

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL

www.orlaghinthecity.ie



FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

22nd December 2024

Luke 1:39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

This is the story of two pregnant women and, therefore, an opportunity to enter into the symbolism of that experience, especially for those who have gone through it, seeing it as a symbol of how waiting can be a creative time, one when we express our love and one also when we can unmask all the self-centredness that is latent within us and blocks our ability to give ourselves wholeheartedly to others. Of course, it could also be a meditation on the sacredness of pregnancy itself.

Mary should be the main focus of our attention, at this moment of her life a symbol of the person of faith, and indeed of the church. Particularly significant is the expression "blessed" that is attributed to her by Elizabeth; we must give the word its full biblical meaning, indicating that a person has a great gift from God and also that he or she has brought blessings to others. Mary's blessedness in this passage is simply that she has faith, no great achievements or visible signs of God's favour – just faith.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels, Year C

Along with John the Baptist, Mary, the mother of Jesus is the other key figure in Advent. As John urged us to repentance so Mary is put before us in Luke's gospel as the woman of faith, the one whose trusting 'yes' to God opened up the way for the wonderful mystery of the incarnation. In this text, Mary and Elizabeth, the two pregnant women both witness to the power and fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit as they recognise the amazing way God is at work in them, and respond with joy. Throughout the gospel of Luke the role of the Spirit will be emphasised and the reader will be constantly reminded that being faithful to God's will requires an openness to the promptings of the Spirit.

Reflection

Today Bethlehem is not a particularly impressive town. The only lasting sign of an earthly king is the distant tomb of King Herod the Great which rises on the horizon as an impressive monument to human vanity and oppressive rule. The irony is that even as Herod was having it built a child was born in a cave only a few miles away who, without the use of military force or the power of wealth, would show the world a different way. He would live his life in love as a simple offering to God. In the person of Mary and her simple 'yes' to God we are reminded that there is only one present that matters this Christmas and that is the gift of ourselves.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year C

Many of us have a particular devotion to Mary. Advent is the ideal time to reflect on what Mary can teach us about being a disciple and "God-bearer". God asks each of us to be bearers of his love and his Word. Our challenge is to create a space for God in all of our human experience, in our joy and our brokenness. Let us follow in the footsteps of the first evangelist, Mary. Let us also listen to the experiences of the women in our Church and society who, through their strength and enthusiasm, continue the task of carrying Christ in and to the world.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT—Go Deeper

Mary's visit to Elizabeth allows Luke the evangelist to connect John and Jesus even before they are born. The two women are to be mothers, They have been called to collaborate in God's plan. No men are mentioned. The two women hold the stage.

Mary becomes the central figure. Everything revolves around her and her Son. Her person shines with features more authentic than many others that have been added to her in later years, due to the advocacy and the conferring of titles far removed from the milieu of the Gospels.

Mary, the mother of my Lord, Elizabeth proclaims with loud cries, filled with the Holy Spirit. The same confession is true for followers of Jesus. Mary is, above all, the Mother of our Lord. This is the point of departure for her greatness. The early Christians never separate Mary from Jesus. They are inseparable. "Blessed by God among all women", she gives us Jesus: blessed is the fruit of her womb.

Mary is the one who believed. Elizabeth declares her blessed because she believed. Mary is great, not just for her biological motherhood, but for having heard with faith the call of God to be the Mother of the Saviour. She knew how to listen to God. She kept his word in her heart; she has pondered it; faithful to her calling, she has put it into practice. Mary is a woman of faith.

Mary the evangeliser, offers everyone God's salvation that she has received in her own Son. This is the greatness of her mission and service. According to the story, Mary evangelises not only with her words and gestures, but also because wherever she goes, she takes with her the person of Jesus and his Spirit. It is, in essence, the act of an evangeliser.

Mary is the bearer of joy. The greetings of Mary spreads the joy that comes from her Son Jesus. She has been the first to hear God's invitation: "Rejoice .. the Lord is with you". Now, moved by an attitude of service and help to those who need it, Mary radiates the Good News of Jesus Christ, whom she always bears with her. She is the best model of a joyful evangelism for the church.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year C

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The greeting of Elizabeth to Mary "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" is a joyful welcome of the child to come. Bringing new life into the world through pregnancy and birth is one of the most awesome human experiences. How have you experienced this for yourself or in someone close to you?
2. The image of the pregnant Mary going a distance to visit her cousin is a symbol of her willingness to look beyond her own needs to the needs of another. When have you witnessed that kind of generosity in others, or have been able to act in this way yourself?
3. Mary is praised for her faith, because she believed the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled. In what ways have you experienced blessings from your faith and trust in God's promises? What are God's promises that mean the most to you?

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

Thought for the Day

Even in its resolutely secular form, the Christmas celebration has positive sides to it. People do try very hard to get together with close family and friends. It might help to reflect *in advance* on this seasonal intensity of encounter. What do I hope for? What do I bring? How can I/we be so the we are not simply in the same physical space but truly meet each other and are the better for it? There should be some leap of joy, so that at the end of the festivities, we are glad we made the effort.

Prayer

God of all loving, bless all our encounters this Christmas. Help us to be both kind and joyful, so that all whom we meet will be the better for it. Inspire us to know when a word of witness will lift the celebration and enable family and friends to get to the heart of it all. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Comment

There are explicit connections between this scene and the rest of the gospel. These links are always on a thematic level; no one within the ministry ever seems to 'remember' anything about this story, not even John the Baptist himself. But the theological themes anticipated here are present in the two volumes of Luke-Acts: fulfilment, Holy Spirit, joy and blessed

KIERAN O'MAHONY OSA—www.tarsus.ie