

Week 3: *The Visitation*

Pray

Pray one decade of the Rosary each day, focusing on the Visitation. Try to enter into the mystery of Mary's journey to Judah, Elizabeth's greeting to Mary, John's reception of the Holy Spirit, and Mary's heartfelt Magnificat of praise. Any one of the many facets of this mystery may be enough to occupy your prayer. Focus on staying present with Jesus and encountering Him, rather than trying to "cover the material."

Read

Luke 1: 39-56

Enter into the Scene

Prayerfully reflect on *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth* (attached), or enter into your own reflection. Try entering the mystery from different perspectives. What does it feel like to be Mary, perhaps nauseous in the early stages of pregnancy, traveling a far distance by foot? What is happening in the heart and mind of Elizabeth as she enters the late stages of pregnancy at an advanced age? Imagine the perspectives of John the Baptist or even Jesus, experiencing all of this in utero. What does it feel like or what happens when John is filled with the Holy Spirit? Or perhaps imagine yourself as Zechariah, witnessing such beautiful displays of faith in silence.

Reflect

1. Ponder the words that Elizabeth speaks to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Try to quantify how many times you have prayed these words in your lifetime. Next consider every Christian who has ever prayed, said, or read these words over the past 2000 years. Why are these words so significant? What do they mean to you personally?
2. Imagine what Elizabeth must have experienced living her entire life as a "barren" woman. Now, imagine what she must feel being pregnant. Consider that her experiences and feelings may be more nuanced or multidimensional than you may assume at first glance. Perhaps Elizabeth is still a subject for gossip among casual acquaintances – being visibly pregnant despite her "old age." In what ways do you think that Elizabeth's "barren-ness" has prepared her for her role as mother to John the Baptist and spiritual friend to Mary? What do you think it is like to be both "barren" and "with child"?

Question

1. Take a moment to imagine Jesus growing within Mary's womb, and notice Mary growing (literally!) with His presence. How is Mary's pregnancy a metaphor for the spiritual life to which we are all called? What are some ways that you experience Jesus growing within you?
2. When Elizabeth sees Mary she calls out, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Do you think that this is an odd way for Elizabeth to greet Mary? Do you think that Elizabeth over-emphasizes or draws too much attention to Mary? Why or why not?
3. Mary points the way to Jesus with the words of her Magnificat, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." In what ways does or could Mary continue to bring you and your family closer to Jesus?
4. Mary's first reaction to the news of her pregnancy is praise. How do you react when surprised by unexpected changes in your circumstances?
5. In Mary's Magnificat, she speaks of her own lowliness and then goes on to say that "all generations will call [her] blessed." How does Mary remain lowly and humble while ascending to such a magnanimous call?



Reflection: *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth*

Prayerfully we seek to encounter Jesus and Mary, imagining them just after the Annunciation:

Mary beholds the words of Gabriel; She ponders them and hides them deep within Her heart. She is satiated in the life of You, Her Son, continually attentive to Your presence. The reality of You, growing within Her, informs Her outward movements and interior meditations. In moments of profound prayer, it is as if She is able to meet You in the garden of Her own womb. She waits with You as You form; She studies You, loves You, and listens to You in silence. By this She becomes Your first disciple – observing You, following You, and growing with You.

The relationship Your Mother shares with You is always fruitful. Your life-giving love flows directly into Her, flowering out from Her toward others. Mary's first concern is for Elizabeth – how she is feeling and coping in the late stages of pregnancy. You Mother's attention never lingers on Herself, on Her own circumstance, or on the possible consequence of being both unwed and pregnant. She is not ignorant of the law or of the rejection She will endure from others. With great trust She gathers Her cares together and places them before You, orienting Herself outward in charity.

Your Mother acts swiftly; She makes travel arrangements, carefully bundles Her few belongings, and sets off to a small town in the hills of Judah. After a few days journey, She arrives at the home of Zechariah, and runs to find Elizabeth. Mary opens Her mouth to greet Elizabeth, but the Holy Spirit precedes Her and fills Elizabeth in His presence.

The baby who will grow to become John the Baptist, seems to joyfully dance and flutter within Elizabeth's womb. Her stomach jumps and bubbles with so much vigor that Elizabeth and Mary both smile at the spectacle. The room is full of energy, as if the air around everyone is being stirred. Brimming with zeal, Elizabeth receives the Holy Spirit. With her newly accepted gift of knowledge, Elizabeth begins praising You through the lens of Your Mother.

“Blessed are You among women, and blessed is the Fruit of Your womb! And who am I, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” Elizabeth proclaims these truths with humble magnitude, “Blessed are You who believed that what was spoken to You by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

Your Mother's faith now seems to tower beautifully above the room, like a steeple or turret, spiraling into Heaven itself. Yet Her spirit remains simple, unimposing, and receptive to Her Lord's will. With a clear and humble voice, She sings the hymn that has been welling in Her heart since the night of Your Annunciation.

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For He has looked upon His handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed.
The mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is His name.”

The words of Her Magnificat bring You to us; She inundates us with Your presence. It is as if You are born before us and we are invited to cradle You and wrap You in our love. Even in Your smallness, Mary magnifies You. In Your hidden state, She brings us to You. She never tires of pointing toward You; She lays down Her life to bear and reveal Yours.

Jesus, thank You for entering humanity through the conduit of Your Mother, who loves You and all others perfectly. During seasons of life when I lose sight of You, when You seem to temporarily disappear or withdraw, She is faithful to magnify You and reveal the secrets of Your hidden presence. Like Elizabeth, I am overcome with Your Mother's nearness. With Elizabeth I bow my head and say, “Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?”

JOYFULLY PROCLAIMING, CELEBRATING, WITNESSING, AND SERVING *Together*