

“A DANCE OF JOY: CELEBRATING THE INCARNATION!”

Lk 1:39-45; Heb 10:5-10; Micah 5:2-5a

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, And she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

This sounds familiar, doesn't it? Many of us will be traveling this week, perhaps even with haste, to visit loved ones. Just like Mary, we'll be heading to see family. She went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. And that's exactly what many of us will be doing this week – traveling to spend time with those we love.

But here's where this story takes a unique turn, unlike our usual Christmas celebrations... And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.

Now, it's not uncommon for babies to kick and move around inside, but leaping for joy? That's definitely out of the ordinary! I'm guessing that any mother here today could tell you that couldn't have felt very comfortable!

But Elizabeth was overjoyed. This wasn't just any ordinary visit from her cousin Mary. This was Mary, the mother of the Lord, visiting. And if the mother of the Lord is present, then so is the Lord Himself – the Lord within her. The Almighty, the creator of everything, the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush, the Lord of David, yet also David's Son – is now a tiny baby boy growing inside Mary. And in that moment, He was also present in the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth. The finite contains the infinite!

It seems John the Baptist was already fulfilling his role as the forerunner of Christ. Before Mary could even explain what had happened to her, John danced for joy. He knew. Even before he could speak, he was crying out—preaching a silent sermon and pointing towards the one greater than himself. And filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth knew it too, and she was filled with joy. And so she exclaims: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

Blessed, not because of who Mary is, but because of who the Lord is, because wherever the Lord is, there is blessing. Just look at the shepherds, the wise men, the blind and the deaf, even those Jesus would speak harshly to – He came to bless them all. And where He is, there is blessing. For us too.

But then Elizabeth asks the all-important question: 'And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' This is the crucial question, because the answer reveals the true meaning of Christmas. It's a meaning that sadly, many miss in their celebrations today.

And the answer for us today is found in our Epistle reading from Hebrews, where the author quotes Psalm 40. He says, 'When Christ came into the world, sacrifices and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sin offerings you took no pleasure.'

These words might sound strange to our ears, even if we're familiar with the Bible and with the Old Testament, with its many commands for sacrifices. How could God say He didn't desire or take pleasure in them? The truth is, He didn't. Sacrifices were necessary, but never God's ideal. Our sin, made them necessary. God never wanted His precious creatures to be slaughtered. That's not why He created them. But we needed them. They were given to us in mercy, by a merciful God. But was God truly happy with these sacrifices and the killing of animals? Not at all.

What God truly wanted is what He desired from the very beginning: for Adam and Eve and their descendants to do His will. To obey Him, to fear, love, and trust Him above all things. Instead, they chose their own desires, saying, 'Thanks for all this, God, but we'll do things our way.' We still do this today, don't we? We often choose our own will over God's, over the guidance of our parents and those in authority (4th Commandment). And the result, just as with Adam and Eve, is separation from God, which is a form of death.

God never desired this separation, because death is the opposite of who He is. He's the source of all life, the one who knit us together in our mother's womb, as the psalmist says. He mercifully established the sacrificial system in the Old Testament to address sin, but those sacrifices were never the true solution. As Hebrews 10:4 states, 'It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.'

But, we heard today that there is one who has come to do the will of God, fulfilling all Scripture. This is the significance of the phrase 'a body you have prepared for me,' which the author added to the Psalm quote. This is the new reality, the reason for John's joyful dance in his mother's womb.

We have a second Adam—a perfect man, who came to do two things:

1. Live the perfect life that the first Adam failed to live. He perfectly kept God's Word, and to,
2. Undo the damage caused by the first Adam. As He took the perfect and sin-free body that the Father prepared for him, and offered it on the cross to receive the death and punishment that we and all the world since Adam and Eve truly deserve.

By taking our place, He remains the God of life, even in death.

So why has the mother of the Lord come to Elizabeth, bringing with her the Lord Himself? It's the same reason that the Lord comes to us: to forgive our sins, to save us from death, and to raise us to new life.

And indeed He has done it. As the author of Hebrews says, He abolishes the first (that is, old system of sacrifices) in order to establish the second (that is His own perfect sacrifice—the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices—His own body). And by that will (Through this offering), we've been made holy – it's a done deal... through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. This gift of life is given to us through the Word, Holy Absolution, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper – these are the places where He comes to us today, just as He came to Elizabeth hidden in Mary's womb. And this brings us Christmas joy, the joy of the Lord's birth, the joy of forgiveness, as Elizabeth concluded, blessed is she who believes that the Lord's promises would be fulfilled.

This blessing isn't just for Mary. It's for you and all who believe. But let's be clear: this forgiveness doesn't mean we can sin and get away with it. Some people think it's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. But that's not Jesus as Savior. That's Jesus as an accomplice, helping us dig our own graves.

Rather, the second Adam came, as Micah said today in our Old Testament reading, to shepherd his flock, to lead us to safety and peace. In simpler terms, he came to:

1. Live the perfect life we couldn't.
2. Undo the damage caused by our sin.

He came to transform our old, sinful lives into new, godly lives. He came so that we can begin to do the will of our Father in heaven, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done." He came so that we can learn to fear, love, and trust Him above all things. His birth signifies our new birth – a new life that has no end.

May our souls also magnify the Lord, along with Mary, Elizabeth, and John. Because in the little town of Bethlehem - too small to be among the clans of Judah, but not too small for God - our ruler, shepherd, and Savior was born.

And so blessed are you. Whether your family gets along perfectly or not, whether you receive the perfect gifts or none at all, whether you feel joyful this Christmas or not – none of that truly defines Christmas.

- Blessed are you who believe.
- Blessed are you who have been baptized,
- whose ears have heard His Word, and
- whose mouths have received His Body and Blood.
- Blessed are you who know your sins are forgiven.
- Blessed are you, because the Lord has come to you.

May you also leap, yes, dance for joy in Him. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.