**YEAR OF THE FAMILY – SANCTITY OF PRENATAL LIFE**

**English District Lifeline Team**

As our Lord has taught us, we pray every day to God the Father that He lead us not into temptation (Matthew 6:13 [Luke 11:4]). Yet, in this fallen world, temptation happens. When faced with an unplanned pregnancy or the unexpected reality of a disturbing prenatal diagnosis, many women (and their husbands, boyfriends, parents, and others) are tempted to arrange for abortion, thus ending the life of the baby. Jesus, having been tempted Himself, deeply sympathizes with all who are dealing with temptation (Hebrews 4:15).1 And, as we recall every year on the first Sunday in Lent, when He was tempted in the wilderness, Jesus demonstrated that God, being faithful to His promises, has provided *the* way of escape from temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), namely His Very Word (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). How does His Word apply to crisis pregnancy?

Let us consider a few pericopes, or cuttings, from Scripture:

*God’s call to Jeremiah*

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. (Jeremiah 1:4-5, KJV)

Of note here:

1. God is the One who opens the womb (Genesis 29:31, 30:22) and gives conception (Ruth 4:13). Without Him, Jeremiah would not have been there. Without Him, none of us would be here!
2. As in the English, the word “formed” in the Hebrew text from Jeremiah is the very same word used in Genesis 2:7-8, “then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground” … “the man whom He had formed” (ESV).2 The same word is used in the Psalms to describe God’s fashioning of the heart (33:15), His forming the eye (94:9), and even the number of days He has appointed for each of us to live (139:16). Additionally, similar language albeit with different Hebrew wording is used by Job (10:8-12, 31:15) and David (Psalm 139:13-16).3 Thus, God personally forms each of us, as He did Adam at creation and everyone since.
3. “Knew” connotes a very intimate knowledge, think for example, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived…” (Genesis 4:1, ESV).4 “Before” actually goes back to before the foundation of the world and applies to all of us (Ephesians 1:4). Thus, God intimately knew each of us, and each person who ever was and ever will be, even before creation! He has made each individual human being in His image and sent His Son to die for him/her (Genesis 1:27; 1 John 2:2).5
4. The word for “womb” in the Hebrew text is very closely connected to the word for “have compassion.”6 The prenatal baby is one for whom God has compassion and desires to bring safely to His salvation in the waters of baptism (Micah 7:19; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:4; Titus 3:5-8; 1 Peter 3:21). God has created the womb as a place of tender, loving care, in which He forms and shelters the very young infant and there provides for all s/he needs to support his/her body and life (SC Creed, First Article).
5. God sanctified, or set apart, Jeremiah before he emerged from his mother’s womb. God similarly called Isaiah (Isaiah 49:1,5), John the Baptizer (Luke 1:15), and Paul (Galatians 1:15).7 Indeed, God has a purpose for each of us as He forms us in our mothers’ wombs! (Isaiah 43:1,7, 44:2)

*Mary visits Elizabeth following the Annunciation*

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 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! And why is this granted that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:39-45, ESV)

Of note here:

1. Our Lord sanctified the womb by His presence there.
2. This text immediately follows the Annunciation of our Lord (which we celebrate each year on March 25), at which time He took on the single-cell human form that is common to us all at the moment of our conception. Although we celebrate the Visitation later,8 the text indicates that, following the visit of the angel Gabriel, Mary arose and went with haste to visit Elizabeth.9 The journey itself may have taken as few as four days.10 Thus, although Scripture does not elaborate, and one cannot bind consciences on this, it is possible that when the visitation took place, our Lord had not yet implanted in His mother’s womb and indeed was in the stage in which He literally was in the form of a ball of cells. Either way, our Lord was in His first trimester when the visitation took place. Put another way, the Almighty God, Creator of the Universe (John 1:3), the Savior of all men (Luke 2:11), was at the time anywhere from 0.004 inches in length to the size of a pea!
3. John the Baptizer was likely early in his third trimester at the time of the Visitation. This baby in the womb, having received the Holy Spirit and recognizing that he was in the presence of his (very tiny first-trimester) Savior, leaped in exultation! Even today, babies in the womb are given faith through hearing the Word of God when brought by their mothers to Church (Romans 10:17).
4. We are not told exactly what Mary said to Elizabeth, though the text in Luke simply says that she greeted her, possibly with a greeting of peace.11 We have no indication that Mary as yet had told Elizabeth of the visit of the angel. Elizabeth received the Holy Spirit from the Father and the very tiny first-trimester Son (John 14:26) and from this knew that she was in the presence of her Lord, and furthermore, of all that had happened to Mary and the great faith gifted by God to her.
5. The Greek word for “baby in the womb” (ex. Luke 1:41, 44) is the exact same word as that for a baby who has emerged from the womb (ex. Luke 2:12, 16).12

*What does this mean?*

The woman in a crisis pregnancy who is contemplating abortion should know that her baby’s life is precious to God and that He has intimately known him/her since before creation! Her baby is created in God’s image and His Son has died for him/her. Her child is a heritage from the Lord, namely a gift by His grace, with which He has richly blessed her (Psalm 127:3-5). He has set aside her baby for His purpose, even if s/he carries a devastating prenatal diagnosis (ex. Mark 7:31-37; John 9:1-38; Acts 3:2, 14:8).13 The killing of babies, by “morning-after” pill, chemical or surgical abortion, no matter the underlying circumstance, is grievously sinful, just as is the murder of anyone outside the womb (Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). It is important also to remember that for those who have committed the sin of abortion or aided and abetted it, with repentance, there is forgiveness at the foot of the Cross (1 John 1:8-9).

*How can you help?*

First and foremost, take the time and *listen*. Let the mother tell her story, express her anxieties and fears. Let her know that you care and are sympathetic, literally taking her burden as your own. Point her to God’s Word, that He has gifted to us as the ultimate way of escape from temptation (in the end, the sanctity of life witness is a powerful witness to Christ!). Remind her of the availability of the pastor for counseling and individual confession and absolution. Rejoice over God’s gift to her. As you are able, offer to help her. Additionally, guide her to the life-affirming pregnancy care center nearest to her for assistance in meeting her and her baby’s physical needs (for links to lists of these centers in the United States and Canada, see <https://englishdistrict.org/resources/life-affirming-pregnancy-care-centers>, accessed 18 February, AD 2023). And by all means, support these centers with your prayers and your gifts. Finally (and most importantly), pray with her and for her. If you are at a loss for words, you may use this prayer which our Synod has provided:

God of all grace, out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy You have given us life and commanded us not to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body. Teach us to care for this unborn child whom You have created in Your image. Grant Your grace to <*name of mother*> that, by Your Word and Spirit, she may live according to Your will and have the courage to nurture and cherish her child. Surround her with those who will rejoice in this child, and provide for her needs of body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.14

We are thankful that you have taken the time to read this and pray God’s richest blessings on you as you proclaim the sanctity of life in your congregation and community.

End notes

1. The Greek verb *sumpatheo* (to sympathize) is a combination of the words *sun* and *pascho*, literally meaning, “suffer with.”
2. The verb *yatzar* is also used in the Old Testament to describe the work of a potter, see for example Isaiah 29:16, 45:9-12, 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6.
3. The predominant verb here is *asah*, namely “make,” and is also used extensively in Genesis 1 and 2 to denote God’s work in creation. Interestingly also, in Psalm 139:13, the verb that the ESV denotes as “formed” (*qanah*) is the same word used by Eve regarding her firstborn, “I have *gotten* a man with the help of the Lord,” from which came the name “Cain.”
4. The word in the Hebrew is *yada*.
5. Being created in the image of God is defined as having been created with wisdom and righteousness so that man could apprehend and reflect God (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II, paragraph 18). This was lost in the Fall, but human dignity remained in the promise of Christ-crucified (Genesis 3:15; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Revelation 13:8) and the restoration of His image (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10).
6. The word for “womb” is *rechem*, and the word for “have compassion” is *racham*. Same letters, different vowel pointing.
7. The Greek text in Galatians literally reads, “having set apart me from (the) womb of the mother of me.”
8. The celebration of the Visitation occurs on May 31 in the 3-Year Lectionary and on July 2 in the 1-Year Lectionary.
9. The Greek word *spoude* implies speed, diligence, and enthusiasm.
10. See the analysis by Russell E. Saltzman, *Biblical travel: How far to where, and what about the donkey?* at <https://aleteia.org/2017/01/24/biblical-travel-how-far-to-where-and-what-about-the-donkey/> (accessed 18 February, AD 2023).
11. The Greek word is *aspazomai*, or “greet.”
12. The Greek word is *brephos*.
13. Given that he had a speech impediment, it is reasonable to posit that the deaf man in the Mark 7 text was born deaf.
14. LCMS Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Service Book Pastoral Care Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007) p. 193