

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Micah 5:1-4 - *He shall be peace*

Responsorial Psalm 80 "Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10 – *Here am I, O God, I come to do your will.*

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45 - *Blessed are you who believed that what the Lord spoke would be fulfilled.*

[violin & voice] 🎵 **Happy are they/who believe/that the promise of the Lord/will be fulfilled.** 🎵

Anna This Gospel story is about **Mary's Visit** to **Elizabeth**./There were angels all over the place delivering messages,/ in the verses that come BEFORE this story/but NOT to **Elizabeth**./ She wasn't anybody in particular, herself,/ just someone's **wife**,/somebody's **mother**,/somebody's **cousin**./She was so **happy**,/so **thankful** to be having this child./

**YET** **Elizabeth** was the 1<sup>st</sup>/after the **Angels**,/to greet **Mary**/fully aware/she was in the **presence of Emmanuel**—God with us./

While **Mary** remained with her,/ **Elizabeth** spent her days/in ordinary feminine activities/  
– in loving companionship/& in the holy silence/of expectancy & joy close to Jesus./

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Did you ever reflect on the fact/that **we** may be called/to be like **Elizabeth**?.....Happy to be who we are;/ willing to recognize the Lord's presence/no matter how hidden/it might seem./

With **Mary**/may each of us know/God will always send the courage/to be fully, faithfully human/  
so we can **trust** the **Spirit** of God/who speaks from down deep within us/  
– that we might say/**YES**/to the initiatives of grace, no matter what the cost./

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Peter Mary believed the promise of the first reading: "He shall be peace."

She believed the song she & Elizabeth had often heard in the synagogue

– the song Jesus himself probably sang at his bar mitzvah:

🎵 **Oseh shalom bim-romav, hu ya aseh shalom aleynu - v'al kol y'Israel, v'im ru, im ru amein**  
**Yah-seh shalom, Yah seh shalom shalom aleinu v'al kol y'Israel.** 🎵

**The Official translation** (from a synagogue prayer book I got from a Jewish friend who used to minister with me in Marriage Encounter):

*"May the one who makes peace reign in the heavens, send peace to us,  
to all Israel and to the whole world."*

But the more accurate translation is: "The one who makes peace reign in the heavens,  
**sends** peace to us, to all Israel, & to the whole world."

It is not just a prayer for peace, for shalom, it is a prophesy of the coming of the Prince of Peace.

This is the one **Micah** refers to when he says, "He shall be peace" in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading.

This is the one **Paul** writes of when he says, "He is our peace" in his Letter to the Ephesians.

And what does that peace look like? —

It is much more than the absence of war. It is a state of **reconciled relationship**.

We see it in many scenes during the **Christmas Season**, we even see it in some TV movies.

**Isaiah** paints a picture of that **SHALOM** in Chapter 11 of his prophesy:

*The **wolf** shall be a guest of the **lamb**, & the leopard shall lie down with the **kid**;  
the calf & the young **lion** shall browse together, with a little child to guide them.  
The **cow** & the **bear** shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest;*

*the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, & the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)*

**We have brought a few friends so you can see what the prophet is describing:**  
[bring out wolf, lamb, goat, bear, cow puppets. Demonstrate the the wolf & lamb are friends & the cow, goat & bear are too]

But the gift of peace, made visible in Jesus, is a call to receive peace & to wait in joyful hope for that peace to become real. That is not an invitation to passive complacency, it is a call to active hope. It is a call to be like the prince of peace, & to live the beatitude,

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God."**

And we are all children of the same God.

**The more we live that gift, the more our world will be filled with Shalom;  
the more the earth will be filled with the experience of the Lord who is our peace.**

Anna There is a **story**/about the **coming** of the **Messiah**,/the **prince of peace**,/that has touched our hearts/& carries the message we would like to share/as Christmas approaches./

—The name of the story/is **THE RABBI'S GIFT**/& it goes like this:

There was a famous monastery/which had fallen on very hard times./Formerly its many buildings/**were filled with young monks**/& its big church/**resounded with the singing of the chants**,/ **but**/now it was deserted./— **People no longer came there**/to be nourished by prayer./

—**A handful of old monks**/shuffled through the cloisters/& **praised their God with heavy hearts**./

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Peter *On the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi had built a little hut. He would come there from time to time to fast and pray. No one ever spoke with him, but whenever he appeared, the word would be passed from monk to monk: "The rabbi walks in the woods." "The rabbi walks in the woods." And, for as long as he was there, the monks would feel sustained by his prayerful presence.*

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Anna One day the **abbot** /decided to visit the **rabbi**/ & to open his heart to him./So, after the morning Eucharist,/he set out through the woods./As he approached the hut,/the **abbot saw the rabbi standing**/in the doorway,/his arms outstretched in welcome./

It was as though/he had been waiting there for some time./The 2 embraced like long lost brothers./Then they stepped back & just stood there,/smiling at one another /with smiles/their faces could hardly contain./

After a while the **rabbi** motioned /the **abbot** to enter./In the middle of the room was a wooden table/with the **Scriptures open on it**./They sat there for a moment/in the presence of the **Book**./Then the **rabbi** began to cry./The **abbot** could not contain himself./He covered his face with his hands/ & began to cry too./For the first time in his life, he cried his heart out./The 2 men sat there/like lost children,/filling the hut with their sobs/ & wetting the wood of the table/with their tears./

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Peter *After the tears had ceased to flow & all was quiet again, the rabbi lifted his head. "You & your brothers are serving God with heavy hearts," he said, "You have come to ask a teaching of me. I will give you a teaching, but you can only repeat it once. After that, no one must ever say it aloud again." The rabbi looked straight at the abbot & said, "The Messiah is among you." For a while all was silent. Then the rabbi said, "Now you must go." The abbot left without a word & without ever looking back.*

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**Anna** The next morning, / the abbot called his monks together / in the chapter room. /  
He told them he had / received a teaching / from “the rabbi who walks in the woods” /  
& that this teaching / was never again to be spoken aloud. /  
Then he looked at each of his brothers / & said, “The rabbi said that one of us is the Messiah.” /  
The monks were startled by this saying. / “What could it mean?” / they asked themselves. /  
“Is Br John the Messiah? / Or Fr Matthew? / Or Br Thomas? / Am I the Messiah? / What could this mean?” /  
They were all / deeply puzzled by the rabbi’s teaching. / But **no one** / ever mentioned it again. /

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**Peter** As time went by, the monks began to treat one another with a very special reverence.  
There was a gentle, wholehearted, human quality about them now which was hard to describe but easy to notice. They lived with one another as men who had finally found something. But they prayed the Scriptures together as men who were always looking for something. Occasional visitors found themselves deeply moved by the life of these monks. Before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life of the monks and young men were asking, once again, to become part of the community.

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**Anna** In those days, / the rabbi no longer / walked in the woods. / His hut had fallen into ruins. /  
But, / somehow or other, / the old monks / who had taken his teaching to heart /  
**still felt sustained** / by his prayerful presence. / (Adapted from a story by Francis Dorff, O. Praem)

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**Peter** The Rabbi says: “The Messiah is among you.” He is recalling the words of Isaiah – *they shall call him Emmanuel, God with us. And evoking the prophecy of Micah, He shall be peace*

The Abbot says the same thing in a different way, “One of us is the Messiah.”

The Rabbi is speaking from the Old Covenant between God & the people of Israel,  
The Abbot interprets his words in the light of the birth of Christ.

He completes the promise and describes our call to become Christ for each other.

The monks show us HOW to give birth to Christ in our world.

How to be like Mary.      How to be like Elizabeth.

Mary believes so deeply that she becomes a part of the fulfillment of the promise.  
Her “yes” makes it possible for the Messiah to come as one of us, as a human being.

She lived the words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, “I have come to do your will.”

She sang this verse from Psalm 40 with her life,

♪ ♪ “Here am I, O God, I come to do your will, here am I, I come to do your will.” ♪ ♪

When the Abbot said, “One of us is the Messiah”, he was also saying, “The Messiah is one of us”,  
that is, that the Messiah has been born as a human being through Mary.

**Both of those meanings are contained in the Rabbi’s teaching, “The Messiah is among you.”**

Our call, as Advent spills over into Christmas, is to be like the Rabbi, the Abbot & the monks in the story:  
It is to be like Mary, Joseph, & Elizabeth in the Scripture.

We are called to believe so deeply that The Messiah is among us

that we can SEE Christ in each other, and BE Christ for each other.

When we welcome the stranger fleeing from oppression, hunger and war, we are welcoming Christ

When we care for the sick, we are caring for Christ among us.

When we advocate for the poor & imprisoned and respect persons who are different from us,  
we are advocating for Christ and respecting his dignity.

**Anna** Our call/is to see Christ in ourselves/like Mary, & to give him to each other/by the way we  
respect/& love one another./ Our call/is to be like Elizabeth,/ & to let ourselves be blessed/by the  
presence of Emmanuel,/ God-with-us./

Our call is to believe/that the Messiah,/the Christ/lives in each one of us./ as we hear in this song:

### The Visit by Miriam Therese Winter

She walked in the summer/through the heat on the hill./

**She hurried as one/who went with a will./**

She danced in the sunlight/when the day was done./

**Her heart knew no evening,/who carried the sun./**

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Fresh as a flower/at the first ray of dawn,/

**She came to her cousin/whose morning was gone./**

There leaped a little child/in the ancient womb,/

**And there leaped/a little hope/in ev'ry ancient tomb./**

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Hail, little sister,/who heralds the spring./

**Hail, brave mother,/of whom prophets sing./**

Hail to the moment/beneath your breast./

**May all generations/call you blessed./**

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When you walk/in the summer/through the heat on the hill,/

**When you're wound/with the wind/and one with Her will,/**

♪ **Be brave/with the burden/you are blessed to bear,/**

♪ **For it's Christ/that you carry/ev'rywhere,/ev'rywhere,/ev'rywhere./**



**Peter & Anna & the choir blessing graduates in the Lutheran Church**