

# Sunday Message

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year C • 22 December 2024 • Psalter Week 4



Every time we pray the Hail Mary we say the words, 'Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb...'

These words come from today's Gospel and recall Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth when both were pregnant. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy, while Elizabeth expresses her own delight at receiving a visit from the mother of 'my Lord.'

Advent is moving swiftly to a climax, and Elizabeth's joy is shared by all who anticipate the coming of Christ. It is no wonder that even the baby in her womb dances.

Christ is very near to us. ■

## SAY

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."

## DO

Visit someone over Christmas that you haven't seen in some time.

## LEARN

The Christian has been given a gift to share with others.

Christ is the peace we long for in our lives.

Like Mary, we are called to be Christ bearers.

## PRAY

Pray for all those who are lonely and have nobody to visit them at this festive time.

## REFLECT

Sharing good news is exciting. You want to let everyone know about the new baby or the new job or the good test results, you can't wait to share your joy with them, so you post a message on WhatsApp or Facebook. It is instant, cheap and handy, the modern, convenient way of doing things.

These days when we have news to share, it is rare that we rush off to tell family or friends face to face. Instead, we text or instant message them. We might pick up the phone and actually speak to people but even that is happening less frequently now. The short text is quicker. It gets the job done. (It's a handy way of breaking bad news too, as people who have been dumped by text know all too well.)

Despite the fact that we can communicate instantly with people thousands of miles away, we seem to be connecting less and less on a personal, human level. A group of friends or family members can be sitting together in a room or walking up the street, but are so engrossed in their smart phones that they may as well not be together at all. Social media has made us

less social. There is something sad about this. As today's Gospel reminds us, real human contact is a gift. The human contact enjoyed between Mary and Elizabeth was a gift for both of them. The way so many of us communicate today may mean that we are not enjoying that gift of human intimacy and togetherness as much as we could or should.

Spending real time with others and visiting others is important because relationships grow when we can share experiences and emotions in the present moment, when we can soak in the other person's scent, when we can feel the warmth of a physical handshake or hug or embrace. Would the baby in Elizabeth's womb have leapt with joy had Mary and Elizabeth been instant messaging? Often it is only when we are physically close to the other that we can appreciate what he or she is really feeling and thinking. It is only when we look into the other person's eyes that we can truly be with him or her.

Christmas is the time of year when people do a lot of socialising and visiting of relatives and friends. For some this can feel

like a duty or an imposition, too much of an effort. It's easier just to stay at home with our loved ones. Mary could have chosen to stay at home and to not visit Elizabeth. After all, she was pregnant herself. But instead she rushed to share with Elizabeth the good news they had both received. Mary knew the importance of the personal touch, the face to face encounter.

The season of Advent reminds us of God's personal touch, that God has visited us in human form as one like us. God entered fully into our humanity in order to show us how to be fully human. God visited us and remains with us, through thick and thin. That is the wonderful good news that this season heralds.

As Christians, each of us is a bearer of this good news. Christmas is an opportunity to share the joy that our faith brings us. Very often joy is contagious. If we share our joy with others, if we follow the example of Mary in today's Gospel, then they may catch it and it will spread, so that there is more joy in the world. Perhaps the greatest present we can give anyone this Christmas is to be truly present to them. ■



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

*Drop down dew from above, you heavens,  
and let the clouds rain down the Just One;  
let the earth be opened and bring forth a Saviour.*

**COLLECT**

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,  
God, for ever and ever.

*Amen.*

**FIRST READING** Micah 5:2-5a

A reading from the Prophet Micah.

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 word of the Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** Psalm 80(79):2ac. 3b. 15-16. 18-19. R. 4

*R: Bring us back, O God;  
let your face shine forth, and we shall be saved.*

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

**SECOND READING** Hebrews 10:5-10

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.

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 word of the Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

**ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL** Luke 1:38

*R: Alleluia, alleluia.*

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

*R: Alleluia.*

**GOSPEL** Luke 1:39-45

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

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.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

**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.  
Through Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*

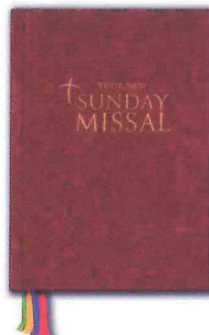
**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

*Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a son;  
and his name will be called Emmanuel.*

**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.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

*Amen.*



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