

Homily. 4th Sunday in Advent. Year. C. 21/22 December 2024.

Mary set out as quickly as she could to visit her relative Elizabeth, traveling from Northern Nazareth to the Southern hills of Judah. What was the rush for, I wonder? I think that surprisingly conceived of a child after having said yes to God's invitation, the youthful Mary made this not small journey to Elizabeth because she'd heard the good news of her unexpected pregnancy so late in her life. I imagine that Mary sought to help Elizabeth and Zachariah and to receive the comfort and wisdom that they could offer as she came to terms with her own situation. This is the human historic story behind her haste. St. Luke adds that she stayed on with them for around three months before going back home, in other words until their child had been born and Mary was in her first trimester.

There's another reason though for Mary's haste to visit Elizabeth and Zachariah, a reason of faith. Mary had made the link between their story of God's intervention and her own. She'd seen and understood that what God was doing for the world with her willing cooperation and what God was doing through the elderly Judean couple and their child were joint events of grace. Her eyes of faith were able to find sense and meaning in all that was happening. This explains the joyful exclamation Elizabeth made upon hearing Mary's voice and the leaping in her womb of her child who would be called John, later becoming the Baptist preparing the way of Mary's son, the Lord of Spirit and salvation.

This is our role, our mission and ministry; to join up by faith the dots of God's ongoing saving work for us today and to bring the Good News to others as Mary brought Jesus to the quiet hills of Judah. With prayerful

and thoughtful reflection we, too, know and carry the Lord of life with us. Recognising the urgency of this service, we're called to share his love, mercy and hope with those we meet and greet. Like I said last Sunday, for most people you and I are the only gospel that they will ever hear.

In just a couple of days our Christmas celebration of our Lord's birth will be happening. In Rome something else and new will also come into being; the opening of the Great door of Jubilee marking 1,700 years since the Nicene Creed, our shared statement of our faith was agreed. This Creed united as one the various groups and traditions of those times. It remains a foundational expression of our unity in the Christian faith.

Jubilee Years, when they occur, are about the Good News given for all, to be shared and lived in every time, culture and circumstance. This divine hope and saving gift isn't meant to be locked behind the doors of our fears, doubts, insecurities and selfishness. The swinging open of the Jubilee door in Rome symbolises the much needed swinging open of our minds, hearts and vision, releasing of energy of our faith and service.

Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, faithfully point our way forwards. We have the gift of faith and the many gifts it brings to be given away like hope, meaning, purpose, compassion and respect for and solidarity with all. If we let these 2 wise women and their loving men of faith support our mission today then this Jubilee year will be effective and our Christmas be ripe with joy, generosity, kindness and good will to all.