

## GOSPEL

*Luke 1:39-45*

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

## HOMILY OF ST JOHN PAUL II

*21 December 1997 (Excerpt, translated from Italian)*

"Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). The first beatitude mentioned in the Gospels is reserved for the Virgin Mary. She is proclaimed blessed because of her attitude of total trust in God and full acceptance of his will, shown by the 'yes' spoken at the time of the Annunciation.

By proclaiming herself "the handmaid of the Lord" (Gospel acclamation; cf. Lk 1:38), Mary expresses the faith of Israel. She is the fulfilment of the long wait for salvation which, starting in the garden of Eden, passes through the Patriarchs and the history of Israel, to reach that "city of Galilee named Nazareth" (Lk 1:26). Because of Abraham's faith, the great work of salvation begins to be revealed; because of Mary's faith, the new times of the Redemption are inaugurated.

In today's Gospel passage we listened to the account of the Mother of God's visit to her elderly relative, Elizabeth. The first meeting between John the Baptist and Jesus takes place through their mothers' greeting. St Luke tells us that Mary "went with haste" (cf. Lk 1:39) to Elizabeth. This anxiety to visit her cousin indicates her wish to be of assistance to her during her pregnancy, but above all her desire to rejoice with her that the time of salvation had arrived. In the presence of Mary and the incarnate Word, John leapt for joy and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:41).

We find reflected in Mary's visitation the hopes and expectations of the humble, God-fearing people who were awaiting the fulfilment of the prophetic promises. The first reading from the Book of the Prophet Micah announces the coming of a new king, after God's heart. A king who will not try to display greatness and power, but who will rise from humble origins like David and, like him, will be wise and faithful to the Lord. "But you, Bethlehem ... who are little ... from you shall come forth ... one who is to be ruler" (5:2). This promised king will care for his people with the strength of God himself and will bring peace and security to the ends of the earth (cf. Mi 5:4). All these ancient promises will be fulfilled in the Child of Bethlehem.

As Christmas approaches, may today's celebration inspire in everyone the enthusiasm to love life, to defend it and to promote it by every legitimate means. This is the best way to celebrate Christmas, by sharing with every person of goodwill the joy of salvation that the incarnate Word brought to the world.

I hope also that the Christmas season and the beginning of the new year will renew a strong missionary fervour in each individual. May this community and the whole Diocese see a rebirth of the zeal experienced by the ancient Christian community of Rome described in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 28:15, 30).

"Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:7). In presenting the mystery of the Incarnation, the Letter to the Hebrews describes the attitude of the divine Word as he enters the world: "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me" (10:5). The true and perfect sacrifice, offered by Jesus to the Father, is that of full adherence to the plan of salvation. The total obedience to the Father that marks Jesus' earthly life from the very first instant will be definitively fulfilled in the mystery of Easter. Thus the paschal dimension is already present at Christmas. This is the beginning of Jesus' Redemption, which will be totally fulfilled by his Death and Resurrection.

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May Mary, model of faith for all believers, help us prepare worthily to welcome the Lord who comes. Together with St Elizabeth we acknowledge the great things that the Lord accomplished in her. "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk 1:42). May Jesus, the blessed fruit of the Virgin Mary's womb, bless your families, the young people, the elderly, the sick and those who are alone. May he, who became a child to save mankind, bring everyone light, hope and joy.

Amen!

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** Do you try to be like Mary in your faith? If so, in what ways? What aspects of Mary's faith or life do you try to emulate?



**Heart:** St John Paul II describes the best way to celebrate Christmas – by sharing the Gospel with others. What matters most to you at Christmas?



**Hands:** In the last few days before Christmas, how will you prepare to properly celebrate Christmas?

## PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.