

Micah 5:1-4a

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

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 22, 2024



REFLECTION

This Sunday's Gospel tells us that Mary traveled to help her pregnant cousin, Elizabeth, after the angel Gabriel's visit. The baby inside Elizabeth leaped for joy when Mary greeted her cousin. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth proclaims Mary's blessed and grace-filled state, recognizing God's presence within her in the person of the unborn Christ.

God chose to begin earthly life the same way we all do—as a completely helpless embryo, voiceless and unseen. And then the unborn John the Baptist was the very first messenger of Christ's coming, leaping for joy in Elizabeth's womb!

How often do we miss God's presence in our lives because it is quiet or hidden? To discover God hidden in the small and the powerless, we need to stay open to the Holy Spirit, like Elizabeth, and seek out opportunities to serve others, especially the powerless and the voiceless. As Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25:40, when we serve and care for the least among us with compassion and love, we are serving Christ himself.



ACTION

This week, focus on celebrating the gift of new life and showing your support for those who may be struggling financially or emotionally with a pregnancy. Consider organizing a baby shower for a friend or family member who is expecting. Alternately, consider donating money, supplies, gifts, or time to a local organization that supports women with crisis pregnancies or young families. There might be one such organization at your parish that you could become involved with.



“Look Like a Fool”—
Matt Maher https://youtu.be/J_CQ9XqbccE

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Why do you think Mary went to visit Elizabeth? What role do friends and family play during the big moments in our lives?
- ❖ In your communities, what groups of people might be considered small and powerless? In school? On teams or in clubs? At home? In your city? How can you serve them?



December 22, 2024

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

Today's reflection invites the teens to consider the blessings in their lives and the ways they can share God's love with others. We join Mary, who, even while pregnant, journeys to aid her older relative who is herself miraculously pregnant. Both women recognize the numerous blessings that God is pouring out upon them. In return, they praise God and show his love with one another. Their interaction provides an example for us for the way we should respond to God's abundant blessings in our lives, giving praise to God and sharing his love through service to others.

Q FOCUS: *God's love is unending.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

In the midst of the joyous celebrations that surround Christmas, the Church honors martyrs in the days following Christmas. On December 26, St. Stephen is remembered. Stephen was chosen as a deacon in the early Church and proclaimed the Gospel. For this, he was stoned to death. He is considered the first martyr in the Christian church. You can read his story in Acts 6-7. Then, on December 28, the Church remembers the Holy Innocents. This term refers to the all the baby boys (under the age of 2) that Herod had killed when he heard that a new king had been born in Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:16-18). These somber feasts seem out of place with the joy of Christmas, but they remind us of the reason for

Jesus' birth: to proclaim God's truth to the world, no matter the cost.

Church Teaching Connection

"The Gospel passage about Mary's visit to Elizabeth, which we heard at Mass today, prepares us to experience Christmas properly, by communicating to us the dynamism of faith and charity. This dynamism is the work of the Holy Spirit: the Spirit of Love who made Mary's virginal womb fruitful and who spurred her to hasten to the service of her elderly relative. . . . May the Virgin Mary obtain for us the grace to experience an 'extroverted' Christmas, but not a scattered one: extroverted. May our 'I' not be at the center, but rather the 'You' of Jesus and the 'you' of brothers and sisters, especially of those who need a hand. Then we will leave room for the Love that, even today, seeks to become flesh and to come to dwell in our midst" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 23, 2018).

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:

► **When have you sacrificed your comfort for the good of another person?**

► **How does it feel to be of service to someone?**

► **How does it feel to accept help from someone?**

Today's Gospel reading highlights the movement from blessing to praise to service. Immediately before today's reading, we hear the account of the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she will conceive and give birth to God's own Son. And, as if that isn't miraculous enough, the angel tells Mary that her elderly relative Elizabeth is pregnant too! This is where today's reading picks up. As soon as Mary discovered that Elizabeth was miraculously pregnant, she took the nearest donkey to see her, so to speak. Maybe she walked; Scripture doesn't say how she got there. Regardless of her mode of travel, it was not a walk in the park and Mary might have been uncomfortable in her early weeks of pregnancy. But a little discomfort would not stop her. She wanted to be there for her cousin.

As the story continues, so do the miracles. When Mary greets her, the baby in Elizabeth's womb jumps

for joy. Even before he was born, John the Baptist could recognize Jesus. Feeling a baby in the womb kick is a joy unto itself, but for that baby to recognize God is a miracle! Elizabeth also recognizes the presence of God in the womb of Mary and declares those words that are so familiar to us who have prayed the rosary: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Elizabeth recognizes the blessings of God's love and mercy that are being bestowed upon herself and Mary and praises God for his work. There are blessings upon blessings!

► **What are some blessings that you have experienced in your life, or that you have seen in the lives of others?**

An abundance of blessings is part of the nature of God. God never runs short of blessings to give. He blesses Elizabeth and he blesses Mary. He blesses us today with the same love and mercy. Our response to these blessings should imitate the response of Mary and Elizabeth. Both women offer praise to God and respond with a spirit of generous love. God's love does not diminish when it is sent out into the world, it multiplies. For example, in response to the love God has shown both her and Elizabeth, Mary hurries off to be of service to Elizabeth. When we are filled with love, the most natural response is to love more. God's love is an unlimited resource, and we are always invited to share in it and share it with others.

► **What are some ways that you can share the blessing of God's love with others this week and during the Christmas season?**

As Advent comes to a close and we move into Christmas Time, let us rejoice like Elizabeth in the love that is being shared. God blesses us every day and we should respond to him with praise. God is present in our lives and the more we recognize God's faithfulness and love, the more we, in turn, also love others.

One of the easiest ways to do this is to show our love to our immediate family. Strive to make each person feel special. Wake up early and prepare breakfast for your family. Do the dishes without being asked. Use your gifts and talents to show the joy you feel for the people you live with. This is a season of giving! Mary showed her relative love

through service and as we follow her example, we also rejoice with her.

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 96.

God is generous with his blessings.

Those who are blessed share their blessings with others.

During this season, it is important to count our blessings.

Act on the Word

White Elephant

For this activity, you will need small, inexpensive gifts, that have been wrapped (enough for each teen to receive one). Alternatively, you could have the teens each bring in a wrapped gift (with a low price limit, like five dollars). You will also need slips of paper with numbers on them to determine the order of the exchange.

This is a fun activity to help the teens celebrate Christmas by giving and receiving gifts. Even unexpected gifts can be blessings in disguise! This is a variation on a White Elephant gift exchange.

If you are having the teens bring in gifts, provide them with that information a few weeks in advance. Alternatively, you could do this exchange when everyone returns from Christmas break. Tell the teens what the price limit is (keeping it low so that it is affordable for everyone), what types of gifts are and are not allowed, and that the gifts should be wrapped. Be mindful of the financial situation of the young people and have extra gifts available in case anybody is not able to participate because of financial reasons.

Instructions:

- ❖ Arrange the chairs in a circle. Have the gifts in a pile in the middle of the circle.
- ❖ Have the teens choose a numbered slip of paper. This is the order in which they will open gifts.

Then have the teens sit in the circle in the order of their number.

- ❖ The first player selects a gift from the pile and unwraps it. Make sure everyone else can see what the gift is.
- ❖ Each of the following players can choose to either pick a wrapped gift from the pile or steal a previous player's gift. Anyone who gets his or her gift stolen in this way can choose a new gift from the pile or steal from someone else.
- ❖ This game can go on for a while, so to help limit the time, the following rules should be followed. Any one gift can only be stolen once each round. After a gift is stolen three times (over the course of the game), it can no longer be stolen. In each round, there can only be a total of three exchanges (steals or opens). After three have occurred, the next person's number is called and the game continues.
- ❖ After all the players have had a turn, the person who opened the first gift may choose to steal any gift, as long as it hasn't been stolen three times.

Enjoy your time together! At the end of the activity, remind the teens to thank God for their blessings during Christmas and to share their blessings with others by doing small acts of service.

Closing Prayer

*You are the light of the nations, O Lord,
and the promise of salvation for all peoples.
Remember all those who walk in darkness
and renew within us the spirit of your Son
that we might bring forth the light of his love.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
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.