

“A Charlie Brown Christmas” ... “It’s a Wonderful Life” ... “How the Grinch Stole Christmas” ... “Miracle on 34th St.” and more recently ... “A Christmas Story” ... “the Santa Clause” and “Christmas Vacation”; ... These are just a few of the movie and television industry’s contributions to our Christmas traditions. My personal favorite is the 1951 movie, “Scrooge”, one of over 60 (Can you believe it?) English Language versions of the Charles Dickens Classic ... “A Christmas Carol” We find joy and comfort in watching these ... and I’m sure ... other stories ... with their happy and sentimental endings. We watch them again and again ... year after year and ... I think one of the things that must draw us to them might be that ... on one level or another they all seem to be stories of hope ... conversion ... redemption ... certainly all valid Advent themes ... consistent with our time of preparation for the celebration of the coming of our Savior. But our Advent ... our time of preparation is almost over ... a scant 29 hours before we ... here at the Cathedral ... begin our celebration of the Lord’s Birth.

But these stories **also** present themes of joy ... love ... mutual support ... affirmation ... assurance ... themes of the Spirit entering hearts and moving one or more characters to decent and noble actions ... intervention of the Holy Spirit ... themes that help move us into our celebration of Christmas!

We find all these same themes in our Gospel today. I can think of no reading in all of Sacred Scripture more fitting to help us transition from advent preparation to Christmas celebration.

I certainly cannot ... nor can any other homilist you are apt to hear this weekend ... pretend to know much about what these women in today’s Gospel were feeling or thinking ... but we might try ... to do our best to just imagine a little

We have a woman ... we don’t really know how old she is but we are told that she “was advanced in years.” We know that her husband was a priest so we can surmise that she was very high on the social totem pole ... a pillar of the community. We also know that that despite her advanced years ... she was six months pregnant, a fact that she would have found very, very validating in her particular society ... where her years of barrenness had been a source of shame and social reproach. Not only that but ... nothing less than an angel of the Lord ... had foretold great and wonderful things about her son! If ever a woman might have been tempted to feel superior or judgmental it might have been Elizabeth. She was on top of the world!

Now she is getting a visit from her cousin ... a young woman ... a girl really ... who had also recently received a visit from an angel. The results of that visit must have been somewhat unsettling! She had agreed to do what the angel asked ... indeed what her God asked of her. ... She was also promised great ... wonderful ... yet mysterious things concerning **her** son ... and there was certainly joy in that. ... **But** ...

when all was said and done ... when the angel was gone ... she **still** had to live in the world ... in the society she was born into. And **that** was a world where the lot of a young ... unwed ... expectant woman was not a pleasant one! The **best** she could hope for was to be socially ostracized ... to live in disgrace ... her **parents** would be disgraced ... her betrothed would certainly be expected to renounce her ... she could expect no better! The worst that could happen was **really** terrifying ... death by stoning!

We, of course, don't really know all the thoughts and feelings that were going through Mary's mind as she set out on her journey to the hill country of Judah. She must have wondered though ... about what kind of reception she would receive. Elizabeth and Zachary were important people ... religious leaders. How was she going to explain her condition? Would she ... could she be believed? Would she be an embarrassment to them? Would she be shunned ... turned away?

We don't know, of course, what Elizabeth might have done ... how she might have acted ... **without the intervention of the Holy Spirit!** Sometimes ... it seems ... we find it comforting ... affirming ... **to ourselves** ... to belittle and be judgmental and exhibit imagined superiority ... over those **most in need** of love and understanding. Elizabeth certainly **could** have done so ... **but** **SHE WAS OPEN** ... to the Holy Spirit ... and the exchange that took place between these two exceptional ... holy women is certainly one of ... the most loving ... joyous ... supportive ... **and affirming** exchanges found in Sacred Scripture!

So ... might we not each ask ourselves ... as we reach the rapidly approaching end of this Advent season ... as we move into our celebration of Christmas ... where ... how is the Holy Spirit trying to intervene in **my** life? Who is the Holy Spirit calling **me** to show love and understanding to? Who is the Holy Spirit calling **me** to affirm? And most important ... am I **open** to the Holy Spirit? **Please have a joyous & blessed Christmas!!!**