

## Homily for December 21, 2019

## Saturday Advent 3

We are told that when Mary hears of Elizabeth's pregnancy she went with haste to the hill country of Judah. The word "haste" not only means "with speed", but there is also an implication of motive as well. It means to be done eagerly and with earnestness. She desired to go. Why is that? Well of course on one level she wanted to be with her older cousin in her time of need. However in that we remember this encounter whenever we way the Rosary suggests to us there is more going on here than meets the eye.

That something more is better understood when we understand the Old Testament background. We read in Micah that a successor for David who will come from the City of David, Bethlehem. What did David do? He brought together the tribes of Israel, First Hebron in the south and then the tribes from the north came too. He brings them together and then establishes Jerusalem as his capital. Jerusalem and Zion of synonymous and are mention in our first reading four times, indicating the importance of Jerusalem for the Jewish people. Into the capital he brings the Ark of the Covenant so that this unified nation would worship God together. And then by the very clarity and beauty of its worship it would draw all the tribes of the world together. That is the story of David.

Notice how it is happening in the story of the Visitation. David brought the Ark of Covenant into Jerusalem and with reckless abandon he danced before the Ark.

Look at the overtones here. Mary comes into the hill country of Judah. That is exactly where David found the Ark. Here is Mary the true Ark of the Covenant. The ark contained remnants of the Ten Commandments and the Manna from the wilderness wanderings. Mary contained in her womb the word of God and the Bread of Life. How wonderful it is that just as David dances before the Ark, so too in the womb, John the Baptist does his own kind of Davidic dance before the true Ark of the Covenant, Mary.

This is why Elizabeth exclaims "Blessed are you among woman" The Ark was the most revered Holy Object in Israel and here is the Blessed one, more holy still.

This is the great story that God and his faithful people have met and that God has sent his son into the world so that as we learn to share in the will of God we are drawn into this great story of love.

Now let me mention that the word Bethlehem means "House of Bread." With that in mind let me ask where Bethlehem is today and where is the Ark of the Covenant? It is the Tabernacle found in every Catholic Church. Here is the House of Bread, the womb, so to speak where Jesus now dwells.

In the Mass we join in the dance of David and John the Baptist with a kind of reckless abandon. We thereby insert ourselves into this great story stretching back to David, through to Mary and Jesus and up to our present time. When we attend the Mass with this kind of attentiveness then we can more fully live the ordinary events of our everyday lives with the purposefulness and care embodied by Mary and Elizabeth. Our lives can become ever more encounters with grace. Such encounters allow us to choose the will of God over our own wills and so more fully discover what it is to live with the kind of exuberance expressed at the end of Zephaniah:

*The LORD, your God, is in your midst,  
a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing*