

## From The Pastor

The fourth Sunday of Advent takes us to the brink of Christmas with all the excitement and expectation of the arrival of a new birth. In the same way that Mary is greeted by Elizabeth, children are filled with the energy and joy of all they anticipate and hope for on Christmas day. Adults too, find that even though the years have been many, there is an unspoken truth and joy that conveys the hope and light of this feast.

Energy and excitement should characterize our anticipation for the celebration of the birth of God in the flesh. Even those unprepared for the holidays, or those who haven't bothered to prepare, there is none the less an inexplicable reality that is revealed and perceived. The world is different because of the birth of God in the flesh, and whether one finds them self close to the mystery or not, the mystery of this grace is evident and undeniable.

The story of the Visitation is packed with energy and joy. Prior to, but very much a part of the faith reality going on, there is a lot of human emotion in this story. This is only natural as God, through Mary, was coming to share in all that is human. What is more human and natural than for a family to gather, and ponder the wonder of pregnancy? Set the scene in your mind. Elizabeth is an older woman, without children. Her home must have been a quiet one. Elizabeth would have borne great personal and social pain in not having any children. Into this quiet and lonely scene comes Mary. All the evidence is that Mary is only about fifteen years of age. She is pregnant. It is not clear who traveled with her to this out of the way place. It is not likely she went alone.

Imagine the scene. Elizabeth is shocked, yet overjoyed with her most unusual pregnancy. She excitedly receives the much younger and more energetic Mary, who is also pregnant. As a family scene, there is great joy and wonder going on here. It is not likely they saw each other often, and this coming together was especially charged with emotion.

Adding to this very human and emotionally packed scene is the mystery and wonder of faith that both of these women have experienced. Into this human encounter, grace enters. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit as the mystery of the experience begins to unfold. Seeing Mary confirms for Elizabeth the reality of God's action on her behalf, while it opens her eyes to what God has done in Mary. Faith stirs her heart. Totally accepting of Mary's circumstance, Elizabeth understands and affirms the action of God through the favor of Mary's child.

Notice how kind God is here. Not only is the world receiving its Savior, but God is also totally blessing these women in the process. These women need each other, not only in the practical support of their pregnancies, but also in the action of faith God has bestowed on them. They need each other to believe. They are affirmed and validated by one another. Together they can go forward.

God never calls us alone. We need each other to believe and move forward in our faith. God does not expect us to go it alone. He has come to us to unite us not only to Himself, but also to one another. Elizabeth must have calmed many of Mary's confusing thoughts and fears. 'Blessed are you among women, blessed is the fruit of your womb. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.' In Mary's yes, Elizabeth could more peacefully accept her late in life pregnancy.

Notice that both women are filled with joy. They are both free to rejoice in the action of God on their behalf. They are not afraid to feel and show their emotions to one another in this powerful and faith filled experience. This is a powerful human story that is galvanized with the grace and action of God. Joy is evident in the power of the Holy Spirit all over these pages.

Mary and Elizabeth brought each other joy and spiritual friendship that bore great fruit in faith and new life. This story is a model and an example of what we are called to be for one another as people of faith. Who brings you joy and Good News? Who helps to inspire and confirm your faith? Are you able to rejoice and share with another the power and action of God's grace in your life? To whom do you bring joy and Good News? This is essential to our faith if it is to be alive and 'pregnant' with the expectation of God's blessing.

The feast of Christmas later this week is a very divine action in the midst of our very human activity. God wants to be present in our lives in real and active ways. The experience of Mary and Elizabeth was religious and sacred, but it was also in the midst of their very human lives. God has entered our experience. He has pitched his tent among us. We are invited to welcome God into our daily realities of life and love, of failure and pain, of sin and grace. This is the Incarnation, God who lives within and among us in the Son, now present in the Holy Spirit.

May the feast of Christmas knock your socks off with the joy of God's love. Share that joy and faith with all in your life. Merry Christmas!