

## 4th Sunday of Advent, C Bringing Christ to Others, Mary

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to view a painting that was temporarily on display at the Ghent Art Museum in Norfolk VA. (They pronounced it Naw-Fawk) I had never seen a painting like it before or since. It was called [The Virgin, Infant Jesus and John the Baptist by William Adolphe Bouguereau](#). (Only the guide gave the title in French, so it sounded almost as pretty as the picture itself).

It depicted Mary, sitting on a white marble throne, very calmly looking down on a chubby, curly-haired, cherub-like Jesus caressing the cheek of the slightly older John. The painting truly touched me and I felt amazingly.....relaxed. There was something just very serene and peaceful about the painting.

We do not know if Jesus and John played together as young children. It is nice to think that they might have, but that period of the life of Jesus is not documented in the Holy Scriptures and in writings outside of scriptures stories are speculative, at best.

In fact, until Jesus comes to John to be Baptized in the Jordan, the only documented meeting between Jesus and John the Baptist is in today's Gospel.

And it was something very special.....Something so important in the life of Jesus, that it is one of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary. It is an event that has been meditated upon, prayed over and written about for centuries.

And, unlike the painting, there is very little that is serene or peaceful in this narrative. Mary leaves in **haste**. A baby **leaps** in a womb and Elizabeth **cries out in a loud voice**.

This is a very real and an extremely human event with a clearly Divine touch. We don't think about this, but Mary was pregnant. We put that into a very neat and orderly box when we do think about it, but the incarnation was God becoming fully and

completely human. That means, He grew and was formed in Mary's womb in the same progression, along the same schedule, along the same time-line as you and I were. God became human cell-by-cell-by-cell. What a huge statement God has made about the value and reality of human life from the very instant of conception by humbling Himself to be conceived! How can the Church stand anywhere but for Life?

For the first time in Luke's Gospel, here we are introduced to the person of Jesus Christ. Even though He is probably only about a week old inside of Mary's womb, He is already busy with the work of Salvation!

When a woman becomes aware that she is pregnant, there is a tendency to think immediately of the baby's welfare, for their safety, for their benefit. They begin to think and love and act almost entirely outside of themselves. They are moved and inspired by another.... inside of themselves.

Mary.....thinks immediately of another...Elizabeth, her elderly relative, who, being six-months pregnant, is going to need some help. And so she gets up **in haste** and makes what was probably a four-days journey, on foot, to help another person. That kind of unselfish love, that kind of purposeful action is inspired by the God she carried within her. With the first step Mary took on that journey, she set her feet forever, ...forever... on the road to helping her Son redeem the universe.

She brought with her, in her womb, to the House of Zachariah, Redemption Himself. And so at the mere sound of her voice, the Church Fathers tell us that John the Baptist was Redeemed, freed from Original Sin, not by Mary's voice, but by the God-Man she carried within her, through

The Holy Spirit was poured out to John,.....and....Elizabeth! How else could she proclaim Mary the Mother of her Lord? How else could she name Mary as blessed? How else could Zachariah speak again, and so eloquently of John's mission and the coming of the

Messiah, had God, through Mary, not lived in his home?

Some people say we Catholics talk to much about Mary, we spend too much time writing, reading, praying to Mary. We honor her because God honored her above all creatures. Immaculately Conceived, mysteriously redeemed, unique in all of human history Mary is the one who brought Christ, to John, to Elizabeth, to the wedding at Cana, and to the whole universe. The Father GAVE us the Son, but Mary brought Him to us!

It is her greatest joy, to bring Jesus, to point to her Son, to hold Him up for all to see and know, and it pleases the Son when we honor His mother.

*(Slightly longer PAUSE)*

Last week John the Baptist, as an adult, proclaimed that to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom, to prepare for the coming of God, we are to act justly.

We too are called to be Christ-bearers.

If Mary, who bore Jesus in her body, had as her first concern, bringing Jesus to another by her presence to serve, how can we, who receive His body and blood, who take Him into our bodies, do any less than show Jesus to everyone we meet?

Are our hands and feet, when placed in the service of our neighbors, our families. anyone in need, all that different from the hands and feet of the one who thought and acted to serve Elizabeth?

Is the sound of our voices to the lonely, the hurting, the forgotten, the estranged, all that different than the voice of the first bearer of Christ?