

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

RORATE COELI

Shower, O Heavens

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Gerhard Grabenhofer



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Luke 1:39-56 ESV

Author and Date:

The Holy Spirit caused St. Luke the Evangelist to write this Gospel around 55-60 AD. Our text follows the account of the angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she would be the mother of our Lord.

³⁹ **In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah,⁴⁰ and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.**

- Eager with the news that she would be the mother of the Messiah and to see for herself what Gabriel had said was true (Luke 1:36) and so to strengthen her faith in the promise, Mary went the approximately 100 miles from Nazareth to the Judean hill country. She trusted the Lord for guidance and protection.

⁴¹ **And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,**

- Everything Gabriel had said to Zechariah (Luke 1:13-17) was now fully confirmed. John the Baptizer begins his prophetic work announcing the Messiah's presence in the womb of the Virgin.

⁴² **and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"**

- Mary is blessed because the great promise of the long awaited Messiah, who would be born of a virgin, is fulfilled in her. It was an act of pure grace of the Lord. He is the promised Seed of Abraham in whom and by whose saving life and work all nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

⁴³ **And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?**

- By the work of the Holy Spirit (see verse 41 above) Elizabeth recognized the unborn Baby in Mary's womb as the true God and her Savior. Elizabeth also recognizes her unworthiness, that she was experiencing God's grace and honor.

⁴⁴ **For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.**

- Being filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth knew this was not just any natural movement of the baby in her womb. The baby, St. John the Baptizer, the forerunner of the Messiah, had the Holy Spirit already in the womb (Luke 1:15). Both Elizabeth and the pre-born John recognize Jesus' divinity even though He is still in the womb.

- Babies—even the pre-born—can be the temples of the Holy Spirit. He can work faith in them, and so it is right and proper to baptize babies.

⁴⁵ **And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."**

- Mary was blessed not only in that she is the mother of God, but in Spirit-worked faith she believed the angel's message. Elizabeth praises Mary's faith, a sharp contrast with Zechariah (Luke 1:18-20).

⁴⁶ **And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord,**

- "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34) She is inwardly filled with joy and praise of God. Our hearts, too, should rejoice in God our Savior who did great things for us in the work for our salvation.

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⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

- Mary gives all honor to God, recognizing that there is nothing in her for God to choose her. It is all pure grace.

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

- Mary points to her lowliness and by that to God's grace to her in choosing her. She has received the highest honor any woman could have—the mother of the Savior.

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

- “Great things” include the coming of Gabriel, his message, and Elizabeth's confirmation.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

- God's greatness is in His showing mercy. Those who “fear” Him are those who have faith in Him. Fear calls forth worship and obedience. “Generation to generation” includes peoples from all times and places.
- Verses 46-50 show Mary thanking God for having chosen her to be the mother of the Savior.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

- God breaks into and acts in human history. Although verses 51-53 are in the past tense, they also point forward to the work Jesus would do in conquering His enemies and establishing His kingdom, in which the humble, lowly sinner hungry for righteousness and holiness will receive the forgiveness and holiness he desires. These are spiritual blessings, not earthly/ physical blessings.

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;

- The proud and mighty are the ones proud in themselves, the self-righteous; they oppose Jesus, (Psalm 2) but will not succeed.

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

- The humble and hungry are those crushed by the Law, who recognize they have no holiness and righteousness of their own and yearn for forgiveness and the righteousness the Savior would bring.
- In verses 51-53, Mary praises God for helping the humble sinner but opposing the self-righteous proud.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,

- God has begun His work by sending the Son to be born of a woman. His work is as good as done.

⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

- The Lord is to be praised because He keeps His promises—here the promises He made to the Old Testament patriarchs for a Savior. God's mercy was reaching its triumphant climax in the sending of Jesus.

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.

- How Mary and Elizabeth must have talked about the Lord and His grace and strengthened each other! As each one saw the other, she saw the fulfillment of God's promise spoken to her through the angel.

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