John leaps in the womb.

Then Mary sings.

The Magnificat rises not from control or certainty, but from encounter.

This is the shape of the Gospel in Luke:

Not explanation first.
Not system first.
Not achievement first.

But **recognition first.**

3. Recognition: the hidden structure of faith

This is not just a story about two women meeting.

It is a revelation of how God works.

Faith is not primarily something we manufacture internally.

Faith is what happens when grace is recognized.

Not produced.
Not controlled.
Not achieved.

Recognized.

Richard Rohr often speaks about awakening to what is already present—moving from anxious ego-control into what he calls a deeper participation in reality itself.

Luke shows that here:

Elizabeth sees what Mary cannot yet fully name.

Mary receives what Elizabeth speaks.

And both are drawn into a reality neither of them created alone.

Faith, in this sense, is not isolation.

It is **response to a spoken promise.**

4. Survival dance vs sacred dance

We learn early how to survive life.

We learn a survival dance:

- manage yourself
- protect yourself
- prove yourself
- hold everything together

- stay spiritually “okay”
- avoid being overwhelmed

Even religion can become part of that survival dance.

But there is another way of being.

A sacred dance.

Not performance.
Not control.
Not self-management.

But participation in what God is already doing.

In the Visitation:

- Mary does not manage the encounter
- Elizabeth does not compete
- John does not perform
- The Spirit moves first

And then there is recognition.

The sacred dance is not something we produce.

It is something we enter when we stop trying to hold everything together alone.

5. Church as recognition, not consumption

This changes how we understand church.

We often think we come here to receive something:

- a good sermon
- uplifting music
- encouragement for the week
- spiritual fuel

And those are not wrong.

But they are not the deepest truth.

We come here to recognize.

To recognize:

- Christ present in Word and sacrament
- grace already at work among us
- God speaking through ordinary people
- a reality we do not generate, but receive

Faith does not survive well in isolation.

We can believe things alone.

But recognition requires community.

Because sometimes you need someone else to say:

“Blessed are you.”

When you cannot see it yourself.

6. A church in transition: Visitation as lived reality

This Gospel is not set in stability.

It is set in transition.

Two women.
Two pregnancies.
No certainty about what comes next.
No institutional security.
No public recognition.

And yet this is where the Spirit is most clearly at work.

That matters for us.

Because we are also in a time of transition.

We are a small community.
We are discerning leadership.
We are wondering what comes next.

And it would be easy to interpret that through survival language:

- How do we stay viable?
- What are we losing?
- How do we compete?

But the Visitation asks a different question:

Can we still recognize grace among us?

Because if we can recognize grace, we are not abandoned.

We are already in the middle of God's work.

7. Faith through Word and community

In Lutheran theology, faith is not self-generated.

Faith comes through:

- the spoken Word
- the sacraments
- the gathered community

Faith is created by promise, not by effort.

That is why Elizabeth matters so deeply in this story.

Mary does not come to figure it out alone.

She comes to someone who can speak what she cannot yet see.

And Elizabeth becomes, in that moment, a bearer of the Word.

This is what the church is:

A place where the Word of God is spoken into human lives so that faith can be awakened again and again.

Not because we are strong.

But because we are addressed.

8. Smallness is not failure—it is the shape of visitation

We live in a culture that values:

- scale
- production
- visibility
- performance

And the church can feel pressure to match that.

But the Visitation tells a different story.

God's decisive work happens:

- in hiddenness
- in vulnerability
- in small encounter
- in ordinary households
- in bodies that the world would overlook

There is no stage here.

Only recognition.

So the question is not:

Is the church large or small?

The question is:

Can grace be recognized here?

9. Dillard: waking up to reality

Annie Dillard helps us see that worship is not casual.

Something real is happening here.

She warns that we often treat worship as if it were safe, ordinary, predictable.

But she is trying to wake us up:

This is not a performance.
This is not a hobby.
This is not background meaning-making.

This is encounter with reality.

But Luke goes further than Dillard.

Because Luke does not leave us in awe or fear.

Luke shows us what happens when people actually recognize what is happening:

They bless one another.
They rejoice.
They sing.

10. The center: recognition changes everything

When Elizabeth speaks:

Mary is recognized.

When Mary is recognized:

she sings.

When she sings:

the world is reinterpreted.

The Magnificat is what recognition sounds like when it becomes voice.

And that is what the church is meant to be:

A community where recognition becomes speech, and speech becomes song.

11. Closing: what we do now

So what do we do in a time like this?

We do not panic into survival dance.

We do not try to manufacture sacred intensity.

We do not try to become something we are not.

We do something much simpler—and much deeper:

We show up.

We listen.

We speak blessing.

We recognize grace where it appears.

We trust that God is already at work among us.

Because the deepest truth of the Visitation is this:

God is not waiting for us to get it right.

God is already on the way.

And when we recognize that—when we recognize one another in grace—

the church becomes what it was always meant to be:

A place where Christ is seen, and life begins again.

Amen.

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