

Advent Reflections

December 21, 2019



We are approaching the end of Advent, and today's readings draw us into the mystery of salvation unfolding all around us in an ever-deeper way. Options for the first reading describe two human experiences and situate them before another very human experience—the joy-filled meeting of two expectant mothers, Mary and her cousin Elizabeth.

There are profound, transcendent interpretations attached to the experiences recounted in these readings. But it is all too easy to devalue the real human experiences in these scripture accounts - and in our lives- and consider them valuable only in the sense that they point to some future glory. This is from an emphasis in Christianity that Christians are somber, and piety calls us to despise human experiences as people who are *mourning and weeping in this vale of tears*. The temptation is to fall for this line of thinking and contextualize all human experiences- those we read in scripture and our own- exclusively within the context of some yet unrealized significance. But is this truly our call?

Such de-emphasis of the here-and-now does not match the welcome of the Lover to Whom we beg: "Let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely" (Songs 2:14). Nor does it jive with celebrating that God is "in our midst", so we have nothing to fear as this God turns away the enemy, removes judgment, renews us, and rejoices, singing joyfully at our restoration (Zeph. 3:15-18). Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the one within whom the promises of God are fulfilled and is thus overjoyed, as is her son John the Baptist who "leaped for joy" in her womb (Luke 1:44). These accounts all have deep future-oriented significance. But all of these characters relish the here-and-now as the scenes unfold around them. Perhaps we need to re-think our lives, and look for the value, the

good, the joy in the here-and-now, as *God is in our midst*.

When you see a manger scene, or as you place the Infant in your manger in a few days, remember the humanness of it all. Take time to reflect on a very human experience you have had and rejoice in the experience in a very human way. For the Gift in the manger- and of *God in the midst* of your own experience- sing *a new song to the Lord* (Ps.33). Be caught up in the moment, the here-and-now. And in the same way God does, rejoice in the experience and sing joyfully... *as one sings at festivals* (Zeph 3:19a).

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Reading 1 [SG 2:8-14](#)

Hark! my lover—here he comes
springing across the mountains,
leaping across the hills.
My lover is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Here he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattices.
My lover speaks; he says to me,
"Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one,
and come!
"For see, the winter is past,
the rains are over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of pruning the vines has come,
and the song of the dove is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance.
Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one,
and come!

"O my dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the secret recesses of the cliff,
Let me see you,
let me hear your voice,
For your voice is sweet,
and you are lovely."

Responsorial Psalm [PS 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21](#)

R. (1a; 3a) Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song.

Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;
with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises.
Sing to him a new song;
pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness.

R. Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song.

But the plan of the LORD stands forever;
the design of his heart, through all generations.
Blessed the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he has chosen for his own inheritance.

R. Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song.

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield,
For in him our hearts rejoice;
in his holy name we trust.

R. Exult, you just, in the Lord! Sing to him a new song.

Alleluia

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [LK 1:39-45](#)

Mary set out in those days
and traveled to the hill country in haste
to a town of Judah,
where she entered the house of Zechariah
and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting,
the infant leaped in her womb,
and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit,
cried out in a loud voice and said,
"Most blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

And how does this happen to me,
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears,
the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
Blessed are you who believed
that what was spoken to you by the Lord
would be fulfilled."