

My dear people of God, as Advent draws to a close, the readings focus on the **mystery of Christ's coming in the flesh**, and the church does not leave Mary out of the picture. It was through her faith and obedience that made the incarnation of God's Son possible. The prophet Micah announces Israel's Deliverer or Ruler will come from Bethlehem – a tiny, insignificant town, from the clan of Judah (Mic.5:1). The Book of Hebrews also opines that Christ took a body like us in order to sacrifice himself in total obedience to God (Heb.10:5, 7). The Gospel presents, to us, a pregnant Mary, who goes in haste to visit aged Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. This scene is simply joyous, as it contains two powerful messages for those who want to be faithful disciples of Jesus. The first is a call to recognize the role that the Blessed Virgin Mary played in **the history of Salvation**. The second message Mary bears is that **Christ must be received in the flesh**.

In the first Reading, Micah asserts straightforwardly that any hope for the leadership of their people couldn't come from sophisticated Jerusalem. Micah looked to the small town of Bethlehem, about five miles south of Jerusalem. He called also it Ephrathah (v. 1), because when the Jews had come from Egypt and conquered Canaan, Bethlehem had been settled by the Ephrathah clan of the tribe of Judah. The name Bethlehem itself means **"house of bread"**. Its important origins were from ancient times (v. 1).

Our Gospel, today, has presented to us the **faith, obedience and love** of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Shortly after the Annunciation, Mary visited her aged cousin Elizabeth who was pregnant and will soon give birth and who needs support, Mary went in hastens to help her. At the very moment the two holy women met, the infant in Elizabeth's womb was leapt for joy, and Elizabeth was **'filled with the Holy Spirit'** (Lk.1:41). Two worlds met (Old and New Testament), not worlds of space, but of time. Elizabeth, advanced in years, **symbolized the approaching end of the Age of the Law and Prophets**. Her son John the Baptist would herald the new age of salvation, which Israel had long awaited and which Mary now represented. Their sons' careers would be as collaborators, not competitors. In the Visitation greetings, both Mary and Elizabeth responded to the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth was the first to address Mary as **"the mother of my Lord,"** thereby showing that Mary is **'the Mother of God'**(Lk.1:43) and in response Mary intoned the immortal canticle of praise, the Magnificat. Mary's Magnificat canticle is a poem of singular beauty and it is similar to 1 Sam.2 :1-10.

Three stanzas may be distinguished in the canticle: in the first (Lk. 1:46-50), Mary glorifies God for making her **the Mother of the Savior**, that is why future generations will call her blessed "... For behold, henceforth all generation will call me blessed" (Lk.1:48). In Mary's opinion, the Incarnation is a mysterious expression of God's power and holiness and mercy "for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name..." Lk.1;49-50.

Secondly, (Lk.1:51-53) Mary teaches us that the Lord always had a preference for the **humble, resisting the proud and boastful** "he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those who are lowly" (Lk.1:52). According to St. Josemaria Escriva, (Friends of God, page 100) when pride takes hold of a soul, it is no surprise to find it bringing along with it a whole string of other vices such as: greed, self-indulgence, envy, injustice.... In fact, we should beg God not to let us fall into this temptation, because pride is the worst sin of all, and the most ridiculous ... Pride is unpleasant, even from a human point of view.

Thirdly, (Lk.1:54-55) Mary proclaims that God is always faithful to **His covenant or His promise**. God has always taken special care of his chosen people – and now does them the greatest honor of all by becoming a Jew (cf.Rom.1:3). The Lord your God bore you, as a man bears his son, in all the way that you went (Deut. 1:13). God did so many times, using Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David....and now giving us a definitive leader by sending the Messiah – moved by his mercy, which takes pity on the wretchedness of Israel and of all mankind.

Finally, dear friends, let us ask ourselves what gave Mary the strength to say: behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word (Lk. 1:38). Obviously her life of prayer, faith and love that gave her the strength to be obedient to God's call. She was full of grace and the Lord was with her (Lk. 1: 28). She had a deep faith to fulfill her high calling. She submitted to God's plan in faith. May Mary's faith and obedience inspire us as we are preparing for Christmas, let us submit ourselves to the will of God so that we can prepare our hearts in faith to be worthy mangers to receive Jesus Christ. Amen!