

# Sunday Homily

## 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

19 DECEMBER 2021

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK IV

"The moment your greeting reached my ears,  
the child in my womb leapt for joy."

### Illustration

Amazing progress has taken place in our ability to view the unborn child as it develops in its mother's womb. From a certain stage in her baby's growth, a mother has always been able to feel the child moving inside her. Fathers too have been able to place a hand on the mother's stomach and feel their child as it kicks and jumps. However, ultrasound technology has revolutionised how people understand and think about human life in the womb. Now, rather than just feeling their child move, a mother and father can actually see it. They can watch as it sucks its thumb, as it turns and stretches. An incredible video called *Window to the Womb* even shows an unborn child doing somersaults inside its mother's womb!

It has also become common practice for expectant parents to be given ultrasound pictures of their unborn children. They rightly consider these to be the first photographs of their child. Sometimes they even put them in frames or save them in photo albums. They provide a record of the first nine months of life.

We now know that much more is going on in the womb than we previously imagined. We can see the unborn child living in harmony and security with its mother and, through her, with the outside world. Ultrasound enables us to see and appreciate what God has always known: the beauty and wonder of human life as it grows and develops.

### Gospel Teaching

The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth, as recounted to us by St Luke, is often referred to as the visitation. But more is going on than just one expectant mother visiting another. Both of these women have been caught up into God's plan to send his Son into the world. Both women are pregnant. Mary carries the unborn Christ child in her womb; Elizabeth carries John the Baptist, the one who will announce his coming. Here, two women meet; and both of their lives have been touched in different ways by the Holy Spirit. They are crucial to God becoming Emmanuel, to God dwelling among us as one who is truly like us.

Yet, as well as two mothers encountering each other in this act of visitation, two unborn children also encounter each other. When Mary greets Elizabeth, the child in Elizabeth's womb leaps for joy. Both she and her unborn child know they are

in the presence of the Lord. Jesus is there among them, hidden in Mary's womb. Mary is blessed because she is pregnant with the saviour of the world. Elizabeth rightly calls her the mother of the Lord: the fruit of her womb is the one who will take away the sins of the world.

We speak of God's coming to live a human life as the incarnation. This word literally means "taking flesh". It's a very physical reality; it's about God working in and through a real body and real people. The Israelites had long described God in human ways. Today the prophet Micah and the psalmist foretell how God would come as a shepherd, but one with divine power and majesty. In the same way, God would descend from heaven and protect the people like a gardener caring for a vine. God's hand would stretch over them. God had promised to be close to the people. In becoming one flesh with us, Jesus fulfils this promise, standing beside us. His physical body becomes the place where people can meet the living God, and in the sacrifice of that body on the cross our sins are forgiven.

### Application

Very soon we shall be placing the child Jesus in the manger of our Christmas cribs. The figure of that tiny baby reminds us that God has not only blessed us by creating us but also chose to become one with us. God can work through human lives and make them extraordinary. Mary and Elizabeth had faith to believe God's promises; they were prepared to trust God's word.

The visitation is more than a nice story. It's an invitation to deepen our faith and trust in God's love. It's a call to recognise the presence of Christ in the people we meet and to allow Christ to shine through our often fragile human lives. Mary and Elizabeth were unique in what God asked of them. We too have a unique calling. As someone once said, we are all meant to be mothers of God, because Jesus needs to be continually born in our lives.