



**Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-45**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (December 22, 2024)**

Some of you are in town visiting family or friends for the Holidays or preparing to drive or fly out to join relatives. More than 119 million travelers are expected to take to the skies and hit the roads for the holidays, capping a record-setting season. 'Tis the season.

In today's gospel, we hear of **Mary's visitation to Elizabeth**. The distance between the two villages of Nazareth, where Mary lived, and Ein Kerem, where Elyzabeth and her husband, Zechariah, resided in the hill country near Jerusalem is a little over 88 miles. A car trip of under two hours is a 4 to 5 days trip on foot (a total of 34 hours with no breaks).<sup>1</sup>

Mary didn't travel to be with relatives for Christmas (it wasn't on the calendar, yet). She didn't even travel for the Feast of Hannukah,<sup>2</sup> the eight-day "Festival of Lights," with the nightly Menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods.

No, Mary traveled to see Elizabeth because she learned from the angel Gabriel that her old and barren relative was expecting a child, "for nothing is impossible with God." (Lk 1:37)

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<sup>1</sup> [Nazareth, Israel to Ein Karem, Jerusalem, Israel - Google Maps](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Feast commemorates the time when the defiled Temple was restored and rededicated. See [https://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article\\_cdo/aid/102911/jewish/What-Is-Hanukkah.htm](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/chanukah/article_cdo/aid/102911/jewish/What-Is-Hanukkah.htm)

So, after the tiring trip done in haste (Lk 1:39) with a sense of urgency and anticipation, Mary, full of the grace of God, enters Zechariah's house. The women greet each other with a **sweet greeting** like the one that only caring people know how to do.

Have you ever greeted one another with joy in the voice, a greeting that makes one's heart smile, a greeting that says: "I'm so glad to see you, so glad you are here, so glad you exist."? Those kinds of greetings are precious and carry a singing note of joy and appreciation. Those are the kind of greetings I like to give and receive. Those greetings express joy, openness, light.

Mary got one of those greetings earlier on when an emissary of the Lord, the angel Gabriel, came to her: "**Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.**" (Lk 1:28)

What a wonderful greeting! It spoke of God's preference and nearness. It was like hearing God say: "I value and honor you. You are precious in my sight, and I choose you, I want to be with you all the time. I will bless and enrich you with my presence and want to be your eternal friend if you allow me."

Gabriel continued and announced that she will bear God's son if only she agreed to God's plan of salvation for all people. Mary was astounded and proclaimed a resounding "Yes!"

And now we hear **another special greeting**. Elizabeth, moved by God's Spirit, addresses Mary with words used for centuries by Catholics as they pray the rosary:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard

the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.” (Lk 1:42-44)

Elizabeth is honored by Mary’s visit: she feels blessed. And did you hear what she said? The six-month-old fetus in her belly leapt and kicked as soon as Mary’s voice reached Elizabeth’s ears. Mary didn’t have a chance to tell her news and surprise Elizabeth: The Spirit in her gave her away. That’s what happens when we carry the Spirit of Jesus in us: The Spirit precedes us.

It wasn’t so much the *sight* of Mary that brought the news to Elizabeth as her *voice*: her voice carried the message.

Luke favors the hearing sense: Those who hear the Word and apply it to their lives are Jesus’ family.<sup>3</sup> He follows Paul’s lead: to Paul it isn’t the seeing that brings faith but the hearing.<sup>4</sup> Faith comes through receptive hearing!<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth didn’t know about Mary’s pregnancy. She picked it up from her voice. The presence of God, the shadow of God’s Spirit in Mary was evident in her voice: a blessed message of God’s favor that makes even a fetus dance in excitement! **Joy is a sign of the presence of God.**

Elizabeth declares and confirms yet again that Mary is blessed. Her blessedness, Elizabeth acknowledges, comes from the fact that Mary firmly trusts that God fulfills promises. There is no doubt in Mary’s mind. She demonstrates a solid faith: she is a simple vessel in God’s hands to carry on humanity’s salvation.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 8:19-24

<sup>4</sup> Romans 10:14-17

<sup>5</sup> Dwelling in the Word or abiding in the Lord is another way to express that command.

And Mary erupts in song at the faithfulness of the Lord from generation to generation, a simple song of immense trust in God, and hope for the world.

May we share in the joy of Elyzabeth, in the exuberant faith of Mary, and in the love of God for all humanity as we continue to prepare for Christ's coming. Amen.