



**Luke 1:39-44**

**39** Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. **40** She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. **41** Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. **42** She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. **43** Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? **44** For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. **45** Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

**Other readings: Micah 5:1-4 Psalm 79 Hebrews 10:5-10**

On the days before the feast of Christmas, and on this final Sunday, the gospel read at Mass is taken from the first chapter of Matthew's gospel or the first chapter of Luke's. These two gospel-writers give us accounts of the birth of Jesus, and in Luke's case the birth of John the Baptist too.

Luke describes Mary as the 'kinswoman' of Elizabeth (Luke 1:36), and stresses how deeply related the mission of John the Baptist is to the mission of Christ. Today's gospel passage is unique because it presents a meeting between the mothers of the two men, each carrying in their wombs the children soon to be born. The story, known as the 'Visitation', follows the account of the Annunciation to Mary of the coming birth of the Saviour, which ended with Mary's 'Yes' to God and her words, 'let what you have said be done to me'. (Luke 1:38)

Commentators on this gospel story have often stressed the kindness of Mary in going to the assistance of Elizabeth in her time of need. The story also has a deeper significance, for it is the first meeting between the Messiah and the one who will prepare the way for him. The first words of Elizabeth to Mary are familiar as part of the 'Hail, Mary': 'Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!' Luke tells us that the child in the womb of Elizabeth recognised the coming of the Lord, the Messiah. What John will do during his adult life, preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah, is anticipated here in the tender meeting of two pregnant mothers.

As Mary welcomed the coming of the Lord into her body, now John, as yet unborn, welcomes his arrival too. If we continue to read the gospel beyond today's passage we hear the words of Mary's hymn of thanksgiving, the *Magnificat*, prayed daily by the Church at Evening Prayer.

*What can we learn from the behaviour and attitude of Mary and Elizabeth?*

*How will the coming of Christ change me?*

*Pray for all mothers that they may welcome the children of their womb.*

*Pray for a deep spirit of thanksgiving for God's goodness.*