

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The God Bearer arose and journeyed to the hill country, into the Land of Judah. Greeted there with shouts of joy, the house where the God Bearer remained was blessed by the Divine Presence. David, terrified by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant, cried out “How shall the Ark of the Lord come to me?” And there, in the house of Obededom, did the Ark of the Covenant remain for three months.

The God Bearer arose and journeyed to the hill country, into the Land of Judah. There Elizabeth greeted Mary with shouts of joy, crying out “...why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” There, in the house where Zacharias sat mute and Elizabeth shouted for joy, was there great blessing in the presence of the Promised Lord. And there, in that house, did Mary remain for three months.

The Ark of the Covenant held three Divine Gifts: the two Tables of the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai; the staff of Aaron, cut off and dead, that budded to life; and the jar of Manna, the mysterious bread from heaven. Above the Ark was the Mercy Seat, the place where God dwelt physically among His people, the locus of the Divine Mercy that, with the shedding of the blood of the sacrifice, brought plenary remission of the sins of the chosen people of God, Israel.

Mary bore God. The ark of her womb was for a time the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelt physically. It is the Son of God, Mary’s Son, who would fulfill the Law given to Moses. It is the Son of God, Mary’s Son, who, being cut off and dead, would spring to new life.

And it is the Son of God, Mary’s Son, who is the true Bread from Heaven, the Babe of Bethlehem, the House of Bread. He is the Mercy Seat, the locus of Divine Mercy, the very presence of God among His people. It is by the shedding of His Precious Blood that He makes Himself the Once For All Sacrifice, winning the remission of sins for all men of all time.

It is He that filled the Ark of Mary’s womb. So Mary is rightly called “blessed.” The archangel said to her “Blessed art thou among women.” And Elizabeth cried out “Blessed is she who believed...” And Mary is rightly Θεοτόκος, the “God Bearer”, for she, even more than the Ark of the Covenant, bore God. She bore God in her womb, carrying Him as David had journeyed with the Ark to the hill country of Judea. She carried the Nascent Messiah into the house of her cousin, whose womb was filled with the Forerunner, who would be called John.

We call that encounter “The Visitation”, the miraculous event we celebrate this night. But it is not Mary’s visit we celebrate, rather it is the Visitation of the Son she carried, God Incarnate that she bore, as Zacharias proclaims by the Holy Spirit: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people...”

It is more than an historic event, although it is that. It really happened. It happened just as the Scriptures record. But the Visitation is not trapped in history on dusty pages. The Word of God is living and active. The Word became Flesh in Mary’s womb. The Word was borne to the hill country of Judea. The Christian faith is Incarnational. God is not a nebulous spirit that whisks about like a vapor. God has hands and feet, hands and feet like you have. And those hands and feet, formed in the womb of the Virgin, He gave to be pierced for your redemption.

“He who is Mighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name” Mary declared. But you too, you, O Redeemed of Christ, you for whom He died and rose again, He who is Mighty has done great things for you. His might He put aside to be found in weakness. His life He put aside to die your death. And greater than the works of all men of all times is the Great Thing He did for you on Golgotha, and at the empty Garden Tomb.

For you, like David, should be terrified by the presence of the Lord. You too could cry out “How shall the Lord come to me?”, for God is Holy, and you are fallen. Like Nadab and Abihu, to enter into the presence of God rightly ought to invoke holy, consuming fire. But thanks be to God, He has visited and redeemed His people.

His mercy is on those who fear Him, those who fear, trust and love Him above all things. His mercy is on you, you who believe in Him. The arm stretched out on the gibbet of the cross has shown great strength, for that same arm, the Arm of God revealed, rose to new life, defeating sin, death and the devil, and bringing forth the First Fruits of a harvest of holiness. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, He Himself emptying Himself of His Divine powers, and humbling Himself.

And this day, the Child that filled Mary’s womb at the Visitation, the Babe born in Bethlehem, the Man of Nazareth, the Victim of Calvary, the Risen Christ who fills the heavens, fills the hungry with Good Things. He fills you, hungry by faith, with His Body and Blood. You receive Christ. You eat and drink. And you who are filled with the Holy Spirit, your faith leaps with joy at the Blessed Fruit, the Seed that fell from the tree of the cross. He is the Seed that crushes the serpents head, the Seed that undoes the sinful fruit eating of Adam.

You eat and drink, and you are filled with the Divine Presence, the Sacramental Presence of Christ, not in a house in the hill country of Judea, but here this night Christ placed into your mouth and poured across your lips. He stands, as Solomon confesses, behind the wall, Christ concealed in Bread. He who gazed through the lattice of the Virgin’s womb gazes through the lattice of the Chalice, the Beloved bidding you “rise up”, you who He loves, “rise up” and “come”, receive Him for your salvation.

In faith, your soul magnifies the Lord, and your spirit rejoices in God your Savior. And you can wonder with Elizabeth “Why is this granted to me, that the Lord should come to me?” Because God loves you, and blessed are you who believe, for there will be a fulfillment of those things told you from the Lord.

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