Advent 4 – December 22, 2024
Text: Luke 1:39-56
Theme: My Soul Magnifies the Lord

Our Gospel for today is one of the best texts for explaining that God says that babies are fully human from the moment of their conception, and why we baptize them as soon as possible after their birth. John the Baptist was in utero when Mary came to see her cousin Elizabeth to share the good news that she was pregnant with Jesus. We're told,

"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'"

John leaped in her womb at the presence of Jesus. At the moment Jesus entered the room, John understood the presence of his savior and leaped for joy! Only a senescent human being could do this. So, babies are clearly senescent before birth.

While some in our world think killing babies is their right, God speaks clearly against it. Many times, someone has asked me if something is a sin. I answer the same way. "What does God say?" It is not my place to determine if someone is sinning or not. God has made himself very clear. So, you can list all the reasons to terminate a pregnancy, and some of those reasons might seem good. What if

the mother will likely die if the baby comes to term? Of course, that is a medical opinion and medical opinions are just that: opinions. One of the most difficult things with which doctors have to deal is the notion that they know everything about the human body. The reality is that the human body is one of the most complex organisms on earth and many parts of life mystify even the most advanced physicians.

Then there are the one in a million reasons like pregnancy from rape or incest, or pregnancy of an exceedingly young girl. Again, regardless of how that human being came to be, he is still a human being and must be treated with the same care and respect as God demands for all human beings. There is no doubt that we live in a broken world and sometimes we must deal with very difficult situations in which the right answer is a very hard answer. The disciples themselves were known to say to Jesus, "this is a hard saying." They even asked who in the world could possibly do what Jesus commanded and Jesus reminded them that for human beings, it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. The bottom line is always that the truth is the truth whether it is hard or easy. John the Baptist was a human being before birth and so is every other human baby.

On to Baptism. John the Baptist was able to worship Jesus before his birth. Sometimes people have asked me what happens to their baby who died before they could baptize him. I have heard explanation about the intent of the parent. If the parent intended baptism, it's as good as done. That sounds good, but it's not in the Bible. Some just say we entrust that soul to the hands of a loving God, and that's a good answer because indeed we do entrust all our children, living and dead, to the hands of a loving God. But my favorite answer is right here.

Modern medicine knows that babies hear in utero. What they understand, we have no idea and no way of measuring, but the fact that they hear is not disputed. Now we also know that Zechariah, John's father was a priest of the Lord, so we know that Elizabeth and by association John heard the Word of God regularly. We also know that the Word of God works in and of itself. That is why I tell you to read the Bible. You might understand everything and you might not, but the Word of God never returns in vain but always accomplishes that for which God sent it. The Word, like baptism, creates faith. That is why we say baptism is necessary but not absolutely necessary. Remember the thief on the cross? Jesus told him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." But he was not baptized. So, salvation outside of baptism is possible and the Word can do that.

Babies can be saved before birth if they have heard the Word of God while in their mother's wombs.

While that is so, we still baptize them as soon as possible because baptism is objective salvation. Through the Water and the Word, we have the promise that the Holy Spirit enters that child and creates faith in him. Then we follow baptism with teaching. Jesus said,

"Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit AND teaching them everything I have commanded you." So, our Gospel before us today makes it abundantly clear that John was alive and had faith already in utero. Likewise for all babies, so we baptize them as soon as possible and continue feeding that faith throughout their childhood until they are capable of feeding themselves.

Never underestimate God's power. We don't understand it. We cannot control it. But it is massive and works always for our good. Like Mother Mary, we stand in awe of what he has done for us and say,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant."