

St Pius & St Anthony 4th Sunday Advent 2025 (C)

There is something so musical about today's gospel! Perhaps it is the impressing role of sound, song and voice that reverberates throughout the whole reading of the Visitation of the Blessed Mother to her kinswoman Elizabeth! If I find a summary *refrain* in the reading, it is this: "What God has done for us, we are to do for one another!" (Jesus will specifically teach this later on when He says, "Love one another as I have loved you!" John 13:34). So let's look now at the verses of this reading. We basically hear of Mary's response to having just been visited and graced by the Holy Spirit! Afterward, she in turn, flies out to the hills of Judea to visit her kinswoman, Elizabeth. What is happening here? Well, consider that she has just been gently touched by the life-giving Holy Spirit, announced to her by the Angel Gabriel. Imaginatively thinking of the dove's wings of the Holy Spirit and Gabriel often depicted with angelic wings, maybe we can say that Mary has been lightly brushed by the Holy Spirit's feathers bringing about this Divine Conception of Jesus (this scene led me to look up and learn that in fact hovering birds orioles, finches and of course *humming*-birds can actually pollinate flowers by the action of their wings exchanging pollen for nectar – reciprocally sharing life for life. Often, we just think of landing, sedentary bees, on flowers to transfer pollen from flower to flower, but it *sounds* like the light feathering motion of birds can also carry pollen to blooms for life producing flower or fruit. In our case here maybe the dove of the Holy Spirit or the Angel Gabriel?

Well, Mary and Elizabeth have something in common—both have been visited by God to bring about a wondrous conception (Mary's occurs singularly spectacular- Mary virginally conceives Jesus by the Holy Spirit, as is sung to her by the Angel Gabriel (Psalm 91:4 "*shadowed under* his wings you may take refuge"-Luke 1:35 "power of the Most High will *overshadow* you"). Yet Zechariah and Elizabeth have a differently miraculous conception too, since they had been long-sufferingly barren & sterile (*advanced in age-could their biology seven till function at such age? Well yes with God who can heal such infirmity and bring to life new-Yes*) Mary and Elizabeth have much to share. So, Mary suddenly graced with God's child within her (who could most sensitively understand Mary's unique experience but Elizabeth?) and Mary, also from Gabriel, learns about Elizabeth's blessed pregnancy, so Mary herself takes to flight (reading says Mary 'traveled in haste' 1:39). What news to share and celebrate-Mary knows and can't wait! So why does Mary go to Elizabeth? I'd say for two reasons, 1) Mary is full of grace (Lk 1:28), so her natural response is to go to help an aged kinswoman potentially in a difficult situation (how is Elizabeth handling not just a first baby, too, but at an

advanced age-and is Zechariah still away performing his Temple duty work?) So Mary is the perfect handmaid as she herself claimed to Gabriel (Lk 1:35). Mary is a most 'helpful servant', quick to render support to Elizabeth. Yet a 2) second consideration is that Mary is confirmed in her mission by Elizabeth. Mary is not alone (can we see them as a prefiguration of Jesus' later command to evangelize with mission support--sent out two by two (Luke 10:1) So, Mary teams up and quickly goes to Elizabeth.

A big question here is, how does Elizabeth learn/know of Mary's blessed situation? Mary had it straight up announced to her about Elizabeth but how does Elizabeth come to know of Mary's divine conception. And here is where the sound of music enters again into this story, or our refrain of 'What God has given to us, we are to give to one another.'" The scripture tells us that Elizabeth feels it in her body (Luke 1:41, 44) the whispering work, intra-uterine, of the child John within her (John is already working in the womb announcing the Messiah's arrival). The larger question may be "How does John know this is Mary and Jesus at their doorstep? Yes, it is the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41 "*Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit,*" which had already been prophesied by the angel in Luke 1:15 "*the child {John} will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb*"-like mother, like son!), but I suggest that John senses/hears Jesus in the voice of Mary greeting Elizabeth (*What do they say but that every child has an ear already, to immediately recognize its own mother's voice--Jesus makes that formal at the cross when He gives His Mother to everyone--Jn 19:27 'Behold **your** mother'*) So John hears his spiritual mother's voice and recognizes the Christ within it! Then John signals Elizabeth, that a mighty presence has come to their home, by dancing/kicking, or 'leaping' like he had never before. Now, Elizabeth knows in whose awesome presence she is. This mutual recognition confirms/validates for Mary the message of the angel!

Knowing that we are just two days away from Christmas, I want to point out a neat parallel that Mary is establishing a pattern of discipleship response by her going out to Elizabeth as a type of pastoral visiting-evangelization. Christmas eve we are going to hear about the shepherds who similarly get a prophetic message from an angel and what do they do? Luke 2:15-16 says that, "when the angels went away from them (like Gabriel departing from Mary) from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this sign.....***So they went in haste*** (just like Mary's '***haste***' in Luke 1:39) They confirm and validate the angel's message by meeting Mary & Joseph, but most importantly 'Jesus' their Savior (and respond similarly by telling everyone Luke 2:17)

We know there is grace when a person encounters angels, but a message for us today, is what happens afterward. What is the response? The message

carries, or better said, it reverberates. Here is that reference to song and sound (voice) again. A constant hum through this reading is the role of '*lifted voice*'. Why is it that we always associate angels with music? Their medium is music-always visualized with instruments-harps, horns, strings? It is scriptural as Revelation 5:8-9 describes a heavenly assembly around God's throne with harps and they "sang a new hymn"! I find this whole Visitation scene a *complete musical!* It begins at the door, with Mary's voice carrying, as Luke 1:41 & 44 both mention the **sound** of Mary's greeting. And how does Elizabeth respond, but she "cried out in a loud voice" (1:42) **a song of praise**. And what does she say? Three times, "**Blessed** are you among women., **blessed** is fruit of your womb..., & **blessed** are you who believed...'" Which echoes the song of the angels in Isaiah 6:3 in the presence of God singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" (also we sing such at Mass in a moment). But the music continues (band played on) with the next verse, Mary adds her 'Magnificat' "My soul proclaims ... my spirit rejoices" and that has to be sung! *How could she keep from singing?* So, at the threshold today of Christmas, do we wonder why there is so much caroling that goes in this season? This message of blessing and God's presence carries, seen in the full harmony of all of the Christmas figures and how they respond. The angel visits Mary, Mary visit Elizabeth, Angel visits shepherds, shepherds visit Mary/Joseph/Jesus, before going on 'over the hills and everywhere' to visit everyone, announcing the good news of God's coming to earth. For us, since Christmas means God visits us, are we moved to go out, share and give, pass forward to others what we have received? To keep the music playing?