

Homily 4th Sunday of Advent: Mary, Mother of Jesus

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The Gospel for this fourth Sunday of Advent is from St. Luke, who tells us how the Blessed Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth, her cousin. This took place right after Mary conceived Jesus. But the theme of the first two readings this Sunday is the Incarnation and Birth of Our Lord.

The first reading comes from the Old T. Prophet Micah – his great prophecy that the Messiah would be born in the little town of Bethlehem, the city of King David’s birth: “From you [Bethlehem] shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” Based upon Old Testament prophecies, the Jews were expecting their Messiah to be a king in the line of King David; he would also a shepherd, just as King David was, and so Micah says: “He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord.”

In His humanity Jesus was a king in the line of King David. In his Gospel St. Luke tells us that St. Joseph, the legal father of Jesus and husband of Mary, was a descendent of King David. This is why when the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, ordered a census be done and that everyone be registered in the birthplace of their ancestors, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, and it was there that the Savior was born.

Our second reading is from the Epistle to the Hebrews, words that are understood to be placed on the lips of Jesus: “Sacrifices and offerings you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me” – a body fashioned by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Then we read: “Behold, I come to do your will”; that is, Jesus came not to sacrifice the blood of bulls and goats, but to offer His own Body and Blood on the cross for our salvation, accomplishing the will of God the Father, who sent His Son as our Redeemer.

And on this fourth Sunday of Advent the Church invites us to meditate upon the wonderful mystery of the Visitation, the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary.

St. Luke informs us that after Mary conceived Jesus, she does not think of herself and the great marvel that God has worked within her. No, after the Archangel Gabriel tells her that her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, is in her six month of pregnancy, Mary goes “in haste” to assist her.

When Mary enters the house of Elizabeth and greets her, the child in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) leaps for joy. Why? Because he is in the presence of the Savior. The Saints, in commenting on this blessed event, tell us that St. John was sanctified in the womb; he was not conceived, but born without Original Sin.

His mother, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cries out: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." These words of Elizabeth should sound familiar to us. Along with the words of the Archangel Gabriel: "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee," they are the words of the prayer, the Hail Mary.

But Elizabeth's words also reveal to us a beautiful and wonderful mystery regarding the Virgin Mary: that she is the new Ark of the Covenant. Just as the old ark made by Moses contained the two stone tablets with the 10 Commandments, which represented the Old Covenant, Mary's immaculate womb contained the Son of God made man, and the human body of our Savior which would be sacrificed on the cross for us to establish the New and Eternal Covenant.

The relationship between the old Ark of the Covenant, and Mary, the new Ark of the Covenant, is seen elsewhere in the Old Testament. The book of Exodus, chapter 40, tells of how when Moses and the Israelites were wandering in the desert, a cloud overshadowed the meeting tent in which the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This cloud represented the presence of the Holy Spirit.

At the Annunciation of the Incarnation and Birth of our Lord, when Mary asked Archangel Gabriel how she would become the mother of God while still remaining a virgin, Gabriel responded: "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

Saint Luke, we think, intentionally used the same word, "overshadow," in reference to Mary to indicate that she is the new Ark of the Covenant that carries not just two stone tablets with God's words written on them, but the Eternal Word of God Himself, who is made flesh in her immaculate womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth's words reveal this truth: "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" – words which reveal to us that Mary is the Theotokos, the God-bearer. Bases upon these words, we say in the Hail Mary prayer: "Holy Mary, Mother of God," and then add, "pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death."

Then Elizabeth says, in reference to Mary: “Blessed is she who believed what the angel spoke to her.”

On this final Sunday of Advent, let us ask our Mother Mary’s intercession, that we may have a firm and strong faith like hers – to believe, like her, all the holy mysteries that God has revealed to us through His Son.

Mary conceived Jesus in faith. Jesus has only one mother in the flesh, but as the saints tell us, we conceive Jesus spiritually in the womb of our souls at Baptism, and bring Him forth/give birth to Him in a spiritual way, by works of charity, and in doing so lead others to believe in Him.

Let us make Jesus known, and proclaim His glorious Birth to all the world, so that others may come to believe in Him as our Lord, our King, and our Savior!