

23<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 (Fourth Sunday in Advent, Year C)

Micah 5:1-4; Psalm 79(80):2-3,15-16,18-19; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45.

### **Blessed is she who believed!**

Our Advent journey, our time of preparation and waiting, has come to an end. This is the fourth and final Sunday in Advent and we are now only a couple of days away from the celebration of the great event of the birth of Jesus.

The readings of the past three Sundays have encouraged us to hope and have faith in God who is coming. We started with Jesus' invitation to stand up proudly in the presence of God who comes, and then listened to John the Baptist encouraging us to be prepared for the day of the Lord's coming. 'What about us?' 'What should we do?' we heard people asking John in last Sunday's gospel. John gave his answers: we are invited to be like God, to reach out and be generous to those around us, to be just in our dealings with others. 'Be perfect, as your Father is perfect,' Jesus would say later on.

In today's gospel reading we are given another answer; we are not told how to act, but we are invited to observe. Mary is the one who is blessed by God because she believed! In an earlier narrative in the same gospel, we are told of Mary's encounter with the messenger from God. Gabriel came to invite Mary into the great dance with God. Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son. One might ask: did Mary understand what this really meant? I suspect that she did not; yet this did not stop her from declaring herself to be the handmaid of the Lord.

In order for Mary to be able to accept the message she received, and to allow God to use her as the mother of his Son, she had to have a positive relationship with God. This is what leads Elizabeth to declare that Mary is blessed because she believed! This is a definition of faith: a deep personal relationship with God allowing Mary to immerse herself into the mystery of God. Her faith is deep and strong enough to allow her to enter into this divine dance, even though she cannot fully understand what is being asked of her. The concept that was being proposed to Mary was totally foreign: God was going to take flesh inside her womb! No world religion has ever spoken of a God who chose to be born as a simple human person; God the creator becomes part of and submits himself to his own creation!

No sooner does the miracle of the Incarnation take place, Mary immediately hastens to Elizabeth's house in order to be good news to her. Elizabeth, an older woman, was also with child and obviously needed assistance. God's love become human in Mary invited her to share that love with Elizabeth.

Mary's story is our own story. We are called and invited by God to dance with him. We are invited to let God be born again every day in our own life. Our journey is to recognise God, enter into a deep faith-filled relationship with him, and offer him back to the world. Like Mary it is our duty to show God to the world by our generosity, justice and love, as we prepare ourselves for the day when we are invited to meet God face to face.

May this Christmas be another opportunity for us to grow in our faith and share that love to all around us.

Fr Mario