

Luke 1:39-45 – Advent 3C
December 19, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, I finished up the semester this past Wednesday. One of my friends did a presentation on Psalm 51. As he was talking about David being conceived in his mother's womb, he noted that the word for womb in Hebrew, *Rahem*, is a homonym for mercy or compassion.

Womb and mercy. Womb and compassion.

In Hebrew, the word sounds the same. Isn't that interesting?

It totally caught my attention, because I had been thinking about the Gospel reading we have for today where womb is mentioned 3 times – Elizabeth talks about John leaping for joy in her womb twice as she acknowledges the fruit of Mary's womb.

Womb and mercy. Womb and compassion. I guess when we consider that compassion is to have passion with, that makes really good sense.

Mary is carrying the fruit of mercy, the fruit of compassion, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So John, in Elizabeth's womb, leaps for joy acknowledging Jesus in Mary's womb. John, the one who will lead the way for the Lord by forgiving people their sins, rejoices in the womb. He rejoices in God's mercy. He rejoices in God's compassion.

And in the Magnificat, Mary rejoices in God's mercy and compassion. In verse 50, she says, "His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."

Womb and mercy. Womb and compassion. Generation to generation. Womb to womb.

God has not given up on God's people. God has compassion on all people and God keeps God's promises. God keeps the promise he made to Abraham and all of his descendants to always be our ally. To always be with us and on our side. Compassion – passion with.

Womb and mercy. Womb and compassion.

And so both Mary and Elizabeth are blessed with children. Mary who is too young to have a child and Elizabeth who is too old. Both are gifted with children to make it clear that God's mercy and compassion is coming in to the world. The people's prayer is being answered. This is not man made, but God made.

And so Elizabeth, John, and Mary all rejoice. They literally jump for joy! And like Mary, everyone is blessed simply because they trust what God has said. God's mercy and compassion is being birthed into world. Hooray!

And yet, we know the rest of the story, right? God's mercy and compassion that is birthed into the world will be killed on the cross. He will be crucified by those powers of which Mary talks about being made low. In the resurrection, Jesus makes it clear that the powers of death have no power over God's mercy and compassion.

On the third day, after the crucifixion, Jesus is risen from the dead proclaiming that nothing can destroy God's mercy and compassion. It is eternal. And God's mercy and compassion is proclaimed even more powerfully after the resurrection as Jesus forgives everyone who deserted him and everyone who killed him.

Forgiveness. God's compassion and mercy is born into the world in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And in Greek iconography, the tomb is intentionally written to look like a womb.

Womb. Compassion. Mercy.

On Friday, we will celebrate the birth of God's love coming into the world – God's compassion and mercy personified. As we contemplate this amazing gift being born to us, how might we give that gift to others this Christmas?

The real gift of Christmas is compassion and mercy.

In *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, the Grinch's heart grows three times as big and the hard outer shell of his heart is broken because he receives the mercy and compassion of the Whos and it changes his life forever.

How might we be like the Whos this Christmas? How might we be like God – sharing the gift of mercy and compassion?

Mercy and compassion. That's what Christmas is all about. It's not about presents and parties, it's about restoring relationships. Although – gifts and parties might be a way to restore relationships.

The greatest gift you can give for Christmas is sharing God's mercy and compassion.

Who needs forgiveness? Who needs mercy? Who needs compassion?

Make that your Christmas goal this year and like the Grinch your heart will also grow as the hard outer shell of judgment is broken, like Christ breaking through the tomb – like Jesus being born in a stable, which like the tomb was also a cave.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

Love, God's mercy and compassion, escapes from the dark womb to be realized in the world.

As the days get longer this Tuesday, we remember the coming of God's light into our lives – Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, God's mercy and compassion personified.

Thanks be to God. Amen.