

Fourth Sunday of Advent C - The Winter Visitation of Elizabeth, the Magnificat December 19, 2021.

Our Advent season draws to a close with a liturgy filled with promise and expectation. In this Sunday's Gospel reading (1:39-45), Luke describes the first meeting of John the Baptist with the Lord he is to herald so selflessly in his mother's womb. The first reading from the prophet Micah (5:1-4b) sums up the immense hopes about to be realized with the coming of the New David. The messiah will be born in Bethlehem, the city of David; he will be a mighty leader, gathering God's scattered people and exercising a rule giving expression to God's **'power and majesty'** (Eph. 2:14).

The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews (10:5-10) describes how the Saviour's coming inaugurates a new and final order of things in the plan of God. The passage takes us to the heart of the matter - the eternal designs of God shaping the mission of the eternal Son made man. The Saviour's becoming one of us, and giving himself '—once and for all — 'into the hands of his Father through his Paschal Mystery. By this self-offering, he has become the true worship of the whole of creation. More than that, he has united us to himself in his act of worship — **God's 'will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body'**. But all of this is in the future, as **Luke** describes in the Gospel reading (1:39-45) the **meeting of Mary and Elizabeth**. He **invites us to recognize how much is involved in the drama that is beginning: the coming of the Son of God through Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, and Elizabeth with her child are able to enter into the joy that faith in this advent, brings to the world.**

In the month of May, in the springtime of the year, the Church also keeps a feast known as the **Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary** (May 31, next year) The Gospel reading for the feast day is the same as this Sunday (Luke 1:39-45), the story of pregnant Mary's visit to her elderly relative Elizabeth, who is herself pregnant with John the Baptist. Now, at this time of year when the days are shortest and the nights are longest, we hear that visitation story again on this final Sunday of Advent, in preparation for Christmas, which comes in only a few days. We can call today the winter Feast of the Visitation. What happens? Young Mary, a teenaged girl, has heard the angel's monumental message that she is to be the mother of the Messiah, the other parent to the Son of God. In an exercise of the bravest faith and submission, she agrees. Though this pregnancy may end her engagement to Joseph and she might be put to death because she is pregnant before getting married, she agrees to this remarkable and scandalous motherhood. It seems she has been brought, all in a rush, to a dark stone wall. But her faith finds light leading to a door.

The meeting of these two pregnant women is full of surprises. It is common for babies to move and kick in the mother's womb but jump for joy? When Mary called out upon her arrival, John jumped in the womb of old Elizabeth. How shocking his mother must have been and the Holy Spirit then filled Elizabeth, and she cried out to her visitor, "**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.**" Theirs is a culture that honours the elderly, but here we have the older woman offering honour to the younger one, a teenager mysteriously pregnant. Yes, the world is turning upside down! The old era, which Elizabeth represents, has ended and new era, ushered in by Mary, is about to dawn. Elizabeth is the first to utter this blessedness of Mary, which becomes a favourite Christian devotion down through the centuries. Here the older woman does not bless the younger, but recognizes that the younger woman is already superabundantly blessed. Yet we who know what will follow recognize that this blessing is not all springtime. It will have its winter season. A sword of anguish will pierce the heart of blessed Mary. **She will cradle the baby at Bethlehem, yet years later she will cradle her**

dead son at Golgotha. Suddenly the scene at Elizabeth's house becomes a sacred opera. It moves into music. Mary does not speak; she sings. And what a song she sings! **We call this song the Magnificat, from the first word in the Latin translation. We also call it the Song of Mary.** We pray the Magnificat every day in the Evening Prayer of Divine Office. It is an explosive celebration of the God who saves: the one who looks with favour on a humble servant, who does great things, whose name is holy. The God whose mercy is known by those who reverence him, who shows his arm to be mighty, who scatters the proud and throws down the powerful and throws out the rich, who lifts up the lowly, and leads the hungry to a banquet. The one who keeps his promise to our forbearers in faith, whose name is holy, who does great things! This is the God who sets Mary to singing,

Often some Christians don't get it right about Mary. Many tend to ignore her, except perhaps at Christmas. We Catholics honour her higher than the cherubim, with more than 20 feast days. Also the First Saturday of the month of Devotion, (also called the Act of Reparation to the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary) is a Catholic devotion which, according to Sister Lúcia of Fátima, was requested by the Virgin Mary in an apparition at Pontevedra, Spain, in December 1925. This devotion has been approved by the Roman Catholic Church. The month of May is Month of Mary and October is Rosary Month. We just have three Marian feast days: Our Lady of Immaculate Conception on December 8, Our Lady of Loreto on December 10 and Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. **Mary shares her song with us, asks us to sing the Magnificat. Mary reveals in living colour how all Christians are to await Christ. She was carrying him as a gift to a world in need and we are to do likewise. She invites us to delight with her in the God who turns the world upside down, who saves us through this girl's courage.** Mary always points us to her Son, the one redeemer. Her existence reminds us that we can be as she is too: the faithful disciple, the one who brings Christ to birth, the soul espoused to God. Without such joy, Christianity is ever in danger of becoming less than itself, falling into dullness. All our celebrations are an empty sham if Jesus is not born into our hearts. The gifts we give have no purpose unless God is part of the giving and unless we make Christmas a pattern to be followed in everyday living.

Mary's song invites us to consider not only the what, but also the how. The Magnificat can be read as an invitation to sing along with Mary about our part in that divine action. This is what Jesus 'incarnation tells us. It's what Mary is telling us. That God goes about bringing peace, joy, love, and hope to the world through us, by magnifying God's grace and spirit through us. **"My soul magnifies the Lord," can mean that through us others can see the Lord more clearly. Through me and through you, through the way we choose to live our lives and practice our faith in the world people can catch a sustained glimpse of that peaceful kingdom. They can experience the righteous reign of God's justice and peace. They can share in God's dream of shalom. Brothers and sisters, let offer the perfect Christmas gift of saying to God as Mary did, 'Here I am Lord, I've come to do your will.' Amen!**