

Service for Week 16<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> December  
2024- 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent By  
Chaplain Andy



Visitation, by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1491), depicts Mary visiting her elderly cousin Elizabeth.

**Opening Prayer** Gracious God, open our eyes to the breadth of your love, the wonder of your mercy and the extent of your goodness, and so may we give you the worship and adoration due to you, this and every day. **Amen**

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,  
on earth, as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass  
against us. And lead us not into  
temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory  
for ever and ever.

**Amen**

**Bible Reading Luke 1 39-45 (46-55)**

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of

Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In a loud voice she exclaimed:  
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

**Mary's Song**

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to

Abraham and his descendants forever,  
even as he said to our fathers."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about  
three months and then returned home.

*Holy words, Holy wisdom,*

*Thanks be to God.*

### Reflection

Our reading today contains the Song of  
Mary known as **The Magnificat** (Latin  
for "[My soul] magnifies [the Lord]").  
In this song Mary the blessed Mother  
of Jesus praises God for choosing her,  
a person of very modest means and  
status to bring Jesus the Son of God  
into the world. Mary also goes on to  
praise God for his 'Mighty deeds' the  
things that God has brought about  
over the years.

It is the song that Mary sings as she is  
so full of joy when arriving at her  
cousin Elizabeth's house. To me this is  
one of the most wonderful accounts in  
the gospels – this time when Mary who  
is pregnant travels to stay with  
Elizabeth who is also pregnant.  
Wonderful because it confirms the  
direct connection that God made with  
each one of us by coming in Jesus to  
an ordinary family. Not to a family with  
royal or of high status within that  
community but to a family of humble  
means and to one that we can all  
identify with in human terms whatever  
our circumstances today.

The fact that Mary goes to visit  
Elizabeth, another family member  
while they are both pregnant is

something we can understand and  
identify with. They get together to  
share their joy but also, I am sure to  
share their problems and concerns. In  
those days there was a very high  
infant mortality rate and childbirth held  
many dangers for babies and mothers.

But we know that Mary and Elizabeth  
survived as did their babies Jesus and  
John and from this modest and  
ordinary family came the  
extraordinary.

We may think that some of the  
accounts of the birth of Jesus that we  
will hear again over this Christmas time  
have perhaps become romanticized  
over the years. With some aspects of  
the nativity more like a fairy story told  
to children but not taken entirely  
seriously by adults.

I believe the account of Mary going to  
visit Elizabeth before they both give  
birth brings us back to reality. Back to  
why God came in Jesus to be part of a  
family and connect with humanity- to  
connect with us- you and me. For us to  
know God personally and to share his  
purpose and his love. That with all the  
joy of Mary's song is what we will  
celebrate this Christmas!

**Amen**

### Closing Prayer

I thank you God for coming in Jesus  
and the love you have brought to my  
life now and forevermore.

**Amen**

Prayers inspired by 'Prayerfully Yours' by Nick Fawcett