



SUNDAY 19 DECEMBER 2021

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

The Parishes of: Bishop Auckland || Newton Aycliffe & Shildon || Willington
Crook, Tow Law & Wolsingham || Tudhoe || Coundon, Ferryhill & Windlestone

ESCOMB PARTNERSHIP NOTE

4th Sunday of Advent (C): Luke 1: 39-45

Luke the Gospel writer is a people person. An observer who appreciated emotions and relationships. St Paul called him a doctor. I suspect he had a great bedside manner. God has spoken to us through his inspired words.

Today's Gospel carries news of teenage Mary's visit to the mature Elizabeth - two women sharing the mystery of God's purpose during three months preparing for motherhood. They call us to reflect on the power of conversations, time spent exploring in faith-filled wonder what God brings about in us. Don't miss what's going on here. Faith grows bigger when we chance sharing it. What's personal is often most general. We learn from one another. Being open and honest ennobles our humanity.

A word can be electric - "*The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy*". Luke is connecting the mothers of Jesus and John the Baptist and linking the sons they are carrying. Mary and Elizabeth were formed and reformed by the maternal nurturing their roles required. With the Spirit they played their part in the formative years of the Baptist and the Son of God. Brilliant!

Mary and Elizabeth were poignantly not only close to the wonder and mystery of life taking place within them - they're very much aware of the power and presence of God. Elizabeth delights in being visited by "*the mother of my Lord*". To have been a fly on the wall and to listen in to their conversations, their prayers, their joy and sense of awe, would challenge our own humdrum daily routines. How in touch are we with how God is present in our life patterns? How practised in savouring our experience and pondering on our limited openness to God's Spirit? How much of this do we want? We're not just bystanders here - we're being pulled in and questioned.

God's ways are not ours - how easily we can say that - but we're eternal students on a steep learning curve as he reveals himself moment to moment. If we blink we'll miss something. Mary believed, listened and never stopped pondering. She wants Jesus for us too. We need to learn from her style. Today's Gospel picture was certainly not the only time Mary and Elizabeth would have met and spent time and talk together. Share your understandings with a good mate. It creates openings for enlightenment.



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Pope Francis on human dignity

*For Christians, the words of Jesus have a deep meaning. They compel us to recognise Christ himself in each of our abandoned or excluded brothers and sisters. **In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.** (cf. Matthew 25: 40-45).*

Faith has untold power to inspire and sustain our respect for others, for believers come to know that God loves every man and woman with infinite love and thereby confers infinite dignity upon all humanity. We likewise believe that Christ shed his blood for each of us and that no one is beyond the scope of his universal love. If we go to the ultimate source of that love which is the very life of the triune God, we encounter in the community of the three divine persons the origin and perfect model of all life in society. Theology continues to be enriched by its reflection on the great truth.

I sometimes wonder why, in light of this, it took so long for the Church unequivocally to condemn slavery and various forms of violence. Today, with our developed spirituality and theology, we have no excuses. Still, there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different. Faith, and the humanism it inspires, must maintain a critical sense in the face of these tendencies, and prompt an immediate response whenever they rear their heads. For this reason, it is important that catechesis and preaching speak more directly and clearly about the social meaning of existence, the fraternal dimension of spirituality, our conviction of the inalienable dignity of each person, and our reasons for loving and accepting all our brothers and sisters.

- Fratelli Tutti paras 85-86