

Advent 4: Longing

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, **whose origin is from of old, from ancient days**. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace. If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we will raise against them seven shepherds and eight installed as rulers.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the **child leapt in her womb**. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said MAGNIFICAT

Longing

Parallels

God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and then indwelled the Ark. The Ark became the dwelling place of the presence of God [Exodus 40:34-35]

God the Holy Spirit overshadowed and the indwelled Mary. At that time Mary's womb became the dwelling place of the presence of God [Luke 1:35].

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 [Deuteronomy 10:3-5; Hebrews 9:4].

The womb of the Virgin contained Jesus: the living Word of God enfleshed, the living bread from heaven, "the Branch" (Messianic title) who would die but come back to life [Luke 1:35].

The Ark traveled to the hill country of Judah to rest in the house of Obed-edom [2 Samuel 6:1-11]

Mary traveled to the hill country of Judah (Judea) to the home of Elizabeth [Luke 1:39]

Dressed in a priestly ephod, King David approached the Ark and danced and leapt for joy [2 Samuel 6:14]

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 [Luke 1:43]

David shouted for joy in the presence of God and the holy Ark [2 Samuel 6:15]

Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry of joy in the presence God within Mary [Luke 1:42]

David asked, "How is it that the Ark of the Lord comes to me?" [2 Samuel 6:9]

Elizabeth asks, "Why is this granted unto me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" [Luke 1:43]

The Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for 3 months [2 Samuel 6:11]

Mary remained in the house of her cousin Elizabeth for 3 months [Luke 1:56]

The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the Ark [2 Samuel 6:11]

The word "blessed" is used 3 times in Luke 1:39-45 concerning Mary at Elizabeth's house.

The Ark returned to its sanctuary and eventually ends up in Jerusalem where the presence and glory of God is revealed in the newly built Temple [2 Samuel 6:12; 1 Kings 8:9-11]

Mary returned home from visiting Elizabeth and eventually comes to Jerusalem, where she presents God the Son in the Temple [Luke 1:56; 2:21-22]

God made Aaron's rod (which would be kept in the Ark) return to life and budded to prove he was the legitimate High Priest [Numbers 17:8].

God would resurrect His Son, who had become enfleshed in Mary's womb and born to bring salvation to all mankind, to prove He is the eternal High Priest [Hebrews 4:14].

When the Ark was outside the Holy of Holies [when it was being transported] it was to be covered with a blue veil [Numbers 4:4-6]

In Mary's appearances outside of heaven visionaries testify that she wears a blue veil.

In Revelation 11:19 John sees the Ark of the Covenant in heaven [this is the last verse of chapter 11]

In Revelation 12:1 John sees Mary in heaven. It is the same vision Juan Diego saw of Mary in 1531—the Woman clothed with the sun and standing on the moon.

He is, as today's First Reading says, the "ruler...whose origin is from...ancient times." He will come from Bethlehem, where David was born of Jesse and anointed king.

God promised that an heir of David would reign on his throne forever.

Jesus is that heir, the One the prophets promised would restore the scattered tribes of Israel into a new kingdom. He is "the shepherd of Israel," From His throne in heaven, He has "come to save us."

All this is recognized by John when he leaps for joy in his mother's womb. Elizabeth is filled with joy and recognizes that in Mary "the mother of my Lord" has come to her. Elizabeth blesses Mary for her faith that God's Word would be fulfilled in her.

The Church in her liturgy and tradition has long praised Mary as "the Ark of the New Covenant."

The Greek word Luke uses to describe Elizabeth's loud cry of joy (anaphoneo) isn't used anywhere else in the New Testament. And it's found in only five places in the Greek Old Testament - every time used to describe "exultation" before the Ark (see 1 Chronicles 15:28; 16:4-5; 2 Chronicles 5:13).

Coincidences? Hardly. The old Ark contained the tablets of the Law, the manna from the desert and the priestly staff of Aaron (see Hebrews 9:4).

In Mary, the new Ark, we find the Word of God, the Bread of Life and the High Priest of the new people of God (see also Catechism, no. 2676).

Mary is you and me.

We are the ark.

In a way, that is the trend of salvation history: God utterly other, to God both within and without. Immanent and transcendent.

A glorious exchange

bread, meat – anyway food

church as food

not just the intellectual part of Christianity

but the physical part: the sounds, the sights, the smells

desiring god. John Neaum

have sense of longing for God

The 'supernatural existential', therefore, present in all humanity tends dynamically towards its irrevocable climax in Jesus Christ.

The other assumption is that we have in us a longing for something else. And I'm certain we all have this hole within. Some people go to football matches for it. Some people long for chocolate. Some people go shopping—and we see the agony when suddenly it dawns that shopping power is being curtailed by economic circumstance.

But everything fails to satisfy what Schopenhauer calls "a certain trace of silent sadness... a consciousness that results from knowledge of the vanity of all achievements and of the suffering of all life, not merely one's own."

Some of us call this the inclination to the divine. I think it is in our every cell, put there as a result of the divine-human exchange that took place in Mary's uterus 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. We need to let this urge for the divine, flower through prayer and meditation and worship—and enjoyment of life.

Our response is to hearken to it: a word that carries with it a sense of listening, certainly, but also one of acting in accordance with what we hear: aligning our will with the divine will. It's a difficult job amidst all the static we get from consumerism and the evils of advertising, but we bash on in hope.

Not a longing to power, but a longing to fulfilment.

All this comes from the example of Mary: to accept that we are not in control, to yield to power.