

MERCY GLOBAL PRESENCE.

PRESENCE TO SELF AND OTHERS.

INTRODUCTION

We have winter in the Northern hemisphere – a winter like none other. It is a “time to be slow” as John O’Donohue¹ reminds us in his poem of that name.



We know that Winter hides a promise of Spring beneath its coat. It takes faith, hope and courage in these days to listen to the inner voices and remain present as we prepare for a season of giving and receiving. We know too that Covid19 roves our world irrespective of borders and life is fragile. Change too arrives unannounced and we search for a new way of unfolding to the mystery of life that surrounds us.

Time is not a linear path we travel but rather it comes towards us formless and has to be negotiated now – the only time we have. There are moments in our lives when we are aware of our closeness to God. It comes in a flash and cannot be manufactured. Yet it goes as swiftly as it is experienced, and it is as if you come into your own presence in order to awaken the presence of the Divine.



All the great religious traditions offer us ways of contemplation to lead us to awareness of the divine alive at the centre of our being. The challenge is to get past the words to the experience. To be present to self asks us to be unhurried, to find a place where stillness is possible, and every breath and heartbeat assures us of the mystery of presence. These Advent days are days of waiting and expectation.

¹ Excerpt

From Benedictus (Europe)/The Space between us (US)

HYMN²

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 Son.

Fresh as a flower at the first ray of dawn,
She came to her cousin whose morning was gone.
There leapt a little child in the ancient womb
And there leapt a little hope in every ancient tomb.

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.

When you walk in the summer through the heat on the hill,
When your wound with the wind and one with God's will - be brave with the burden
you are blessed to bear, for it's Christ that you carry
everywhere, everywhere, everywhere.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, we rejoice that you revealed yourself in the universe, in nature and in the human person of Jesus at Bethlehem. May Christ continue to be born in our hearts, opening us to ever deeper communion with him and expanding our vision to look through his eyes on the needs of the poorest in our midst.

READING LUKE 1:39-45 NRSVCE

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

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 leaped 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 leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."



² The Visit Sung by Patti Cohenour From Loving You CD (Sacred Folk Songs by Miriam Therese Winter
Medical Mission Sister)
Volume 1 A celebration of all Creation by performing
Artists from many Traditions.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

THE VISITATION³

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

She had not held her secret long enough
To covet it but wished it shared as though
Telling it would tame the terrifying moment
When she, most calm in her own afternoon,
Felt the intrepid angel, heard
His beating wings, his voice across her prayer.

This was the thing she needed to impart
The uncalm moment, the strange interruption,
The angel bringing pain disguised as joy,
But mixed with this was something she could share
And not abandon, simply how
A child sprang in her like the first of seeds.

And in the stillness of that other day
The afternoon exposed its emptiness,
Shadows adrift from light, the long road turning
In a dry sequence of the sun. And she
No apprehensive figure seemed,
Only a moving silence through the land.

And all her journeying was a caressing
Within her mind of secrets to be spoken.
The simple fact of birth soon overshadowed
The shadow of the angel. When she came
Close to her cousin's house she kept
Only the message of her happiness.

And those two women in their quick embrace
Gazed at each other with looks undisturbed
By men or miracles. It was the child
Who laid his shadow on their afternoon
By stirring suddenly, by bringing
Back the broad echoes of those beating wings.



³ Source: The Collected Poems Edited by Emma Mason (Paperback 31st March 2012)



MAGNIFICAT⁴

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
And my spirit exalts in God my saviour
For He has looked with mercy on my lowliness
And my name will be forever exalted.
For the mighty God has done great things for me
And His mercy will reach from age to age

And holy, holy, holy is His name.
And holy, holy, holy is His name.

He has mercy in every generation
He has revealed His power and His glory
He has cast down the mighty in their arrogance
And has lifted up the meek and the lowly
He has come to help His servant Israel
He remembered His promise to our fathers

And holy, holy, holy is His name.
And holy, holy, holy is His name.
And holy, holy, holy is His name.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

In this season of expectation and longing may we contemplate the great truth of the Word made Flesh. May we open to a deeper reality of God in all things. You are present in the encounters and events of our everyday.

May we reflect your mercy to a world in need at this time in our human history and may we sing a new song of hope and love.

⁴ www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zwcXpgJ3SQ
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAY08-WkeqU>

A Blessing for Presence⁵

by John O'Donohue

May you awaken to the mystery of being here
And enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.
May you have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.
May you receive great encouragement when new frontiers beckon.
May you respond to the call of your gift
And find the courage to follow its path.
May the flame of anger free you from falsity.
May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame and anxiety never linger about you.
May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.
May you take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.
May you be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.
May you experience each day as a sacred gift, Woven around the heart of wonder.

⁵ Source: O'Donohue, J., (1998). *Eternal Echoes. Exploring our hunger to belong.* London, Bantam Books. p.139