

## Advent 4-C

St. Patrick's, Vancouver

23 December 2018

Dear Fathers James, Guy, Rodney and Antony, dear friends who are celebrating the Simbang Gabi Novena, and dear parishioners of St. Patrick's Parish:

### *Introduction*

On this last Sunday before our celebration of Christmas on Tuesday, the Church draws our attention, as is fitting, to the Mother of Jesus, to Mary. During the early days of Advent the liturgy drew our attention to the austere and prophet figure of John the Baptist. Citing the Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah, he cried out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight his paths."

But today the Church turns our attention to the more gentle figure of Mary, the one who was actually "expecting" and preparing for the birth of her Son, "with love beyond all telling," as the Preface sings. In this way, she reminds us all of the sense of joyful expectation that should mark these last couple of days before Christmas.

### *Gospel*

Therefore, as we fix our gaze on Mary, we can ask ourselves: what were her thoughts in those months of waiting? Imagine, for a moment, her state of mind after the startling news of the Annunciation when the Angel had left her.<sup>1</sup> Mary found herself with a great mystery enclosed within her

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Francis, Angelus (23 December 2018).

womb. She knew something extraordinarily unique had happened to her. She – and she alone – was aware that the last chapter of the salvation history of the world had begun. But everything around her would have remained as before – her family, her friends, her chores. The village of Nazareth would have been completely unaware of what had occurred in their midst: that the Messiah was coming to his people in the flesh, in Mary’s womb.

All of this would surely have filled her with joy. That is, after all, what the Angel said to her in his greeting: “Hail, full of grace.” “Rejoice, most highly favoured daughter.” The long time of waiting for a Saviour had come to an end.

### *Mary’s Journey*

St. Luke gives us the account of how Mary responded to the Good News of her motherhood. The Angel Gabriel had revealed to her that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was expecting a son and that she was already six months pregnant (cf. Lk 1:36).

So what did the young Mary do? She didn’t stay at home, thinking of her own situation (and, humanly speaking, how troubling it must have been: what would Joseph think?). Instead, she went “with haste” from Nazareth in Galilee to go south to Judea in order to help out her cousin. Mary was not in a frenzied rush, but because she clearly understood what God was asking of her, what she had to do, she didn’t loiter, but went

without putting it off.

Mary's acted not only out of obedience to the Angel's words but also out of love: she went to Elizabeth to make herself useful. And she took with her most precious possession with her. She took her unborn Son, Jesus, to greet Elizabeth and the child in her womb.<sup>2</sup> It is a scene of rich human intimacy and beauty of how one young pregnant mother did a kindness to an older pregnant relative. Their joy is echoed by the unborn John the Baptist leaping in his mother's womb (cf. Lk 1:44).

### *Mary as Missionary*

In visiting Elizabeth, Mary tells us what to give to others this Christmas; that is, our support, our understanding, our forgiveness, and our love; to bring them, as Mary did, the most precious thing we have received, Jesus and his Gospel.

We can say that Mary undertook a journey. This was the first step of her life-long "pilgrimage of faith and charity," one which would only be completed by her walk up the hill to Calvary with her Son.

Newly pregnant, the Virgin went to the hill country of Judea, we can say, as a "missionary": to share her good news, indeed *the* Good News with someone else. Mary's was a real missionary journey which led her to a distant place, far from her family home.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Francis, Address after the Rosary (31 May 2013).

### *What Does This Mean for Us?*

What does Mary's visit to Elizabeth have to do with our own journey through life?

The Gospel is telling us that we cannot keep solely for ourselves the joy that we have received in Baptism, when we were first called into friendship with God – into being his sons and daughters. Joy can't lie dormant. It must always be spread. That's why the Church is calling us to "evangelize": to bear witness by living the Gospel in the places closest to us: in our homes, among our families, where we work, in our neighbourhoods. If we truly believe that we have received "Good News," the Gospel, then we must share it with others in the "lands" of our everyday life: in our kitchens and in our cars, in the malls and on the bus.

People are looking to you to show by your life that belief in Jesus Christ – his Birth, ministry, Death and Resurrection – actually make a difference in the way you live and the way you treat others.

This Christmas season, especially, I ask you – indeed, I urge you – to reach out to those around you who no longer come to church with any regularity. Even if they don't know it, they are waiting for the God who can bring them joy. As Pope Benedict once said, "There is nothing more beautiful than to know him [Jesus Christ] and to speak to others of our friendship with him."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Solemn Inauguration of his Ministry as Bishop of Rome

This is the heart and purpose of our call to be friends of Jesus who are his missionaries: to give to others what we ourselves have received: the Person of Jesus himself. As we heard Elizabeth testify to Mary in today's Gospel, Jesus fills the heart with joy: "For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:44). Jesus is the cause of this joy; knowing him is the source of happiness.

To know Jesus personally, and then to talk about him. That's what we can do this Christmas season. We can tell others about the deeper meaning of the Christmas spirit, why giving gifts reflects the great gift of God's Son to us, why the lights on our Christmas trees remind us that Christ is "the light of the world," and that peace will come when we obey God's saving plan for the world.

Think now of just one person – one individual whom you know – who is alone, abandoned, unforgiven, or ignored in their family or community. I urge you to make a determined effort to extend your hand of welcome to that individual, to assure them of God's merciful love manifested in giving us his Son for our salvation. That person could be a son or daughter, a husband or a wife, a mother or a father, a brother or a sister, a friend or a neighbour.

In these last days before Christmas be an instrument of God's joy.

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(18 April 2005).

Pass on that joy with your kind gestures, patience, help, and above all with a forgiving heart. Communicate to them the deepest joy of all: that of knowing God in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

You can undertake this task, because the same Holy Spirit who accompanied Mary in her visit to Elizabeth accompanies you in your journey. In Baptism and Confirmation, we have all received the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witnesses in our world (cf. Acts 1:8).

### ***Conclusion***

It is the Lord himself who sets us on this path, giving us Mary as our travelling companion. She comforts and reassures us, because she reminds us that her Son is always with us, as he promised, "to the close of the age" (Mt 28: 20).

He fulfills that promise right now as he comes to be with us in this Eucharist. We pray that we will bring him to others, so that for them and for us our Christmas will be genuinely merry.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (18 December 2005).