

O God of our salvation, pour Your grace into our hearts; that, as at the message of an angel, Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and became the mother of the Lord and the most blessed among women, and Elizabeth was filled by the Spirit at Mary's greeting causing her baby to leap in her womb, so we, believing Your word, may receive Christ to dwell in our hearts through the same Spirit and thereby our life make manifest the mystery of His incarnation; who has exalted our human nature into the glory of His Godhead, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (cf. Parish Prayers, ed. F Coloquhoun, p. 133-34.)

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."

In Christ Jesus, whose Word fills us with His Spirit, dear fellow redeemed:

You may be familiar with this seasonal exclamation: "*It's a Christmas Miracle!*" It usually is expressed at an unexpected coincidence that takes place around Christmas Day. For you *Seinfelders* out there, you may even recall Kramer declaring with great enthusiasm: "*It's a Festivus Miracle!*" And while hearing these spontaneous observations, which elicit smiles and laughter at these joyous times, they remain in the end rather meaningless.

But our text is filled with legitimate miracles, which should bring joy to our hearts with real everlasting meaning. So, as we consider it, let us exclaim: "**It's an Advent Miracle!**" – **Of Births and Rebirths.**

# I

Mary, having just had the miraculous encounter with Gabriel and through that divine word spoken, the Spirit overshadowed her and the Christ Child was conceived in her womb, she now visits her cousin Elizabeth. But the Spirit was not now inactive. Upon the greeting of Mary, Elizabeth was filled with the same Holy Spirit and her child miraculously conceived in her old age leaped in her womb. God the Son, true man entered the room, and the Spirit was at work through Him.

God come in the Virgin's womb is an Advent miracle indeed! He came not to judge and condemn but to save. The births that would result through these two conceptions, one through a virgin and the other through a barren woman well advanced in years truly are miracles. Neither was something

natural and ordinary. Divine intervention performed the supernatural, an *Advent Miracle* for sure which led to the true *Christmas Miracle*.

How Elizabeth, even her unborn child could grasp these mysteries can only be attributed to the working of the Spirit. Paul observes to the Corinthians: “we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, ... But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For ... also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

Mary and Elizabeth were believers, not by their decisions but through the working of rebirth in them by the Spirit. Elizabeth recognized this miraculous working for Mary when she said: “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” There was nothing to observe through Mary’s senses to inform her that she now was the mother of the Lord, but she nevertheless trusted the promise. She did ask Gabriel “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

After it was explained to her that it would be the work of the Holy Spirit, and that Elizabeth in her old age was miraculously expecting a child, Mary said: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.” Similarly, Elizabeth believed the Spirit wrought revelation to her and said to Mary: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”

Both of these women born again by the working of the Spirit, no doubt early in their lives, showed signs of their humble faith which took God at His Word. Neither thought they were deserving of any of these miracles, but believe them they did.

## II

So it is for you my fellow redeemed. You believe in these *Advent Miracles*, especially the One that impacts you the most – the birth of the Son of God in the flesh through the holy conception of the Virgin Mary. You

too have been born again by the work of the Spirit. With such faith, you trust the one born of Mary did all to save you from your sins, from your deserved death and your just wage of everlasting punishment in hell.

It was at this point in her visit with Elizabeth that Mary sang her song, known to most of us as the *Magnificat*. It is included as a Cantic in the service of Vespers and begins: "My soul magnifies the Lord; and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." With Elizabeth we honor Mary as the blessed mother of our Lord, but we do not worship her nor do we pray to her. She too was a sinner in need of a Savior as she confesses in her song. She also acknowledged that her Savior God has "mercy on those that fear Him from generation to generation." You and I are included in this ongoing miracle through faith in her Son. And as Mary also acknowledges, which we do, "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." She is the blessed Virgin Mary, the very mother of God – rightly understood.

Tonight and tomorrow we once again have opportunity to worship the fruit of Mary's womb through which we too have been blessed beyond measure. Through faith in Jesus you receive forgiveness of all your sins, life everlasting which is your possession right now in the midst of this world of death and corruption, and eternal salvation which will never be taken from you. As many of us will receive Him most intimately in His holy meal we often sing to Jesus in response: "May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary, That our sins and sorrows did carry, And Thy blood for us plead In all trial, fear and need: O Lord, have mercy!"

In another hymn we also confess this to Jesus with joy: "Thou our throbbing flesh hast worn, Thou our mortal griefs hast borne, Thou has shed the human tear; Jesus, Son of Mary, hear." The miracle of the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus is recognized in the feast of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Paul writing to the Galatians observed these things when he said: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a [child], and if a [child], then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now ... you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God."

Historically December 25 marks some *Christmas Miracles* which you may have heard about: *on Christmas Day* in 1776 George Washington and

the Continental Army crossed the Delaware River, it was a daring nighttime crossing that produced a surprise victory over the Hessian troops, and served as a morale booster as the Revolutionary War continued; *on Christmas Day* in 1868 Pres. Andrew Johnson issued a final pardon to Confederate soldiers, which brought an end to that bloody conflict for many; *on Christmas Day* in 1914 during WWI there was a spontaneous cease fire between the German and the French/British troops with a singing of carols and sharing of provisions. These could all be considered *Christmas Miracles* by those positively affected.

However, those events were temporary reprieves and only benefitted some – not the Hessian troops; not the former slaves who would be oppressed for at least another 100 years along with their descendants; not the many casualties of WWI for the next 4 years. The true miracle of God becoming flesh and saving us all from this place of pain and suffering, war and death was for all people and not only for all time, but also for all eternity. Rejoice in all the miracles we can observe these days, not least of which is the miracle that you believe all that God has done for you and all mankind through His Son. Through this Babe conceived in the Virgin, your sins, all of them, are forgiven, you are dressed in His garment of perfect righteousness. God be praised for these *Advent Miracles*, through which comes your *Christmas Miracle*! This was no coincidence, but planned from eternity until the time was right. Alleluia! Amen.