

There is a saying, "He (she) who is on fire cannot sit on a chair." Mary, filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, hurried to the mountain country where Elizabeth lived, thereby conveying the Holy Spirit to her cousin and Elizabeth's unborn child.

Pope Benedict XVI has written that the Visitation is more than just a trip into the country for a young girl from Nazareth. As he explains, when Mary "set out in haste" to visit her cousin Elizabeth, she embarked on the world's first Eucharistic procession. She carried Christ into the world. She was a living tabernacle.

And so it is that her cousin became the first to experience Eucharistic adoration, and to share in the first Benediction. "Blessed are you," she says to Mary. "Blessed is the fruit of your womb. Blessed are you who believed." Yes, "Blessed be God, as we offer in adoration."

The Jewish Christians believed that God dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem, but now, the evangelist tells them, God is present in Mary. Like the Ark of the Covenant, God is journeying throughout His land, visiting His chosen people, and blessing them with His presence in Jesus, one we can behold.

Elizabeth's unborn child leaped with joy in recognition that salvation was near. Already, before his birth, John had been touched by the Holy Spirit. No wonder, John would be the first to recognize the presence of Jesus as He began His public ministry!

Next week most of us will receive a variety of Christmas gifts. The surprise in opening gifts is a unique joy. You might say, "Just what I wanted. Just what I needed." Or you might think, "Why did he get me this?" "Who does she think I am?"

+Remember that commercial where the husband gives his wife a treadmill for Christmas and her response is, "You think I'm fat?"

A gift says something about the one who gives the gift. It also says something about the one who receives the gift. Christmas is a gift from God to us - the gift of God's own Son. A gift which says something about God and something about ourselves.

In today's gospel Mary visited Elizabeth, who said, "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" The visitation was a gift that said something about the goodness of Mary. The mother of the Messiah took time to visit the mother of the Messiah's herald. The greater served the lesser.

The greatest gift we can give to the Lord and to others is ourselves. No expensive Christmas present can substitute for that. So often, we cherish the simple presents that express who a person is more than the elaborate ones that try to give us what others think we need.

Mary's simple, helping visit was Elizabeth's "Christmas." Mary's visit was a gift that revealed the goodness of Mary.

But that visit also says something about Elizabeth. Mary's visit elevated the dignity of Elizabeth. Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah. But Elizabeth also had a unique role in salvation. And the gracious deference of the highly honored Mary enhanced the dignity of Elizabeth. Elizabeth expressed her wonderment. "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Her question becomes our Christmas question, "Who am I that my Lord should come to me?" What does God becoming man say about my human life? Notice that this reverses the usual perspective on Christmas. The ordinary question is, "Who is this Child?" As the popular carol asks, "What Child is this?"

But Elizabeth's question offers a different perspective on Christmas: Not, "Who is this Child?" but, "Who am I?" Not, "What does Christmas tell me about Christ?" but, "What does Christmas tell me about myself?" "Who am I that my Lord should come to me?"

Christmas is a gift whose wrapping is very significant. The promised redeemer came wrapped in our human nature. He could have come in other ways, more majestic ways. But he chose to share our weak human nature.

The essence of Christmas is that God humbled himself to share in our human weakness. And when the Son of God assumed our frail human condition he gave a new dignity to every human person.

Christmas has elevated the meaning of human life, the meaning of my life. "Who am I that my Lord should come to me?" Christmas is a gift that honors every human person. As the theologian, Gregory Baum, put it: "In Christ is revealed that the way of God's presence is incarnation. God acts through the human. . . ."

Before Christ's coming, [people] sought the invisible God in temples and shrines; after his coming, they seek him in human life. What is revealed in Christ is that human life is the locus of the divine. We can discover God in the ordinary of everyday life as was found in Jesus' life.

Why is this so? Because all the moments of Christ's life were sacred. Not only his suffering and death, but all his human living was part of his saving work, a part of his holiness. Because of Jesus' incarnation, the same is true of our lives.

That is, our entire human life can be a source of holiness and divine grace; all of human living can be sacred; all our human moments— everything except sin— can be sacred moments – the presence of God. Think of that when washing dishes.

On Christmas Day, Christians open the gift of all gifts — God’s own Son wrapped in our human nature. We marvel at that gift. We are in awe at what that gift tells us about God. And we are challenged by what it says about us. “Who am I that my Lord should come to me?” And he would respond, “You are everything to me. Every moment of your life is sacred.”