

SILENT REFLECTIONS

On the Feast of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
Tuesday 31 May 2022



Mary and Elizabeth: Meeting the Cousins of Gladness
'I heard the sound of your greeting, and the child in my womb
leapt for joy' (Luke 1.44)

Luke 1.39-47 - Mary Visits Elizabeth

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

And Mary said,
'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

The story of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth is a feast of gladness – gladness at the coming of Christ, not only to Mary at the Annunciation, but also to others. Mary brings her child in the womb to the formerly barren Elizabeth that they both may rejoice in God's mercy and faithfulness. The mystery is linked too with Pentecost, the feast of the Spirit which we celebrate this coming Sunday.

Something to ponder: *Mary's visit to Elizabeth reveals they are the cousins of gladness as they meet one another. Read over a few times the account of their encounter above as we find it right at the beginning of Luke's gospel. You may wish to note mentally, or on a piece of paper, what it is that immediately strikes you about the encounter. Additionally, is there anything that strikes you about either Mary or Elizabeth? Do they demonstrate an attribute in common? What does the encounter show us about the coming of Christ and what this child might be like?*

The Magnificat



The Window in the Taizé Church of the Reconciliation

The well-known Magnificat below is Mary's song of joy. It is what follows immediately when she meets Elizabeth and they share their common joy.

Mary sings:

'My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

This song of joy is probably the most famous text linked with Mary alongside that of the Annunciation narrative. It is the canticle which is said or sung throughout the church at Evening Prayer each day. But, while it is a song of joy, it does not indicate that everything was easy for Mary at the Visitation. She was an unmarried mother. She ran the risk of losing the man to whom she was engaged. Her future therefore was not guaranteed, except for her unshakeable trust in God's promises. Mary is not singing out of self-exaltation, but out of humility. She personifies what lay at the heart of Luke's story and gospel: the emphasis that Jesus is the friend of the poor, the outcast, and the rejected. That is why the Magnificat has become the theme song of the oppressed people of Latin America.

Some things to ponder:

If you take time to read again the familiar words of the Magnificat, can you identify moments or episodes in your life where you have known the sure faithfulness of God? Reflect on one of those moments and thank God for it, remembering that experience in light of Luke 1.50 in particular.

How might what is said in the Magnificat about power and pride (Luke 1:51-53) be helpfully translated and understood in the struggles and pain of today's broken painful world?

Mary's experience was one of being in danger and uncertainty and yet she knew joy through her faith in God. In what ways might joy be different from happiness? Is joy – one of the fruits of the Spirit – alive and active in your daily experience?

Do you have a favourite story or character in Luke's gospel that speaks of being marginalised, outcast, or rejected? What impact does this story or person have on your own understanding of the character of Jesus and how that inspires you as a Christian disciple?

Thoughts and Prayers:

'It is not easy to imagine what a collision of joys was at this blessed meeting: two mothers of two great princes, the one the greatest that was born of woman and the other was his Lord; and these, made mothers by two miracles, met together with joy and mysteriousness...and the Holy Ghost made festival' (*Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – Jeremy Taylor, 1613 -1667*)

Collect for the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth: Almighty God, by whose grace Elizabeth rejoiced with Mary and greeted her as the mother of the Lord: look with favour on your lowly servants that, with Mary, we may magnify your holy name and rejoice to acclaim her Son our Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Mary is held up to the faithful rather for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she heard the word of God and acted on it, and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All this has permanent and universal exemplary value. *Pope Paul VI*

My soul is filled with joy as I sing to God my Saviour: He has looked upon his servant, he has visited his people. *And holy is his name through all generations! Everlasting is his mercy to the people he has chosen, and holy is his name.*

I am lowly as a child, but I know from this day forward that my name will be remembered, all the world will call me blessed. *And holy is his name through all generations...*

I proclaim the power of God! He does marvels for his servants; though he scatters the proud hearted and destroys the might of princes. *And holy is his name through all generations...*

To the hungry he gives food, sends the rich away empty. In his mercy he is mindful of the people he has chosen. *And holy is his name through all generations...*

In his love he now fulfils what he promised to our forebears. I will praise the Lord my Saviour; everlasting is his mercy. *And holy is his name through all generations...*

Magnificat paraphrase: Anonymous

