

Sunday Message

4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

THE WORD

Year C • 22 December 2024 • Colour: Violet • Psalter Week 4



THE PERSONAL TOUCH

LK 1:39-45

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

Mi 5:1-4

A reading from the prophet Micah

The Lord says this:
You, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
the least of the clans of Judah,
out of you will be born for me
the one who is to rule over Israel;
his origin goes back to the distant past,
to the days of old.
The Lord is therefore going to abandon them
till the time when she who is to give birth gives
birth.
Then the remnant of his brothers will come back
to the sons of Israel.
He will stand and feed his flock
with the power of the Lord,
with the majesty of the name of his God.
They will live secure, for from then on he will
extend his power
to the ends of the land.
He himself will be peace.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Ps 79(80):2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Response:

**God of hosts, bring us back; let your face
shine on us and we shall be saved.**

1. O shepherd of Israel, hear us,
shine forth from your cherubim throne.
O Lord, rouse up your might,
O Lord, come to our help. **(R.)**
2. God of hosts, turn again, we implore,
look down from heaven and see.
Visit this vine and protect it,
the vine your right hand has planted. **(R.)**
3. May your hand be on the man you have
chosen,
the man you have given your strength.
And we shall never forsake you again:
give us life that we may call upon your
name. **(R.)**

SECOND READING

Heb 10:5-10

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

This is what Christ said, on coming into the
world:
You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation,
prepared a body for me.
You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices
for sin;
then I said,
just as I was commanded in the scroll of the
book,

'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'

Notice that he says first: You did not want
what the Law lays down as the things to be
offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations,
the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and
you took no pleasure in them; and then he says:
Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is
abolishing the first sort to replace it with the
second. And this will was for us to be made holy
by the offering of his body made once and for
all by Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!

**I am the handmaid of the Lord:
let what you have said be done to me.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL

Lk 1:39-44

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Luke

Mary set out and went as quickly as she
could to a town in the hill country of Judah.
She went into Zechariah's house and greeted
Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard
Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb
and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.
She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women
you are the most blessed, and blessed is the
fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured
with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the
moment your greeting reached my ears, the
child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is
she who believed that the promise made her by
the Lord would be fulfilled.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH

**I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.**

**I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;**

**through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,**

(all bow during the next three lines)

**and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.**

**I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

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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This is the time of year when we remember
that God sent his only son 'to serve, not to be
served'. He restored love and service to the
centre of our lives in the person of Jesus Christ.

Queen Elizabeth