

Scripture Study

Fourth Sunday of Advent—Cycle C



Opening prayer

Micah 5:1-4a

(Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19)

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Overview of the Gospel:

- In this Sunday's Gospel (which is also the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Visitation), Mary, having just learned from the angel Gabriel that she is to be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38), sets out to visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth, who is 6 months pregnant with John the Baptist (Luke 1:1-25).
- Mary journeyed to what is now believed to be the village of Ain Karim, in the mountains of southern Judea. It was about a 120-mile journey from Nazareth where Mary lived, down the length of the Jordan Valley, and would have taken about four days.
- Along with Luke 1:28, Elizabeth's exclamation of verses 42 and 43 form the basis for our prayer, "the Hail Mary." It also recalls similar songs of joy and honor found in Judges 5:24 and Judith 13:18, which celebrated the victory of Old Testament women over the enemies or their people. Mary, who gave her humble consent to God's plan (Luke 1:38), was instrumental in winning the victory over the greatest enemy of all—that of sin, death, and the devil (Gen 3:15).
- Whereas the last three weeks Gospel readings have emphasized the importance of John's role as precursor to the Messiah, on this occasion we are able to see from the reactions of all involved (including the unborn John!) just who it is that "is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is of old" and whose "greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth" (Micah 5:1, 3, from the first reading)

Questions:

- From the 2nd Reading, why was it necessary for Christ—the eternal Second Person of the Blessed Trinity—to come among men in human flesh?
- What do we know about Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah (verse 40)? What kind of people were they (Luke 1:5-7)? How were their prayers answered (Luke 1:24-25)? What was their relation to Mary and Jesus (Luke 1:36-37)? Who would their child be (Luke 1:57-66, 80; 3:1-4)?
- What reason (or reasons) did Mary "go in haste" to visit Elizabeth? Who else would "go in haste" (Luke 2:16)? How long would Mary stay with Elizabeth (verse 56)?
- The Church has long referred to Mary as "the Ark of the New Covenant." Why? Compare this reading with 2 Samuel 6, where there are at least four parallels. How many can you find?
- What was the unborn John's reaction to the approach of Mary as she brought Jesus into his presence (verses 41, 44)? What is our reaction? What should it be?
- How have I "set out in haste" this past Advent to share the Good News of Jesus with others? How can I continue to do so this Christmas-time, and beyond?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 64, 148, 448, 495, 523, 717, 2676-2677

Closing prayer

Let us live as temples of God, so that it may be evident to all that God dwells in us. —St. Cyprian

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

Joyful Anticipation of the Messiah

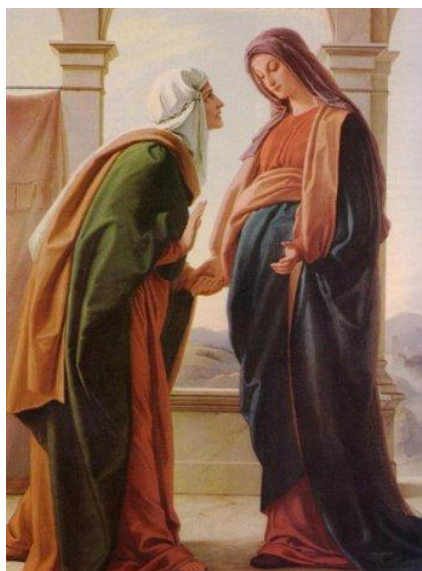
Scripture: Luke 1:39-45

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechari'ah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

Old Testament Reading: Micah 5:2-4

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;

Meditation: Do you recognize the indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus in your life? Blessed



are you if you see and recognize the Lord with the "eyes of faith". The word "blessed" [*makarios* in Greek] literally means "happiness" or "beatitude". It describes a kind of joy which is serene and untouchable, self-contained, and independent from chance and changing circumstances of life. There is a certain paradox for those "blessed" by the Lord. Mary was given the "blessedness" of being the mother of the Son of God. That blessedness also would become a sword which pierced her heart as her Son died upon the cross. Anselm, a great teacher and Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109), spoke these words in a homily: "Without God's Son nothing could exist; without Mary's son, nothing could be redeemed." To be chosen by God is an awesome privilege and responsibility. Mary received both a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. Her joy was not diminished by her sorrow because it was fueled by her faith, hope, and trust in God and his promises. Jesus promised his

disciples that "no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The Lord gives us a supernatural joy which enables us to bear any sorrow or pain and which neither life nor death can take away. Do you know the joy of a life given over to God in faith and trust?

What is the significance of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth before the birth of Jesus? When Elizabeth greeted Mary and recognized the Messiah in Mary's womb they were filled with the Holy Spirit and with a joyful anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promise to give a Savior. What a marvelous wonder for God to fill not only Elizabeth's heart with his Holy Spirit but the child in her womb as well. John the Baptist, even before the birth of the Messiah, pointed to his coming and leapt for joy in the womb of his mother as the Holy Spirit revealed to him the presence of the King to be born. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to enable us to know and experience the indwelling presence of God and the power of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the way in which God reigns within each of us. Do you live in the joy and knowledge of God's indwelling presence with you through his Holy Spirit?

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and give me joy in seeking you more earnestly. Increase my faith in all your promises, my hope in the joy of heaven, and my love for You as my All."

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