

From the Pastor's Desk

***"For unto us a Son is given, unto us a child is born.
They call him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever,
Prince of Peace."***

Often, it seems, that the choices that God makes wouldn't be the choices that some of us would make. God's ways are not our ways! God chooses Bethlehem, that even the prophet Micah claims was too small to be of any significance, a town barely noticed. God ordains John the Baptist before he was born to be the herald of the Messiah. And God chose Elizabeth, a woman well beyond the normal child-bearing age and apparently sterile, as well, to be John's mother. And, yes, God chooses for the mother of the Divine Son, Mary, a teenage girl, likely not even known by many of her townspeople. Yes, God does the unexpected!

The Advent season is filled with the unexpected. Who would have thought that the Christ would make himself present in human flesh and in simple bread and wine. I recently learned that Bethlehem means "the house of bread." Jesus who becomes the Bread of Life, comes from the "house of bread." The wonders of God's wisdom!

The presence of the "embryonic Lord" in the womb of Mary, causes John the Baptist to leap for joy in the womb of Elizabeth. Elizabeth and her unborn son recognized that when Mary arrived, they were literally and physically in the presence of the Lord. This scene of Mary meeting Elizabeth, recalls David's reaction in the Old Testament when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem. "*How can the ark of the Lord come to me?*" he asks. Remember, the Ark of the Covenant contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, given by God and was the most tangible thing signifying God's presence. Later, David danced before the Ark, shouting for joy. David acted in these ways because he was deeply moved by the nearness and presence of the Lord. A wonderful Advent example!

Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, before today's scene, the angel appeared to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah. The angel told Zechariah that his son would "*be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.*" One author wrote, "*Mary's arrival*

may be the very moment at which John the Baptist (and Elizabeth) received the Holy Spirit. Since Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit could then be received by others in the presence of Jesus, even while he was still in the womb."

"*The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior,*" so proclaimed the Prophet Zephaniah, as we heard last Sunday. In Jesus, this truth is made fully visible.

The Church chooses on this day to proclaim a reading from The Letter to the Hebrews, clearly situating the birth of Jesus in the midst of the whole Paschal Mystery. The birth, life, passion and death of Jesus are the sacrifice of our salvation. Mary's totally selfless act of immediately visiting Elizabeth (no planes, trains or automobiles, remember), rather than gloating over her given vocation, can remind us of Jesus' own ultimate selfless act, as the Lamb of Sacrifice. That lifeless body on the cross was, indeed, the body that grew in the womb of the Virgin Mother. Jesus had to be physically born into our world to be able to offer himself, through suffering, for our salvation.

Luke's Gospel wants to make clear that Mary's role supersedes that of Elizabeth, and that Jesus' birth is superior to that of John the Baptist.

When Mary visited Elizabeth she heard the same greeting she received from the angel: "*Blessed are you.*" What Mary did is the same as what Hebrews tells us that Jesus did. They both came into the world to do God's will. This is what makes Mary blessed, **doing the will of God**, doing what a human being is supposed to do. We strive to imitate her who is "*full of grace.*"

My prayer for each of you is a most peace-filled, joyous and holy Christmas. May our celebrations of Christ's indwelling in our world, fill you, as it did Mary, with the fullness of the presence of the Lord.

Fr. Bob

Merry Christmas!!