

*Alleluia, alleluia. Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord;
let it be to me according to your word. Alleluia.*

Luke 1:39-45

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

I come to my place of prayer. I gently become aware of God's presence. When I am ready, I slowly read and re-read the Gospel.

Notice the words used by Luke in describing the encounter between Mary and her cousin Elizabeth: When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting 'the child leapt in her womb...She gave a loud cry'. Such words do not seem appropriate to describe a natural encounter. Luke intends this to be a charismatic setting, to show the overflowing of the Holy Spirit.

Our story has to be understood in a theological light. In the power of God's Spirit, John, still in his mother's womb, encounters Jesus, the One whom he has come to announce. The story of the visitation anticipates his witness, his life and ministry. However, it is Mary who occupies centre stage, and it is towards her that Luke turns our eyes, 'Of all women you are most blessed and blessed is the fruit of your womb'.

Let us be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit this Christmas, that Christ may be truly born anew, in our lives.

Let us be filled with the joy of God's Spirit & with Mary, praise the wonders of God.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year C

22nd December 2024

Fulfillment of the Promises



The fourth & final Sunday of Advent has been called the vigil of Christmas, because it leaves us anticipating the birth of Jesus. In our

Gospel, we have the beautiful story of Mary greeting her cousin Elizabeth. However, our readings today are not meant to be read in a self-satisfied way, knowing that Christ was born in Bethlehem, they are meant to challenge us. In the prophecy of Micah we hear of the remnant returning to the sons of Israel. This is on going. Christ has come, but he must come again. Today, is a time of hope and vigilance. This must be evident in our lives. Psalm 80 picks up on this theme. We joyfully sing: "*God of hosts, bring us back; let your face shine on us and we shall be saved*"

Opening Prayer

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.

Micah 5:2-5a

Thus says the LORD: You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd 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. And he shall be their peace.

The prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, prophesying in Jerusalem between 750 – 686 BC. He was from a little town in Southern Judah and his writings show his deep sensitivity to the social ills of his day, caused largely by political & religious corruption. His message alternates between prophecies of doom & prophecies of hope.

Today we have a prophecy of hope announcing that the Messiah King will come from Bethlehem, an unimportant village, born of a lowly woman. The power of God will show itself in human weakness.

Why does God choose to reveal himself in human weakness?
Do I feel the strength of God in moments of suffering and despair?
How do I treat the lowly and oppressed of our world?

Ps 80(79):2ac, 3b, 15-16. 18-19. R4

*O shepherd of Israel, hear us, enthroned on the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse up your might and come to save us.*

*God of hosts, turn again, we implore; look down from heaven and see.
Visit this vine and protect it, the stock your right hand has planted,
the son you have claimed for yourself.*

*May your hand be on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have
confirmed as your own. And we shall never forsake you again;
give us life that we may call upon your name.*

Hebrews 10:5-10

Brothers and sisters: When Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book."' When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the Law), then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will'. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Book of Hebrews, composed by an unknown author, reflects on the Priesthood of Christ. In today's passage, we read how Christ, born in Bethlehem, has become for us the perfect offering. In becoming flesh; in his life and especially in his death, Jesus surrenders himself totally to the will of his Father – *Father, your will, not mine be done*. In so doing Jesus not only gives us the perfect example of how to live our lives, but his sacrifice gains for us the fullness of life. This peerless sacrifice is set in contrast to the sacrifices of the Old Law.

Prayer over the Offerings

May the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Prayer after Communion

Having received this pledge of eternal redemption, we pray, almighty God, that, as the feast day of our salvation draws ever nearer, so we may press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of the mystery of your Son's Nativity.