

Rev. Derek Fairman

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent C (Place of Blessings)

In the Gospel passage, we hear the account of the Visitation, whenever the Virgin Mary came to the home of St. Elizabeth. Both women were with child, and they rejoiced in what the Lord had done for them. This is, however, no ordinary visit. This is a time whenever the Virgin Mary brought blessings to her relative. The Virgin Mary brought the Lord into the home.

I want to begin exploring the meaning of the term Daughter Zion, which occurs in some of the prophets. The term Daughter Zion is a synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a place or building stands for another. Daughter Zion refers to the city of Jerusalem, as the city related to the Temple and the worship which took place there, as the capital city and the ruling Davidic dynasty, and sometimes related to the people generally.

One of the functions of Daughter Zion, the city of Jerusalem, was to act as a place of pilgrimage. To the people, Zion was a mother, a spiritual home to which the people would come to find blessings from being in the holy city, where the Lord dwelt. To the Lord, Zion was a kind of daughter because of her dependence upon the Lord. The city of Jerusalem, as a place of pilgrimage, acted as a meeting between the Lord and the whole people, a conduit through which the Lord could bestow His blessings upon the people.

In the Gospel account of the Visitation, we find the Virgin Mary bringing the Lord to the home of Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the unborn St. John the Baptist. The old Daughter Zion, the city of Jerusalem, was not portable, so the people had to come to the city to be in God's presence. The new Daughter Zion could travel, so she came to the house of Zechariah, and she brought the Lord's presence, which brought blessings and joy to the whole house.

The new Daughter Zion brought joy, a characteristic gift of the Virgin Mary wherever she went. The city of Jerusalem was known for its splendor and beauty, and no doubt brought joy to the people. The Virgin Mary brought an even greater joy. The Lord at that point dwelt in the womb of the Virgin Mary, not just in His invisible presence in the Temple in Jerusalem, but in the Incarnate Word of God.

This Fourth Sunday of Advent is a time whenever we remember the Virgin Mary, and particularly her perpetual virginity. Sometimes in the prophets, there is an additional term added to Daughter Zion: Virgin Daughter Zion. It has various meanings in the Old Testament prophets, but for the New Daughter Zion, her virginity symbolized her fidelity to the Lord, and her purity.

The old Daughter Zion, the city of Jerusalem, was a place where the Lord dwelt and where the Lord bestowed His blessings, but it was also a place in which wickedness could dwell. We are probably familiar with the money changers and those selling animals in the Temple area, which the Lord Jesus drove away. We are familiar with the political power in Jerusalem which was opposed to the Lord Jesus. Before that, there was the evil of idolatry which crept into the Temple at the time of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There were foolish kings who were not able to protect the city from invading armies. Yes, there were blessings for the people to be found in Jerusalem, but there were also problems that came with the city.

For Elizabeth, Zechariah, and St. John the Baptist, what they found in the Virgin Mary was pure joy, unadulterated joy which came from the unborn Lord Jesus. There was no joy mixed with anger or envy or any other vice. The Virgin Mary brought the Lord's joy, and did not interfere or attempt to add something of her own. The Virgin Mary was able to bring the Lord's presence to the house of Zechariah, and her virginity is a sign of her faith in the Lord alone.

What about us? As we prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus at Christmas, we ask the Virgin Mary's intercession for us. All that we receive from the Infant Lord comes through the Virgin Mary, and she in no way interferes with the Lord's blessings. Just as the city of Jerusalem was a place where the people would find the Lord's presence and receive His blessings, so the Virgin Mary is a Mediatrix where we can find the Lord and receive His blessings. We recognize that she is the Mediatrix of all graces.

What in our lives needs more joy, or a different kind of joy? Maybe something that brought us joy in the past no longer does, or maybe we need some kind of renewal. It is never too late to find a new kind of joy in our lives. The Lord Jesus is about to come into our lives at Christmas, and what gifts do we want the Lord Jesus to bring to us? How do we want the Lord Jesus' presence to make our lives better?

We might imagine what it would have been like for Zechariah or Elizabeth, to have the Infant Jesus come to your home. It might bring us joy, and a sense of honor. It might make us afraid, because bringing God to our homes makes it too real. The Lord did not come to make Zechariah and Elizabeth afraid. As we approach the altar, we thank the Lord for all that He gives us. The Lord has extended His mercy to us, and has given us all good things. The Lord Jesus has given us the great gift of His Mother to be our spiritual mother and Mediatrix. The Lord Jesus comes not to scare us but to bring us joy, and the Virgin Mary brings us joy too.