

Read

Micah 5:1-4a

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16,
18-19

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

LIVING THE WORD

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 19, 2021



REFLECTION

Our bodies know. When danger strikes, our bodies flood with adrenaline to keep us alert. When a loved one visits, our bodies fill with endorphins, the good chemicals that signal warmth and affection. Think about the last time you had a “gut reaction.” Often our bodies know what to do first while the mind plays catch-up!

In today’s Gospel, Elizabeth has a “womb reaction” as soon as her cousin Mary walks through the door. The child she carries inside her body leaps for joy—even the unborn child knows something special is going on! God gifted human beings with bodies that can carry incredible wisdom. By taking on a human body, Jesus elevated humankind to be sharers in the divine life. During this season of Advent, as we inch closer to the birth of Jesus, may our bodies, minds, and hearts be filled with the peace and joy of knowing our God is with us. Like Elizabeth, may we let our bodies be free to greet Christ when he comes into our midst.



ACTION

Pause the next time you have a gut reaction. Don’t just let the moment go by. Instead, pay attention to how your body feels. Make note of the different information your body is trying to tell you. Are you safe? Are you happy or upset? Our emotions and bodily feelings are important sources of wisdom, along with our mind. All can be used to make decisions.

“Our body is like armor. Our soul is like the warrior. Take care of both, and you will be ready for what comes.”

— St. Syncletica



? QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today’s readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How do you know when you know something?
- ❖ How can your body help you come to know something about God?



December 19, 2021

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #12C

Micah 5:1-4a

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

The presence of Jesus on earth was made known by a tiny child. This unborn baby, who was John the Baptist, leapt for joy in his mother's womb when he recognized the presence of Mary and baby Jesus. Like John, we too can rejoice in Jesus. We can rejoice in Jesus by striving to be obedient to God, in imitation of Mary. In today's Gospel, we hear that Mary was "blessed among women." We see clearly that she embodied this through the grace of the Holy Spirit guiding her life. In earthly knowledge of Jesus, our Lord made himself known among women and children first; the joyous scene at Elizabeth's home clearly illustrates this point. Later the Messiah would be known to the poor shepherds, and to the Magi from the east. In a society where importance and order were often organized by levels of power, the Lord of all creation was greeted by the quiet and humble members of society.

Q FOCUS: *We can prepare for Christ by imitating Mary's spirit of humble obedience to God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

As we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we now enter into the last week of Advent. We continue the O Antiphons that began late last week. This week's antiphons are as follows, beginning with December 19: O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring/Radiant Dawn, O King of Nations, and

O Emmanuel/God with us. Find the lyrics to the traditional hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" online or borrow a few hymnals from your parish and sing it together as a group. These titles for Jesus remind us what it is we are preparing for during Advent—not presents and family gatherings, but the savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Church Teaching Connection

The Church teaches that we must care for the most helpless in our society. Who are these people who require a voice? The poor, the persecuted, the unborn, and the elderly—these people, and many other groups should be able to depend on the Church to lift their voices in defense of what is right, good, and moral. The dignity of the human person transcends age, race, place of birth, and level of ability or disability. We are called to defend human life at its most vulnerable (see *Christifidelis laici*, 38).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 1:39-45

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Mary set out 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, “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.”

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today's Gospel passage is often referred to as “the visitation of Mary.” It recounts the story of Mary, even though she just found out that she is pregnant with Jesus, going to visit her cousin Elizabeth who is with child, even though she is very old. When Mary arrives, Elizabeth turns the attention to Mary. What does it mean when Elizabeth says Mary is “blessed among women?” Why do we say those words when we pray the Rosary? Let's take a moment to pray together the words of the Rosary (beginning with “Hail Mary . . .”).

► We echo the words Elizabeth proclaimed when Mary entered her home. What do these words tell us about Mary, and what do they tell us about her Son?

This reading occurs in the time between the annunciation and Mary's formal marriage to Joseph. The young woman, already betrothed, had gone to Judah to see Elizabeth, whom the angel of the Lord had told her was pregnant even though she was old and considered barren. Elizabeth was pregnant with Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. Even from the womb, St. John the Baptist was pointing toward and preparing the way for Jesus, who was present in Mary's womb.

We have the wonderful image of the tiny John leaping for joy in his mother's womb. He recognized the presence of our Lord and Jesus' holy mother.

► We know that Jesus is God, but what about Mary? Why is she important to who Jesus is?

Mary is a fully human person, like us, but because God preserved Mary from sin (which is what we celebrate on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception), she was uniquely able to cooperate with God's grace and become the Blessed Mother. Mary believed the message that the Lord spoke to her through the angel. She knew that God would send a Messiah—and like every Jewish person she awaited his arrival. When she was asked to be God's own mother, she believed in God's goodness, mercy, and grace, and gave her consent to be the Mother of God. Mary is our model of how humans can cooperate with God's grace. In her own way, by her cooperation with God's grace and her joyful acceptance of God's will in her life, Mary prepared the way for the Lord. Mary is an example of what humanity can be like, redeemed from sin. We prepare for the coming of Christ when we turn away from sin and accept God in our lives.

In today's Gospel, we see a faithful group of four; two unborn babies and two faithful women. On earth, these four alone knew that the King of Kings had come to earth. Emmanuel, God-with-us, had come, though his existence wasn't known to most of the earth. God didn't reveal his son to the powerful, strong, rich, and proud; God revealed it to poor women from an occupied land, and the unborn son of a faithful couple. As we have seen throughout this season of Advent, God prefers humility and faithfulness over power and prestige.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the “Church Teaching Connection” on page 88.

With the Jewish people, Mary and Elizabeth faithfully waited for the Messiah.

John the Baptist, an unborn baby, recognized Jesus and Mary and leapt for joy.

Mary cooperated with God's grace.

Act on the Word

Cooperating with God's Grace

For this activity, you will need enough Bibles for each person or small group to have one.

Mary is a wonderful example of how we can prepare for the coming of Christ. She fully cooperated with God's will and responded with trust and confidence in all that God was doing in the world. We prepare for Christ's coming by opening our hearts to God and choosing to act with mercy and goodness.

Divide the young people into at least three small groups. Depending on the number of groups, assign each group one of the following passages or pairs of passages from the same Gospel.

✧ Matthew 1:18-25 (and) Matthew 2

✧ Luke 1:26-56 (and) Luke 2

✧ John 2:1-12 (and) John 19:16-30

These are passages in which the Virgin Mary is mentioned or has a large role. Have the groups read their assigned section and discuss Mary's role and what we can learn from her as we strive to live as disciples of Christ. They can consider the following questions during their discussion.

- ✧ What situations does Mary find herself in?
- ✧ How does she respond to each situation?
- ✧ How does her response model Christian discipleship?
- ✧ Based on these passages, what role does Mary have in God's plan of salvation?

✧ What can we learn from reflecting on Mary? How can this help us as we try to cooperate with God's grace in our daily lives?

After the groups have finished their discussions, come back together as a large group and invite the teens to share any insights they gained. Encourage them to choose one way that they can intentionally follow Mary's example of discipleship during the upcoming Christmas season.

Closing Prayer

*God of day and God of darkness,
you revealed the coming of your Son
into our world through the message
of an angel.*

*May we attune our hearts to the
many ways
you break into our lives every day,
beckoning us to follow.*

*Let us always be attentive
and thankful for the blessings we ourselves
and others receive when open to doing
your will.*

*We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.