

**The Joy of the Visitation**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent (C)**  
**(Lk 1:39-45)**

Imagine what it would be like to win a great lottery, such as \$100 million. When those winning numbers come up choosing you, everything changes, and it is bewildering.

People imagine the lottery as the answer to all their problems, but what actually happens in that moment when you are the one who all of a sudden has this mind-boggling wealth in your life? There is a two-fold reaction. On the one hand, an incredible joy and excitement, a desire to announce to everyone how you have won; but on the other hand a great fear and trepidation that causes you to tell almost no one that you have the winning ticket. Instead, you have to prepare carefully for the public revelation. The lottery is no easy prize, but a burden that carries with it great responsibility, and requires incredible prudence and wisdom. The winner now has the ability to accomplish great things in the world, but it requires a character of great strength and generosity to wield the prize successfully. Most people, due to inexperience or their own greed and selfishness, are unable to handle such wealth, and are destroyed by it.

When the angel Gabriel came to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he announced that of all people who had ever lived, she was the one chosen for the world's greatest prize, of infinite value, God himself. She was to be entrusted with the treasure of heaven, in order to accomplish great good on earth.

Mary was the right person to "win" this prize, since she had all the necessary qualities, beginning with her Immaculate Conception. Mary was "full of grace," as the angel proclaimed. She had wisdom, prudence, and obedience. She was profoundly spiritual, knew the Scriptures, had a deep prayer life and was fully consecrated to God from her childhood. She was generous and put others first. By entrusting His Son to her, God gave Mary an important role to play in the world's salvation, beginning at the Annunciation, all the way to Calvary, and even beyond, since she continues to play an active role even now in the Church's history (as seen, for instance in the apparition at Guadalupe).

It is Mary who gave this great treasure to the world, at the Epiphany and at Cana. But Mary didn't announce him publicly at first. Even though she was overjoyed at the message of the angel, she also experienced fear and trepidation, and proceeded with prudence and caution.

This is the mystery of the Visitation. Mary both expresses her joy which she can't contain, and keeps it hidden. She needs to keep it hidden from those who do not understand, or whose intentions may be evil, such as King Herod. The evil one

wants to know what God is doing, because he wishes to destroy God's work. He sought to destroy Mary's child. The time of the Annunciation and Nativity are not the right time yet for the Christ to be revealed publicly; that will come thirty years later once he has grown to manhood.

But even though Mary must hide her joy from the world for now, she cannot hide it completely, and so goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the one other person in the world who can appreciate the great thing God has just done, since she herself has also experienced being chosen for a great prize: to be the mother of John the Baptist in her old age. It is during the Visitation that Mary expresses her Joy in the one place where it is safe to do so, where there is no danger, and where she can gain the strength and courage for what lies ahead. It is during the Visitation that Mary sings her hymn:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord –  
my soul “magnifies” the Lord –  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior,  
for He has looked with favor in choosing his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations call me blessed,  
for the Almighty God has done great things for me,  
and holy is His Name.*

We need to think about this Visitation often, and meditate upon it. We need to reflect on this great thing that God has done, and how wondrous it is that He chose Mary as the recipient. What a great responsibility she carried inside her womb, and how graciously she accomplished everything God needed her to do.

This is why we pray the Rosary; this is why we go to Mary constantly and speak to her in prayer about those great things God did in her life. When we pray the Rosary we meditate on the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries– but in this case the second Joyful Mystery.

The reason we meditate on these mysteries and ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us understand and appreciate what they mean, is because we too, as disciples of Christ, have been chosen by God for the same great prize.

The fact is, we too have received Christ from heaven, in our lives, in our bodies, souls, and hearts. Granted, we have not conceived him as a child in the womb like Mary did, but have conceived him nonetheless. We are a “Christopher” who carries him, and we too are called to share this treasure with others.

The mystery of the visitation gives the model of evangelization. Christ must be shared in a spirit of joy, where there is welcome. Evangelization takes place through hospitality: Christ is shared with joy, Christ is received with joy.

Evangelization proceeds from a spiritual joy that emanates from within. In the mystery of the Visitation Christ is never seen, he is within the womb. Were someone to win a great lottery, little good would be accomplished by walking down the street scattering \$100 bills. This is the “Santa Claus” approach, and it is the opposite of true Christmas giving. Instead, the richness of Christ can only be shared via the Joy of a heart that experiences him within, and via the sharing of this joy in a context of hospitality; i.e., according to the example of the Visitation. In the “Santa Claus” approach, it is very easy to scatter gifts that mean little. In the Visitation approach, the gift is always personal.

In order to truly evangelize, like Mary our soul must first “rejoice in God my Savior,” recognize how “blessed” it is, and how God “the Almighty has done great things for me.” Without knowing the grace that has entered our lives, with its accompanying peace and joy, it is not possible announce the Good News to others.

In this final Sunday of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of God into our world, we turn our focus to the Blessed Virgin Mary in that time immediately before the birth; the time of the Visitation. Let us meditate on this Joyful Mystery, that we might share in her joy, and become an active part of the mysteries we celebrate.