



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's Gospel is about the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Mary sets out in haste to go to visit her cousin Elizabeth when she finds out from the Archangel Gabriel that Elizabeth is pregnant. There, the baby St. John the Baptist encounters Christ the Savior for the first time. In his joy, he leaps in the womb of Elizabeth. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, then blesses Mary three times: "**Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.... Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled**" (Luke 1:42, 45). I'm going to reflect on this passage and what it may mean for our lives.

First, when Mary finds out about Elizabeth's need, she goes "in haste." God calls us all the time. He might show us the needs of another that we can meet. He might show us how we are to act in a certain situation. He might be whispering to us, inviting us to pray. Do we respond *in haste* to the Lord? Do we act immediately or do we procrastinate? I think of how St. Francis of Assisi was known for stopping in the middle of the street to pray, as soon as he felt God calling him. The more we obey God, the clearer His voice becomes for us. The more swiftly we respond to Him, the more swiftly we receive His grace.

St. John the Baptist is so overjoyed at meeting Christ (from one womb to another), that he literally leaps for joy in his mother's womb! Are we excited about meeting Jesus? As we move toward Christmas, does the prospect of encountering Jesus excite us? Or are we so overwhelmed with the "stuff" of the season – cards, shopping, decorating, parties, wrapping, cold weather, dark days, sickness (COVID!), and everything else! – that we don't get excited, but exhausted! This is a season of peace, yet peace seems to be the last thing we can get! Jesus desires to visit us, but we need to take a step back from the chaos to recognize His love visiting us!

As an aside, the Church's tradition speaks of Mary as the new Ark of the New Covenant (Ark as in "Raider's of the lost..." not "Noah's"). Mary bears the presence of God (in Jesus) as the Ark of the Covenant bore the presence of God. In II Samuel 6, we hear of David bringing the Ark into Jerusalem. David was so excited to have the Ark coming, that he danced and leapt before the Lord. So did John the Baptist.

Finally, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, blesses Mary three-fold. While we may not have the same blessings as Mary, we all can seek to claim the blessing of those who believe "**that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled**" (Luke 1:45). God speaks His words of love to us. He promises to be a good Father to us. Do we trust Him. Do we act as if what He says is true?

Many of you received my Christmas card with "The Visitation" by Bradi Barth (to the right). I invite you spend time with Mary and Elizabeth, John and Jesus meditating on this mystery. Allow the grace of the Visitation to touch your life as we come to an end of the Advent Season and prepare for Christmas.

