

**Deacon Brian Cordeiro – Homily – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent – 091219-20**

The birth of a child is a very exciting experience. Even before the baby is born, it is a time of great excitement and expectation as the baby grows inside the womb of the mother. The foetus begins to develop eyes, hands, feet and other human features. Then the baby begins to move and kick and mother, father, siblings, grandparents all want to touch this very human experience. There is something wonderful and earthy surrounding the birth of a baby.

We are 5 days away from Christmas and it is not surprising that the Gospel wishes to bring us close to the birth of the baby Jesus. **What is distinctive is the fact that the Gospel does so today by focussing entirely on two women-Mary and Elizabeth.** Indeed, today's Gospel celebrates women and the gifts that they bring to us and our lives. These two women are the ones that bring into the world Jesus our saviour and his cousin John the Baptist. **These two women are our models of how we can in our turn, welcome Jesus and the Holy Spirit in ourselves and facilitate his welcome by others in their lives.**

The Gospel of Luke brings us into the world of women. Luke starts with the story of the elderly couple Zechariah the priest and his wife Elizabeth, whom we are told is sterile. **Here at least we are told**

**Elizabeth's name. Many women in the Bible are not named even though they play significant roles. They are called mother, daughter, wife or woman.** A person's name is very significant because it tells us something about the mission or role of the person. Thus the name Jesus means "He saves his people". Elizabeth means "God is my fullness". Isn't that a wonderful name and prayer for us "How is God my fullness, all that I am and how can I experience God's fullness this Christmas?"

To set the scene, Mary has just been visited by the angel Gabriel and giving the stunning news that she is to be the mother of Jesus. She does not understand it all; how can a young unmarried virgin girl become a mother? She does not have all the answers, but she knows that she can trust God and so she says "Let it be done to me according to God's word." And all this can happen because of her being open to the Holy Spirit. **But we see in today's Gospel that Mary does not wait.** She realises that her older cousin who is also pregnant would be happy to receive some help. So off she rushes to her assistance. We are told that she went with haste.

So we now come to her meeting with Elizabeth. In this episode, the male voice is absent, giving dramatic emphasis to the women's conversation. **It is important to note that the coming of the Holy Spirit is announced by Luke through two women, Mary and Elizabeth.** Mary as

we have seen through the announcement of the angel Gabriel and now Elizabeth at her meeting with Mary. The prophet John the Baptist jumps and leaps inside Elizabeth as Mary greets her. This is a moment in the Gospel that is best understood through the eyes of women, especially those that have borne children. Elizabeth and Mary have much to share. Both have experienced blessing and both are surprised. Elizabeth did not expect to have children since she was already past the age of child-bearing. Mary is young and her pregnancy will pose problems for her, Joseph and her family.

**These two women show great partnership of faith.** They each announce the good things that God has done for them. They are not in competition with each other and are united in mutual encouragement and support. There are wonderful examples of collaboration among women in the Gospels. Galilean women assisted in Jesus' mission, women embalmed his body before it was placed in the tomb and a woman announces the resurrection to the apostles and disciples. Today, too our church and diocese are blest with women that collaborate and do great work together, most recently in recent years the success of the faith First program can be attributed mainly, though not exclusively, to the work of women.

How do these two women Mary and Elizabeth speak to us today as we prepare for the home stretch before Christmas? Mary is our model of how we can trust entirely in God even when we do not understand all things happening around us. She is, as Elizabeth points out, Jesus' first disciple because of her "be it done unto me according to your word". But Mary speaks to us today about reaching out to another, looking for a way to be of help to him/her. The Holy Spirit is present in every person. But perhaps his presence in this person needs to be re-awakened. Who is the person that needs you to listen to them, who needs you to share their joy or sorrow, who seeks your advice or help? Jesus will be born in their life by you reaching out towards them.

What has Elizabeth to teach us? She teaches us to recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in others. Three times she calls Mary "blessed" in the Gospel. By confirming the blessedness of Mary, she encourages a younger Mary to stand firm in her commitment to the Lord. Who can you bless by your support?

Elizabeth is not only a woman but is also elderly. The elderly are often cast as frail, needy and with diminished physical and mental abilities. But older women and men have wisdom to pass on; they often have compassion

and can help the wounded. The elderly can present a sense of joy even in their frailty.

So as we prepare ourselves in these last few days before Christmas, let us be grateful for the women who have taught us so much-our mothers, wives, women who work in the church and elsewhere. Jesus is about to become a human like us. Let us give thanks by reaching out to those who need us and by supporting those who are trying to live their lives with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, I would like to leave you with one question to reflect on this week:

How can you bring Jesus, God amongst us, into your life and the life of at least one person that you know? Amen.