

# 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

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For many centuries the Liturgy today has focussed on the role of Our Lady. In cycle A of the readings we hear Joseph's reaction to the message that has conceived her child through the power of the Holy Spirit as part of God's plan for his people. In year B we hear the story of the Annunciation. This year we hear the sequel – Mary's Visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The route she took for the journey must have been very similar to the one she would take to Bethlehem – the village identified as John's birthplace is about five miles from Jerusalem. It would have taken her four days. We are not told whether she journeyed alone, but it was a dangerous journey and she may well have travelled with a caravan. They may have been cousins but given the distance it is unlikely they saw each other very often. The draw of family loyalty and the hope of seeing the sign the angel promised fulfilled overcame any natural sense of fear.

12<sup>th</sup> December was the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and celebrates how Our Lady appeared to a Mexican peasant, St Juan Diego, and an image of her, clearly pregnant and with the appearance of a native Mexican girl, was miraculously impressed on his cloak. Pope Francis offered us some interesting reflections on that occasion. He draws a picture of Our Lady as one who responds to God's call in a very simple way. "Mary teaches us that, in the art of the mission and of hope, many words and programmes aren't necessary. Her method is very simple: she walked and sang."

She sings the Magnificat in praise of God's blessing. "She walked. She walked to Elizabeth's home, to accompany her in the last stage of her pregnancy. She walked hurriedly to Jesus, when the wine ran out at the wedding and then, with greying hair, because of the passing of the years, she walked to Golgotha, to be at the foot of the cross: in that threshold of darkness and pain, she didn't efface herself or go away, she walked to be there. She walked to Tepeyac to accompany Juan Diego and she continues to walk with us when through an image or holy card, a candle or a medal, a Rosary or a Hail Mary, she enters a house, a cell in a prison, a room of a hospital, a home for the elderly, a school, a rehabilitation clinic . . . to say: "Am I not here, I who am your Mother?"

She, more than anyone, knows the surroundings. She is a woman who walks with the delicacy and tenderness of a mother, is hosted in family life, unties one or another knot of the many wrongs we succeed in generating, and she teaches us to stand in the midst of storms. In Mary's school, we learn to be on the way to arrive where we should be: at the foot of the cross and standing in the face of so many lives that have lost or have been robbed of hope.

She sang. Mary walks bearing the joy of one who sings the wonders God has done with the lowliness of His handmaid. Like a good Mother, as She passes She inspires singing, giving voice to so many that, in one way or another, felt they couldn't sing. She is the who gave voice to John — who leaped in his mother's womb, to Elizabeth — who begins to bless —, to the elderly Simeon — and make him prophesy —, She teaches the Word of God His first faltering words.

In Mary's school, we learn that her life was marked not by leadership but by the capacity to make others leaders. She gives courage, teaches us to speak and above all she encourages us to dare to live faith and hope. As the moon reflects the light of the Sun, so Mary reflects the light of Christ around her and helps us to bring that same light into our world today. May we bear witness to the hope and joy of Christ in this Christmas Season and the New Year that lies ahead.