

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20, 2015

And along comes Mary. We call today's gospel story, the Visitation. Try to imagine what it was like for Elizabeth. She was well advanced in years, long beyond the time for childbearing. And here she was in her sixth month of pregnancy. Maybe she felt shy about her condition. Zechariah, her husband, was almost a dead loss since he had come back from his temple duties totally dumb. The water jugs Elizabeth had to fill at the well seemed heavier every day. She struggled to get clothes washed on the rocks in the stream. She sometimes had terrible pains in her back because her old frame had difficulty adjusting to that jumpy, prophetic new life within her. And there was no one who knew enough to massage her back from time to time. And along came Mary.

Elizabeth wasn't anybody to speak of – somebody's wife, somebody's cousin. There were angels all over the place delivering messages, but not to her. She wasn't blessed among women, someone else was. It wasn't her child who was the Messiah, it was someone else's.

And unto her – in such gracious haste – came Mary, the ark of God, the tabernacle of the most High, the Christ bearer. And – of all things – saluted her. She was the first, not counting the angels, to greet the full of grace Lady and to stand, and know it, in the presence of the Lord. No wonder then that the child in her own womb leapt for joy.

Mary remained with Elizabeth for a while. Elizabeth was very close to Jesus then, spending her days with Mary in a loving companionship of pots and pans and mending and scrubbing, of table and hearth and garden, of feminine chatter and holy silence, of expectancy and joy. With Mary, the Christ bearer, Elizabeth was formed and transformed.

Can we begin to see now, in her, the kind of character the Holy Spirit means to form in us? Obedience, fidelity; a happy and self-forgetful humility; a quickening sense of gratitude; a sharp ear for the voice of the Holy Spirit within; a discerning eye for the Glory of God as it really is; a peaceful and loving closeness to Christ, nourished by the daily household ways of ordinary living.

What kind of soil are we for such fruits to grow in? Still, as the angel said, with God nothing shall be impossible. The ordinary shines like the extraordinary with the grace of God. Mary believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled. Elizabeth believed too. So can we. So can we.