

Advent 4, 2012 (Year C)

Psalm 80: 1-8

Micah 5: 2-5a (Hebrews 10: 5-10) Luke 1: 39-45,46-55

A lovely biological gospel today with Mary's and Elizabeth's wombs both containing fetuses, John and Jesus. We even hear of John, the more developed fetus, kicking in the womb. It is a fact that people in Biblical times seemed much more ready to talk without embarrassment of the body and its more intimate parts— think of all the talk of circumcision! If you look for other references in Holy Scripture to parts of the anatomy, you'll find millions. Skulls, hearts, limbs, bones, skin, bellies, bowels, internal organs. And of course Luke describes the son of God developing in Mary's belly – the word in Greek is gaster, from which we get gastric.

Every part of today's Gospel, especially the biological bits, is of huge significance not only to the Christian story, but also in showing how Jesus is the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies.

- In today's Gospel we hear that Mary travelled to the hill country of Judah (Judea) to the home of Elizabeth. In 2 Samuel we are told that the Ark of the Covenant travelled to the hill country of Judah to rest in the house of Obed-edom.
- Mary's womb contained Jesus: the living Word of God enfleshed, the living bread from heaven, who would die but come back to life. The Ark contained the 10 Commandments (the words of God in stone), a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod that came back to life.
- Today we hear that the embryonic John the Baptist, son of a priest who would himself become a priest, leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb at the approach of Mary. In 2 Samuel we read that King David, dressed in a priestly garment, approached the Ark and danced and leapt for joy.
- Today we hear that Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry of joy in the presence God within Mary. we read that David shouted for joy in the presence of God and the holy Ark.
- Today we hear Elizabeth ask, 'Why is this granted unto me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' In 2 Samuel David asks, 'How is it that the Ark of the Lord comes to me?'

I could go on, and on, with parallels between the Ark of the Covenant and Mary. That is, that Mary is the bearer of the divine. Mary's womb is of huge importance to the whole story of Jesus. In Exodus 20 we read that 'God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and then indwelled the Ark.' The Ark became the dwelling place of the presence of God. In Luke 1 we read: 'God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and the indwelled Mary.' Mary's womb became the dwelling place of the presence of God (Luke 1:35).

There is a progression in Holy Scripture about how God speaks to us. In the Garden of Eden the disembodied God speaks directly to Adam and Eve. Once they have been expelled, and for the rest of the Old Testament, the disembodied God speaks only through intermediaries like Moses and Prophets, and makes himself known through strange things like burning bushes. The Israelites try and confine God to the Ark, then to the Holy of Holies in the Temple. But God breaks out in the most spectacular way by becoming one of us. He uses Mary and her womb to do just that. And all the parallels between Mary and the Ark of the Covenant show how instead of being confined to the Ark, the Divine Word is now out in the world as you and me—for Mary represents you and me.

I think the Divine is in our every cell, put there as a result of the divine-human exchange that took place in Mary's womb as she nurtured the growing embryonic Lord within her. We are God's, we belong to God, we are of the divine, from the moment of creation.

The whole point of Christianity is that God became human, like us, and showed us the way. He speaks directly to us when we are still long enough to listen, and allows us to speak directly to him when we take the trouble to do so. It's a difficult job amidst all the static we get from consumerism and the evils of advertising, but we bash on in hope.

This is what we sing about at this time of year. This is what we celebrate on Tuesday—God is present in all of us, individually and together—we are the body of Christ. And our task is to show that presence to the world that so badly needs him.