

Readings: Micah 5: 1 – 4; Ps. 79(80): 1, 2, 14, 15, 17, 18; Hebrews 10: 5 - 10; Luke 1: 39 – 45.

On this last Sunday of Advent the Church focuses our minds and hearts on the place of Mary in the accomplishing of God's plan for the salvation of the human race.

In year A of the Lectionary cycle we heard how Mary's conception of a child *by the Holy Spirit* fulfilled the prophetic promise of a son who the people *will call 'Emmanuel'* – God-with-us.

Last year we heard the familiar Gospel account of the Annunciation in which Mary accepts God's invitation to be the mother of one she *must name Jesus* – that is 'The LORD is Saviour', and who *will be called Son of the Most High*.

Today, in Luke's account of Mary's visit to her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth, emphasis is laid on two aspects of what we have heard in the two previous years.

First, Elizabeth, inspired by the Holy Spirit, recognizes Mary as *the mother of my Lord*. We are to take this description at the highest possible level. 'Lord' – Kyrios in Greek – has an everyday meaning 'master', but it is also the normal word used to translate the never-to-be-spoken name of God. In older English versions of the Old Testament this meaning is indicated by printing it in capitals – LORD. Here Elizabeth is acknowledging that Mary is, so to speak, the Queen Mother of the child who is to be King of Israel. And Elizabeth's unborn son (who will be John the Baptist) shares in this recognition – *the child in my womb leapt for joy!*

The second aspect of the story on which emphasis is placed in today's Gospel Reading is Mary's faith, which is the source of her blessedness: *Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled*.

So Mary is set before us in these two ways – the first is one in which she is unique, for no other human being can lay claim to her title as the Mother of God.

But in the second she is a model and pattern for all Christians. We, too, have heard *the promise made by the Lord* – the promise of Emmanuel – God with us, God sharing our human nature, the promise of God's Son who is to be our Saviour. We – like Mary – are called to believe that promise, and for us too that faith is to be the source of blessedness.