

## **Donnybrook**

19 December 2021 / Family mass

### **Welcome**

Thirteen years ago, before the terrible war started, I was in Syria. In the village of Saidnaya, there is a Greek Orthodox monastery which has a painting, an icon, of our Lady. It is said to be by St Luke. There's another one said to be by him near Bologna, in Italy.

### **Topic**

I don't really believe any pictures are actually by St Luke but you can see why people thought of him as a painter: he paints with words and his stories are very pictorial and somehow they lodge in the mind. A good example would be Zacchaeus – very familiar – but also the the Good Samaritan and the birth stories of Jesus. Also today's Gospel, which has been painted many times.

### **Steps**

In his Gospel so far, he has just told the stories announcing the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus. After our Gospel, the next two stories are the birth of John the Baptist and the Birth of Jesus. In between, stands our Gospel, when the two mothers meet and the two children mysteriously greet. It is like a big painting with five scenes, all connected, carrying a rich message, both human and holy.

Our story is a story of encounter: the two expectant mothers meet. It is very human – one baby even gives a kick in the womb – what one writer called the quickening kick of grace! You can feel the affection and joy felt by Elizabeth and Mary. The story is marked by the three Rs. The old three Rs were reading, writing and arithmetic. But I have a different list: to receive, to recognise, to reciprocate. Reciprocate here means to share with someone, to respond. Elizabeth receives Mary and recognises her as the mother of her Lord. Her greeting has been developed in our familiar prayer, the Hail Mary. Mary responds, in turn, with a powerful prayer (not on our Gospel): My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my saviour.

### **Conclusion**

Over Christmas, even with all the restrictions, we too will have meetings with families and friends. A lot of care goes into making people welcome – decorations, gifts, special food. It would be easy to place all the emphasis on these externals, which have their importance. But the real refreshment comes when we let people not just into our homes but into our lives. The three Rs can help: to receive, to recognise and to reciprocate. When that happens we will all be refreshed by the happiness of good company and we will experience something of the magic of Christmas. We can all ask ourselves: how will I be this Christmas so that other will be the better for our being together?

St Luke, even if he wasn't a painter, would approve!