

4th Sunday of Advent: Mary's visit to Elizabeth and its significance for our lives

We are getting closer to Christmas and the readings for this Fourth Sunday of Advent focus our attention on God's promise and his faithfulness in accomplishing his plan of salvation. The readings bring us to reflect on how God uses what seems insignificant to carry out his mission in the world.

In the first reading, the prophet Micah foretold that the long-awaited Messiah would come from the small place of Bethlehem-Ephrathah in the line of King David to shepherd the people of Israel and lead them to justice and peace. The prophet Micah foresaw that through the leadership of the Messiah all the ends of the earth would come to know the Lord's greatness and loving care.

The psalmist acknowledges that God shows his power and care for his people and blesses them with new life. The psalmist exhorts us to seek God's presence and his salvation. With him, we raise our voices to God as we say, "Lord, make us turn to you, let us see your face and we shall be saved."

In the gospel, we have the familiar story of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth. Mary traveled in haste through the hill country of Judea to visit her kinswoman and her husband Zechariah. She made this trip immediately following the annunciation by the angel Gabriel. The encounter between these kinswomen was very marvelous as both were pregnant under miraculous circumstances. Mary was expecting her child Jesus while Elizabeth was carrying John the Baptist in her womb. They had much to share in the joy and anxieties of each other. The story tells us that the sound of Mary's greeting moved the infant in Elizabeth's womb to leap for joy. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she recognized Mary's privilege as the mother of God. She praised Mary for trusting in God's promise and plan for her life. Elizabeth hailed her as the most blessed of all women. She felt unworthy to have the mother of God visit her. She exclaimed, "How does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

There are moments in our lives when we ask this same question. Sometimes we feel undeserving of a kind deed that others show us. We express surprise and wonder over the love and kindness done to us.

Mary and Elizabeth exhibited courage and faith and allowed God's will to prevail in their lives. They both teach us to trust God's path, to show mutual love, respect and support to one another as disciples of Christ.

As we reach the final days of our Advent journey toward Christmas, let us pray that we may all be filled with love and the joy of God's incarnation. Let us follow the example of our Mother Mary, and like her, rise in haste to visit those who need our time, presence, care, and support. Merry Christmas to all of you! I hope to see you, your family and all loved ones at our liturgical celebrations.

God bless,

Fr. Dr. Ben