

4th Sunday of Advent, Year C

GOSPEL

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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.'

(Luke 1:39-44)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' conception and birth are described in parallel with John the Baptist's conception and birth. One important difference is that the announcement of John's miraculous conception to elderly parents came to his father, Zechariah, while the announcement of Jesus' conception came to his mother, Mary.
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Joseph is the main protagonist; in the Gospel of Luke, the focus is on Mary's role in cooperating with God's plan for the world.
- The Gospel of Luke strongly focuses on the role that women play in the story of salvation.
- Mary undertakes a journey from Nazareth in Galilee, in the north of Israel, to the hill country of Judah, in the south of Israel. This is an extraordinary journey for a young pregnant woman of her time to undertake alone!

EXPLORING THE WORD

Elizabeth's response to the visit of her young kinswoman is quite remarkable. She had no way of knowing what had happened to Mary, but she receives a sudden intuition from God and is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. Elizabeth and the child she carries both recognise and respond to an in-breaking of God's action in human history. The revelation Elizabeth experiences is even more profound when we realise that she rejoices not only because Mary is carrying the long-awaited saviour, but also because she sees Mary's blessedness as a direct result of her faith. 'Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled'. It is Mary's willing acceptance of the role God chose for her that resulted in her being blessed among women.

- Can you think of a time when you 'knew' something without being told? What was the source of your intuition?
- What promises has God made to you? Do you believe the promises that have been made?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer\

- 'You are most blessed.' Do you have a sense of how 'blessed' you are? Can you recognise the 'blessedness' of others?
- Have you ever had a sense of being filled with the Holy Spirit, or a sense of the closeness of God?
- This week, try to visit someone who needs some attention, especially as Christmas is almost upon us. Make the time to reach out to one another.
- Have you ever felt honoured by a visit from someone special? Is there a favourite relative that you visit on a regular basis? Do you have special memories associated with your mother or grandmother? Share your reflections with others.
- Mary's great song of rejoicing, which comes after today's gospel, makes a suitable prayer this week:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.
For he has looked upon my lowliness;
behold, from now on, all ages will call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

