

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C) (2021)

A) WHAT IS "CHRISTMAS SPIRIT"?

- cheerfulness, kindness, unselfishness, generosity
- the very opposite: Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol"
- Christmas and everything to do with it was "humbug"
- Dickens' story is a wonderful tale of redemption: Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Marley his deceased business-partner;
- and then has a series of visions about Christmas Past, Present and Future, showing him what will happen to him if he does not mend his ways
- Scrooge wakes up on Christmas morning a changed man, and, to everyone's astonishment, embodies that spirit of kindness and generosity.

B) MARY EMBODIES THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

- and the scene of the Visitation suggests three special qualities: generosity, joy and thanksgiving
- Mary has just conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- the angel has brought her wonderful news: God's plan for her, inviting her to be the mother of his Son, mother of the long-awaited Messiah.
- It all seems impossible, just too good to be true.
- To give Mary assurance, the angel informs her that Elizabeth, her elderly relative, has also conceived and that she was already in her sixth month.
- The angel tells her, "Nothing is impossible with God."

C) MARY'S RESPONSE: GENEROSITY

- As soon as she learned about Elizabeth, her thoughts turned immediately from the extraordinary gift God had given her, and focused on Elizabeth, her relative, and what she might need.
- Mary forgot about herself. She spent not even a moment in reflecting on how blessed she had been by God.
- St. Luke in the Gospel tells us that Mary set out, as quickly as she could to Elizabeth's home.
- Elizabeth was elderly, and would find extra difficulties in her pregnancy.
- Mary was anxious to bring her whatever help and comfort she could
- She would bring to Elizabeth cheerful kindness and unselfish generosity.
- and, although the Gospel does not say so, we might suppose that Mary would remain with Elizabeth until after her baby was born

D) JOY

- the Visitation is one of the joyful mysteries of the Rosary
- and Luke's account conveys the real joy of the occasion
- there is joy first of all which comes to any woman who is longing to have a child
- Elizabeth was barren, and in that society, such a condition was seen to be a sign of God's disfavor
- Elizabeth herself speaks of the humiliation she has suffered among men, because of her childlessness
- a humiliation the Lord himself has now taken away
- and the Lord has intervened too in Mary's life, and given her the joy and the privilege of being not only a mother but the mother of the Messiah
- in the Visitation, the two unlikely mothers share their joy
- in that meeting joy is also expressed in Elizabeth's unborn child, John the Baptist
- "For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy"
- Elizabeth recognizes in Mary the mother of her Lord, and Elizabeth's child recognizes in Mary's child the Lord himself
- and when, eventually, these children come to be born, the joy of their mothers will be shared with many other people too
- not just the joy of motherhood, and the joy of new life, but the even greater joy that the longed-for Messiah, the Chosen One of God, has at last arrived

E) THANKSGIVING

- both Elizabeth and Mary respond to what has happened with thanks and praise
- Elizabeth cries out: "Of all women you are the most blessed by God, and blessed is the fruit of your womb"
- and Mary responds in her turn with her great canticle, the Magnificat: My soul glorifies the Lord
- they give thanks to God for the wonderful things that he has done in them and through them
- they give thanks because he has been faithful to his promises
- he is as good as his word.

- As we approach Christmas Day, and look forward to a happy time with those we love,
- let us ask Mary to help us imitate her in that true Spirit of Christmas
- the spirit of generosity, the spirit of joy, and the spirit of praise and thanksgiving
- may we say, with her: my soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.