

Commentary to the Fourth Sunday of Advent (C)



As our world is bursting with excitement these last days before Christmas, the Church presents us with two expectant mothers, bursting with the excitement of their pregnancies. We refer to the scene as the Visitation. Spiritual writers have often said that Mary's first act as the mother of the Savior is to bring his love and kindness to her kinswoman, Elizabeth, the Visitation being an act of charity. There is far more to this meeting than that. After all, Elizabeth was the wife of Zechariah, a Temple priest whose rank was so high that he was chosen that year to be the priest to enter the innermost chamber of the Temple, the Holy of Holies. Certainly there were plenty of women around Elizabeth to help her through her pregnancy and childbirth. This meeting of the two expectant mothers has a deeper significance than just being an example of charity.

It is the Old Testament pointing to the New Testament. It is John within Elizabeth, leaping for joy, pointing to Jesus within Mary. What I would like to do today is focus on each of these mothers. First, consider Elizabeth. She was married into the heart of the Temple tradition. She, in her pregnancy, represents the best of the ancient chosen people of God. The Temple was a sign pointing to God. The ancient Hebrews struggled with the concept of constructing a Temple. Pagans constructed temples and limited their gods to their buildings. The Hebrews knew that God could not be limited to one place. But they wanted a place to honor God. They wanted a place that would hold a special presence of the One whom the universe could not contain. Elizabeth's body was like that ancient Temple. Her body contained the one who would point out the Lord to the world. John the Baptist, within Elizabeth, leapt for joy in the presence of Jesus within Mary. John, the last of the ancient Israelite prophets became the first of the Christian prophets pointing to the one he would later call the Lamb of God. He embodied and brought to a conclusion the Temple Tradition of Israel, the tradition of reminding the people that God is among them.

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