



# LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Fourth Sunday of Advent  
December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024**

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**Theme: "The babe in my womb leaped for joy."**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

### **Gospel Reading: Luke 1:39-45**

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

### **Gospel Focus**

This gospel whips us backwards in time: last week we had adult John preaching the coming of the adult Jesus, and now we have fetal John recognizing embryonic Christ in joy. When a woman is six months pregnant, it is not unusual for her to feel strong, leap-like movements from the child in her womb. At the moment Mary greeted Elizabeth, something ordinary turned extraordinary. Something about John's "leap" struck her not as random fetal movement but as joyful response to the presence of God. Her life of prayer and discipline of faith allowed her to see the truth that God was present in what could have been a very ordinary moment. When we cultivate our eyes of faith through prayer and gratitude practices, that very world is transformed. We become more able to see the truth that God is dwelling with us in our lives as they are.

### **Gospel Reflection**

There are certain persons in our lives who, when we see them or hear their voices, make our hearts skip a beat with delight. They are the ones who can make us laugh when everything seems gray. They are the ones who have strong arms and soft hearts,

who wrap us in a smothering bear hug that makes everything, seems alright. They are the ones who have weathered the storm and whose assurances that all will be well can be trusted absolutely. Such is the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth in today's gospel. The moment Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, both her own heart and babe in her womb leaped for joy. Mary undoubtedly felt the same.

Oftentimes we imagine Mary, the younger of the two, hastening from Galilee to Judea out of concern and generosity to help her older relative, who is coping with pregnancy at an advance age. Without discounting this aspect of their encounter, we may also envision Elizabeth as the wise figure of an elder mentor, who wraps the bewildered teenage mother-to-be in her strong embrace, offering her wisdom and strength in a difficult time. God's timing is difficult for both women. How much easier it would have been for Elizabeth had her child come when her body was more limber and supple. How much easier it would have been for Mary had her child arrived after her marriage to Joseph.

In a culture in which a woman was esteemed for the male children she bore, Elizabeth likely endured accusatory glances and unkind comments throughout her life as people wondered why God was punishing her with barrenness. Likewise, in Mary's little village, Nazareth, the gossip, about her probably started flying once her condition was known. Elizabeth, who has been utterly faithful to God all her life long (Luke 1:6), despite the suffering she has endured, is the perfect companion for Mary. She helps Mary learn to trust even more deeply the mysterious ways of God, as she endures the many difficulties that once come with saying yes to God.

In like manner, we, too, carry the mysterious power of God's life within us, which enables us to be a source of delight and blessing for others. When we abandon ourselves to the mysterious ways of God, it is not only for ourselves that the new life within is given. We are meant to be companion to one another, a source of mutual joy, wisdom, and strength.

## **Old and New Testament links**

### **First Reading — Micah 5:1-4**

<sup>1</sup> Now you are walled about with a wall; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike upon the cheek the ruler of Israel. <sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup> 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 dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

### **Responsorial Reading — Psalm 80:1-2, 14-15, 17-18**

***R: Lord make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved***

O Shepherd of Israel, hearken,  
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth,  
Rouse your power and come to save us. **(R)**

Once again, O Lord of hosts! look down from heaven, and see;  
take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted.  
The son of man whom you yourself has made strong. **(R)**

May your help be with the man on your right hand,  
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.  
Then we will no more withdraw from you;  
give us new life, and we will call upon your name. **(R)**

## **Second Reading — Hebrews 10:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me; <sup>6</sup> in burnt offerings and sin offerings thou hast taken no pleasure. <sup>7</sup> Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God,' as it is written of me in the roll of the book." <sup>8</sup> When he said above, "Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then he added, "Lo, I have come to do thy will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

<sup>10</sup> And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## **Catechism of The Catholic Church**

**148.** The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that "with God nothing will be impossible" and so giving her assent: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word." (Lk 1:37-38; cf. Gen 18:14) Elizabeth greeted her: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." (Lk 1:45) It is for this faith that all generations have called Mary blessed. (Cf. Lk 1:48)

**523.** *St. John the Baptist* is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. (Cf. Acts 13:24; Mt 3:3) "Prophet of the Most High", John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. (Lk 1:76; cf. 7:26; Mt 11:13) He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". (Jn 1:29; cf. Acts 1:22; Lk 1:41; 16:16; Jn 3:29) Going before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elijah", John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom. (Lk 1:17; cf. Mk 6:17-29)

**2676.** This twofold movement of prayer to Mary has found a privileged expression in the *Ave Maria*:

*Hail Mary [or Rejoice, Mary]:* the greeting of the angel Gabriel opens this prayer. It is God himself who, through his angel as intermediary, greets Mary. Our prayer dares to take up this greeting to Mary with the regard God had for the lowliness of his humble servant and to exult in the joy he finds in her. (Cf. Lk 1:48; Zeph 3:17b)

*Full of grace, the Lord is with thee:* These two phrases of the angel's greeting shed light on one another. Mary is full of grace because the Lord is with her. The grace with which she is filled is the presence of him who is the source of all grace. "Rejoice . . . O Daughter of Jerusalem . . . the Lord your God is in your midst." (Zeph 3:14,17a) Mary, in whom the Lord himself has just made his dwelling, is the daughter of Zion in person, the ark of the covenant, the place where the glory of the Lord dwells. She is "the dwelling of God . . . with men." (Rev 21:3) Full of grace, Mary is wholly given over to him who has come to dwell in her and whom she is about to give to the world.

*Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.* After the angel's greeting, we make Elizabeth's greeting our own. "Filled with the Holy Spirit," Elizabeth is the first in the long succession of generations who have called Mary "blessed." (Lk 1:41, 48) "Blessed is she who believed. . . ." (Lk 1:45) Mary is "blessed among women" because she believed in the fulfillment of the Lord's word. Abraham, because of his faith, became a blessing for all the nations of the earth. (Cf. Gen 12:3) Mary, because of her faith, became the mother of believers, through whom all nations of the earth receive him who is God's own blessing: Jesus, the "fruit of thy womb."

**2677. Holy Mary, Mother of God:** With Elizabeth we marvel, "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk 1:43) Because she gives us Jesus, her son, Mary is Mother of God and our mother; we can entrust all our cares and petitions to her: she prays for us as she prayed for herself: "Let it be to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38) By entrusting ourselves to her prayer, we abandon ourselves to the will of God together with her: "Thy will be done."

*Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death:* By asking Mary to pray for us, we acknowledge ourselves to be poor sinners and we address ourselves to the "Mother of Mercy," the All-Holy One. We give ourselves over to her now, in the Today of our lives. And our trust broadens further, already at the present moment, to surrender "the hour of our death" wholly to her care. May she be there as she was at her son's death on the cross. May she welcome us as our mother at the hour of our passing (Cf. Jn 19:27) to lead us to her son, Jesus, in paradise.

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. How can we, like Mary, cultivate a deeper trust in God and surrender ourselves to His will? What areas of our lives might we need to let go in order to follow her example of discipleship?
2. Elizabeth recognizes something holy in what she could have experienced as ordinary fetal movement. Why is this so? Where have you found God in the everyday experiences of your life?
3. What can we do to sustain or restore the wonder and awe of Jesus' incarnation?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** God of nations, we ask that, in the power of your Holy Spirit, you hear our prayers and overwhelm us with your joyful grace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen