

*Sermon for the Christian Burial of Marilyn Moore Isenock, ★3.vii.1938 †22.ix.2005
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Chanceford Twp., York
Co., Penna.*

*27.ix.2005, 11.00, Order for Burial of the Dead with Holy Communion
Isaiah 29:6-9; Psalm 46; Revelation 21:2-7; Luke 1:46-55 (Magnificat)*

J. J. !

***Alleluia! Jesus Christ is the firstborn of the dead; to Him
be glory and power forever and ever! Amen. Alleluia!***

The Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke, the First
Chapter!

Glory to You, O Lord!:

*And Mary said:
"My soul magnifies the LORD,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has looked with favor on the
lowliness of His servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will
call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things
for me,
and holy is His Name.
His mercy is for those who fear Him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the
thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from
their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped His servant Israel,
in remembrance of His mercy,
according to the promise He made to our
ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

The Gospel of the Lord!

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ!

[Other Readings & Comments; Choir Anthem]

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our crucified and risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠Amen.

“My soul magnifies the LORD . . . ”

The likelihood that a First Century Palestinian Jewish teenage girl who found herself in a family way too early would be remembered, honored, venerated, prayed to as one closest to God’s own ear and even acclaimed the ‘Queen of Heaven’ and ‘Mother of God’ Incarnate would have been judged at about zero, had you or I asked just about anyone in her home town of Nazareth. But, Mary was not speaking to just anyone when she spoke about herself and about what God was doing in her and through her in the child she

carried, the love of God made flesh to Whom she would give birth, Whom she would raise, Whom she would love as her very own Son, Whom she would see suffer and die one terrible day, Whom she would then encounter as the Risen One in Whom all of her pain and loss, her doubt and fear and her very self would be gathered up and restored to Heaven and to His own side as the very first of Christians, as the first member of the Church Triumphant. She was speaking to her cousin, Elizabeth, in whom God was working another miracle of faith. Mary was speaking to one who could already see how this girl-child's poor, frail life would indeed magnify God's majesty and love in this world, like a magnifying glass for those whose vision has grown dim, like a prism through which all the colors of God's light and truth can be seen. How likely were such words to describe the daughter of Joachim and Anna,

pious child of a pious house though she might be? Not likely at all, anyone could have told you.

But a family larger than Mary's own family has remembered how God's light was magnified in her soul, and the Church remembers her to this very day. After her we name churches, hospitals and our children, especially our daughters. Christians have invented hundreds of ways to do that, in every language and culture. We use both derivations of the name as well as titles or attributes of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Remember that the next time you meet not only a 'Mary' but also a girl or woman named 'Miriam,' 'Marian,' 'Catherine,' 'Purity,' 'Virginia,' 'Victoria,' 'Rose,' 'Rosa,' 'Madonna,' 'LaDonna,' 'Meryl,' 'Mercy,' 'Mercedes,' 'Stella,' 'Mae,' 'Refugia,' 'Regina,' 'Guadalupe,' 'Dolores,' or, of course, someone named 'Marilyn.'

How very fitting that name is for her, and how aptly does Blessed Mary's hymn of praise parallel Marilyn's own life. Faith, the faith of her Baptism into Christ Jesus and the confession of that faith was what Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed in musical terms as 'the great contrapuntal,' that deep base line in the Lutheran chorale that seems to bear up the rest of the harmony, the soprano descants and even the melody itself. That base line reaches very low indeed, as low as it needs to in our lives because it is limited only by the depth of God's love.

In Marilyn's life, God's base line had to reach to the depths of her father's sudden death, of a terrifying illness and its painful treatment in her young life, and deeper still to abandonment by the one to whom she had pledged her faithfulness in the very midst of that ordeal. And that base line of God's love rose to lift

Marilyn to rebuild her life, to overcome all fear of betrayal and to hope for joy in new life together when she had met the true man of her heart, Jim, giving her the strength to walk with him through his own dark night to a new day which included his children, who became and are her children. Marilyn knew where to rest her fearful heart when her old illness returned in a new mutation, in the few years before I became her pastor, and she recognized it for what it was when it returned in a more fiendish form to complete the destruction of her body, holding serenely, habitually and in the most disciplined way to the steadfast love of Christ that would not let her go.

Marilyn also knew great joy, joy in her life with Jim, joy in her farm with its highly developed animal personalities, right down to the last hen, its trees and fields and gardens. She created joy for herself and for

others through her flawless hospitality, so that she reminds me of the ancient Irish Saint, Brigid, whose parting prayer left to the sisters of her convent reads like a menu and a guest list of all those she would like to invite to her table, the good people from all round about but also those Angels and Saints Brigid called 'the People of Heaven,' and, of course, the King of Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, for whom she wished she could brew 'a whole lake of ale.' Marilyn didn't push the ale much at her gatherings, but I hope the People of Heaven and the One who was her favorite guest too let her throw as many choir parties as she wants now.

Her joy was in her Church, Christ's Church, and in that Church here, in this place, in this Congregation of Jesus Christ. Not that it was the Church that belonged to *her*. Marilyn understood that that would be to put things the wrong way around. *The Church, and this*

Church constituted that community of forgiven sinners to which *Marilyn* belonged, and she belonged to it heart, and soul, hand and voice. Her loyalty to the Church and to the office of the ministry, her creativity in organizing and coming up with fresh ideas, her generosity in bringing her experience of the Lutheran Church from outside this rural Shangri-La of ours and applying it here, and also her steely courage in the face of those forces that would isolate this congregation and mold it to their own smallness was so often astonishing. Marilyn believed in and belonged to the Great Church, the Church of the Apostles and Martyrs and of the great historic confession of the Church's faith, and *this* Church is the greater for it today.

Her joy was in song, in praise of her God. One of the last parties she attended, perhaps it was indeed her

final party here, was our choir picnic. Not feeling all that well on a Sunday afternoon on which she might have rested, but there she was, where she so loved to be, with some of her dearest friends who shared her joy in that gift God has given only a few of His creatures.

Marilyn's soul, her life, magnified the LORD in the way she inspired others to works of caring. She was not the sort of person to encourage idleness. She put the words of faith into the practice of compassion and cheerful service, and her spirit was contagious.

She magnified the LORD in all these ways. How do I know this? Well, I know most of her story, the little I have told, the same way you do, by knowing Marilyn, by working with her, if only for a few years. But the rest I know because she *wanted* me to know, because she made *sure* I knew, because she *told* me. Just the other day, some hours after Jim called me to say that

Marilyn's struggle was over, I felt very much like the Disciples must have done some weeks and months after Jesus' death, after His resurrection and ascension. 'Now I get it,' I thought. During those last months in which Marilyn was homebound, except for trips to the clinic, I thought / was making appointments with her and Jim to drop by every other week or so, to visit and to share Holy Communion with them both. But the Holy Spirit was making the appointments with Marilyn. Today we can all be glad that we kept as many of those appointments as we did. ✠Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Our Lord. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !

