

# **Catholic Center Christmas Mass and Luncheon**

## **I. Introduction**

First, let me wish you a Merry Christmas! I don't know about you, but I find that Advent passes in flash. I find myself wanting to hold on to it a bit longer not because I'd get my Christmas shopping done if there were a fifth week of Advent! It's more a wish that to savor the season more deeply so as to arrive at Christmas with a heart that is truly watchful in prayer and exultant in God's praises.

So let me say that there are only three more praying days until Christmas! Amid all the busyness of the season, I hope that we will all find a block of time to go and pray in that very private room that is our heart. May Christmas Eve find us watchful in prayer and exultant in God's praise as we celebrate the birth of that Child who is Son of God and Son of Mary.

## **II. Hannah and Mary**

To help us make final spiritual preparations for Christmas, today's liturgy introduces us yet again to Hannah and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. They have a lot to teach us about being watchful in prayer & exultant in God's praise.

Hannah, as you recall, was unable to conceive a child. For her this was the source of immense sadness. So Hannah went into the temple and there prayed earnestly for a child and promised that she would dedicate her child entirely to the Lord. So loud and tearful were her prayers that Eli the High Priest thought she was drunk but upon hearing her out saw her sincerity, blessed her, & sent her home. She promptly conceived Samuel and when he was born, she and her husband presented the child in the temple. Because the child was to be dedicated entirely to the Lord, she left him behind with the High Priest, Eli, who raised him. (This is a practice which the Church discourages).

If Hannah was watchful in prayer, she was also exultant in her praise. When the child was born, she sang a beautiful canticle in which she gives thanks to God for what he had done for her. If you listened closely to the responsorial psalm today you heard that canticle and you also saw how closely it resembles Mary's Magnificat.

So moving to the Gospel we find Mary still at the door of Elizabeth's house. We recall how deeply and obediently Mary listened to God's Word, so much so that she could say, "Let it be done to me according to Your Word." We also recall that Mary went to visit her cousin when she learned that Elizabeth had conceived a child in her advancing years. Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit and Elizabeth was with child thanks to the extraordinary favor God had shown her. Her child, John the Baptist, leapt for joy, so near was the advent of the Messiah. Like a master weaver, Mary took strands of Scripture and wove them into the beautiful canticle of praise we call the Magnificat. "The Lord has done great things for me and holy is his name!"

### **III. Watchful and Exultant**

Alas, Advent zooms by us with Mach 1 speed but, you know, there's no reason why we can have "advent" qualities in our hearts all year long. There's no reason why we can't be watchful in prayer and exultant in God's praise. In fact, those qualities are pretty important to what we do day in and day out. For, if we are watchful in prayer, we, like Hannah and Mary, will come to recognize how God intervenes in our lives, how tender are his mercies, how beautiful are his blessings, even when things may not be going our way. And the more we realize the great and wonderful things God is doing in our lives, the more convincing will be our testimony to Christ and to the Faith as we go about the work of strengthening the life of this local Church.

And what's more, our testimony to God's greatness and mercy will be suffused with a spirit of praise and thanks to the Lord who loves us more than we can ask or imagine. If more people really thought that God does great things for them then we could not keep them away from Church on Sunday! We could not keep them out of formation programs! We would be flooded with volunteers and intentional disciples. Watch prayer. Exultant in praise. The key to Christmas. The key to joy. The key to evangelization! Thank you for all you do. You humble me and make my job easy.

Merry Christmas!