



This scene of Mary going to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, is the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, you will remember. As I have contemplated this scene, first, I always thought about Mary travelling to see her cousin. What must she have been thinking on the way? The angel, Gabriel, had just come to Mary and told her that she would be with child by the power of the Holy Spirit and that this child would be the Savior. She accepts God's plan, fully and completely, even though she may not understand completely.

Now she travels to her cousin Elizabeth who is, well, old and barren. She never has been able to bear children. And now a miracle: she is with child, Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. What must Mary have been thinking on the way? She certainly wouldn't have been boastful – even just to herself: “Wow! I am lucky to have all this happen to me!” – No. She probably wasn't in shock. The Blessed Mother is too humble and serene to have even this shake her in that way.

I imagine that she was simply awestruck at the greatness and beauty of God's plan. What power God has! And yet, He wields that power in a way that is so perfect. Perfect, so as not to overwhelm us. Perfect, so as not to tear us apart. He's coming as a baby, one of us – human in every way and still fully divine.

By the way, notice that the Gospel says that Mary traveled “in haste” to the hill country. Why “in haste”? Mary was thinking of Elizabeth, this old woman who is now with child. She knew that Elizabeth needs her help so she goes in haste.

Then, Mary arrives and John the Baptist, even in the womb, recognizes that God has come to him. How can a baby in the womb recognize another baby in the womb? It is a mystical moment, not one that can be understood merely by human logic. Mystically John recognizes the Son of God, and he leaps for joy in his mother's womb.

What of Elizabeth too? Mary has not phoned ahead – there are no phones. Mary has not told her what has happened. They have not spoken. But mystically Elizabeth knows by God's enlightening power. She knows that Mary is pregnant and that the child in her womb is the Savior. She knows. She feels John in her womb stir for joy and she knows that the Mother of God has come to her, and that the Lord of the Universe is in her womb.

Elizabeth praises Mary for her faithfulness to God, for her belief in the Word of God spoken to her. Again, notice what Mary does with that praise. We didn't have it here in this passage today, but immediately after this passage Mary directs the praise that she has received to God in her hymn of praise known as the Magnificat. We know it in English. Mary says, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Unfortunately, however, the English translation is a little lame. It doesn't capture the full depth of Mary's response. Her response is translated in to Latin this way: *Magnificat Dominum anima mea*, or simply, "My soul magnifies the Lord".

Magnificat: "magnifies". So Mary here isn't saying that the praise doesn't matter or that you shouldn't be praising me. She is saying, "You praise me because you see what God has done in me." My soul magnifies the Lord. You are able to see God's action in my soul, and it is God that you are really praising, not me. She directs all praise to God.

Mary goes on then, again the Latin translation: *et exsultavit spiritus meum in Deo salutary meo*. "My spirit exults in God my Savior." *Exsultavit* – "Exalts". God's work in her fills her with the greatest joy – she exalts.

Some people fear that if they allow God to do His work in them, that somehow this will take away their freedom, that it will make them a slave. But exactly the opposite is true. If we allow God to work in us, we find true freedom, we become the human that God created us to be, and that fills us with joy. Just as Mary exulted in joy because of the great things that God had done in her.

My friends, as we prepare for Christmas, these are the mysteries that we should be pondering. These are the mysteries of our salvation, and as we ponder them the Lord prepares our hearts for the great celebration of Christmas.

Fr. Mark Gurtner at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend
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