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The Visitation: Magisterium, Saints, Poets

A selection of texts about
Mary's visitation to her cousin
Elizabeth.

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VOICE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

At Mary's greeting, messianic joy comes over Elizabeth too and "filled with the Holy Spirit ... she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!'" (Lk 1:41-42).

By a higher light, she understands Mary's greatness: more than Jael and Judith, who prefigured her in the Old Testament, she is blessed among women because of the fruit of her womb, Jesus the Messiah.

Elizabeth's exclamation, made "with a loud cry", shows a true religious enthusiasm, which continues to be echoed on the lips of believers in the prayer "Hail Mary", as the Church's song of praise for the great works accomplished by the Most High in the Mother of his Son.

In proclaiming her "blessed among women", Elizabeth points to Mary's faith as the reason for her blessedness: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). Mary's greatness and joy arise from the fact that she is the one who believes.

In view of Mary's excellence, Elizabeth also understands what an honour her visit is for her: "And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Lk 1:43). With the expression "my Lord", Elizabeth recognizes the royal, indeed messianic, dignity of Mary's Son. In the Old Testament this expression was in fact used to address the king (cf. 1 Kgs 1:13,20,21 etc.) and to speak of the Messiah King (Ps 110:1).

The angel had said of Jesus: "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David" (Lk 1:32). "Filled with the Holy Spirit", Elizabeth has the same insight. Later, the paschal glorification of Christ will reveal the sense in which this title is to be understood, that is, a transcendent sense (cf. Jn 20 28; Acts 2:34-36).

With her admiring exclamation, Elizabeth invites us to appreciate all

that the Virgin's presence brings as a gift to the life of every believer.

In the Visitation, the Virgin brings Christ to the Baptist's mother, the Christ who pours out the Holy Spirit. This role of mediatrix is brought out by Elizabeth's very words: "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:44). By the gift of the Holy Spirit, Mary's presence serves as a prelude to Pentecost, confirming a co-operation which, having begun with the Incarnation, is destined to be expressed in the whole work of divine salvation.

*John Paul II, General audience,
October 2, 1996*

The *Magnificat* (Lk 1: 46-55) is a canticle that reveals in filigree the spirituality of the biblical *anawim*, that is, of those faithful who not only recognize themselves as "poor" in the

detachment from all idolatry of riches and power, but also in the profound humility of a heart emptied of the temptation to pride and open to the bursting in of the divine saving grace...

"He has shown strength... he has scattered the proud... he has put down the mighty... he has exalted those of low degree... he has filled the hungry with good things... the rich he has sent empty away... he has helped... Israel".

In these seven divine acts, the "style" that inspires the behaviour of the Lord of history stands out: he takes the part of the lowly. His plan is one that is often hidden beneath the opaque context of human events that see "the proud, the mighty and the rich" triumph.

Yet his secret strength is destined in the end to be revealed, to show who God's true favourites are: "Those who

fear him", faithful to his words: "those of low degree", "the hungry", "his servant Israel"; in other words, the community of the People of God who, like Mary, consist of people who are "poor", pure and simple of heart. It is that "little flock" which is told not to fear, for the Lord has been pleased to give it his Kingdom (cf. Lk 12: 32). And this Canticle invites us to join the tiny flock and the true members of the People of God in purity and simplicity of heart, in God's love.

Let us therefore accept the invitation that St Ambrose, the great Doctor of the Church, addresses to us in his commentary on the text of the *Magnificat*: "May Mary's soul be in each one to magnify the Lord, may Mary's spirit be in each one to rejoice in God; if, according to the flesh, the Mother of Christ is one alone, according to the faith all souls bring forth Christ; each, in fact, welcomes

the Word of God within.... Mary's soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God because, consecrated in soul and spirit to the Father and to the Son, she adores with devout affection one God, from whom come all things and only one Lord, by virtue of whom all things exist" (*Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke*, 2: 26-27).

In this marvellous commentary on the *Magnificat* by St Ambrose, I am always especially moved by the surprising words: "If, according to the flesh the Mother of Christ is one alone, according to the faith all souls bring forth Christ: indeed, each one intimately welcomes the Word of God". Thus, interpreting our Lady's very words, the Holy Doctor invites us to ensure that the Lord can find a dwelling place in our own souls and lives. Not only must we carry him in our hearts, but we must bring him to the world, so that we too can bring

forth Christ for our epoch. Let us pray the Lord to help us praise him with Mary's spirit and soul, and to bring Christ back to our world.

*Benedict XVI, General audience,
February 15, 2006*

VOICE OF THE SAINTS

When the angel revealed his message to the Virgin Mary he gave her a sign to win her trust. He told her of the motherhood of an old and barren woman to show that God is able to do all that he wills.

When she hears this Mary sets out for the hill country. She does not disbelieve God's word; she feels no uncertainty over the message or doubt about the sign. She goes eager in purpose, dutiful in conscience, hastening for joy.

Filled with God, where would she hasten but to the heights? The Holy

Spirit does not proceed by slow, laborious efforts. Quickly, too, the blessings of her coming and the Lord's presence are made clear: as soon as *Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child leapt in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.*

The child leaps in the womb; the mother is filled with the Holy Spirit, but not before her son. Once the son has been filled with the Holy Spirit, he fills his mother with the same Spirit. John leaps for joy, and the spirit of Mary rejoices in her turn. When John leaps for joy Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, but we know that though Mary's spirit rejoices, she does not need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Her son, who is beyond our understanding, is active in his mother in a way beyond our understanding. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit after conceiving John, while Mary is filled with the

Holy Spirit before conceiving the Lord. Elizabeth says: *Blessed are you because you have believed.*

You also are blessed because you have heard and believed. A soul that believes both conceives and brings forth the Word of God and acknowledges his works.

Let Mary's soul be in each of you to proclaim the greatness of the Lord. Let her spirit be in each to rejoice in the Lord. Christ has only one mother in the flesh, but we all bring forth Christ in faith. Every soul receives the Word of God if only it keeps chaste, remaining pure and free from sin, its modesty undefiled. The soul that succeeds in this proclaims the greatness of the Lord, just as Mary's soul magnified the Lord and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. In another place we read: *Magnify the Lord with me.* The Lord is magnified, not because the human

voice can add anything to God but because he is magnified within us. Christ is the image of God, and if the soul does what is right and holy, it magnifies that image of God, in whose likeness it was created and, in magnifying the image of God, the soul has a share in its greatness and is exalted.

*Saint Ambrose of Milan (4th c.)
"Commentary on the Gospel of Luke"*

VOICE OF THE POETS

Salvation to all that will is nigh;

That All, which always is all
everywhere,

Which cannot sin, and yet all sins
must bear,

Which cannot die, yet cannot choose
but die,

Lo, faithful virgin, yields Himself to
lie

In prison, in thy womb; and though
He there

Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet He
will wear,

Taken from thence, flesh, which
death's force may try.

Ere by the spheres time was created,
thou

Wast in His mind, who is thy Son and
Brother;

Whom thou conceivst, conceived; yea
thou art now

Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's
mother;

Thou hast light in dark, and shutst in
little room,

Immensity cloistered in thy dear
womb.

John Donne, 1572-1631

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