

## **Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

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Visitation and Shrine blessing  
St. Gianna Home  
Warsaw, ND

“Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”

A short time ago, we blessed a beautiful new shrine to St. Gianna in her chapel across the street. There, before the relics of our beloved saint, we can pray for her intercession, while also contemplating the great love of God for all his children, the born and the unborn. You all know the story of St. Gianna, probably better than I. She was a wife and mother, a physician, and a fervent Catholic. Gianna lived life to the full, giving herself joyfully to her husband and children, but also to the patients she cared for. When she developed uterine cancer at the beginning of her fourth pregnancy, she was determined that her child should live, even if it meant her life would be sacrificed. She made her choice, and one can practically imagine her wonder and awe, her quiet contemplation of the little life growing within her. Gianna was so filled with love for her child, and was so convinced of the sacredness of her child’s life, that she willingly made a gift of her own life as a sign of that love.

And this leads us perfectly into the feast celebrated in the Church today, the Feast of the Visitation. Mary too received the news that she would give birth to a child, but her child was the Son of God. Mary too offered her life to God, so that he could carry out in her his great plan for our salvation. With her yes, Mary become the loving mother of Jesus, who would save us from our sins. And once again, we can practically imagine Mary’s wonder and awe, her quiet contemplation of the One who came to dwell in her womb.

This Feast of the Visitation is a feast of life and a feast of joy. We are welcomed into the intimacy of Mary and Elizabeth’s meeting and their awareness that the children they carry are precious to God. For very different reasons, both of these women must have been shocked beyond words when they found that they were expecting a child, Elizabeth because of her old age, and Mary because she had not yet lived with Joseph. But each of them accepted the child given to them by God, and they did so with reverence for his great blessing.

Elizabeth recognized that she had been especially blessed by God. She was awed by the miracle which had taken place in her womb. But when Elizabeth saw her cousin, she realized that an even greater work of God was present in Mary. Filled with the Holy Spirit, she cried out, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” She was so awed by the miracle which had taken place in Mary’s womb that she felt unworthy even to be in her presence: “And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

And the children themselves show us that life is sacred. When Mary approached, carrying within her the Son of God, the unborn John leaped in his mother’s womb, as if already to acknowledge and worship the Son that Mary carried.

As I said, this is a feast of life, but it is also a feast of joy. Elizabeth’s exclamation was one of exuberant joy, and Luke tells us she was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice. She is

filled with amazement that she has received such a visitor, and she is filled with joy at the wonder of God's grace. And John too expresses the joy of this moment. When he heard the voice of Mary, he leaped for joy. As if to foreshadow what his mission would be, how could he not be joyful in the presence of Christ, the Holy One of God whom he would proclaim and baptize?

And finally, Mary herself is filled with joy. In the great prayer that we call the "Magnificat," she proclaims her joy in the Lord, she rejoices in the great things God has done for her, and she acknowledges that she is blessed. "From this day all generations will call me blessed," and for two thousand years believers like us have proclaimed the blessedness of Mary.

We have all received many blessings from God, though perhaps not as dramatic as that granted to Elizabeth or Mary. But we too are blessed in a beautiful way. Today in a particular way we rejoice in the gift of life. So many here have received the gift of a child from the hand of God. You have embraced this gift and loved your child, just as St. Gianna loved her daughter, and just as Mary loved Jesus. You undoubtedly have made sacrifices for your child. There have been joys, and maybe there have been sorrows too. We all gaze upon the little ones God has brought into the world in this blessed place, and how can we not say with Mary, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Every child is precious and loved by God, and how wonderful it is that we bring these little ones into the world surrounded by love and care, knowing that Jesus too was once such a child.

God loves each one of us, and he comes to us with his grace and mercy. Like Elizabeth, each of us, in wonder and awe, could ask, "Who am I that the Lord himself should come to me?" Before receiving our Lord in Holy Communion, we confess: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof." And it's true, we aren't worthy of this or of any of God's blessings. But the Holy Spirit fills us as he filled Elizabeth, and he enlightens us to see that God's love and his mercy are infinitely greater than our unworthiness. He wants to share with us the gift of life, and he wishes to give us the gift of his only Son. And with Mary, we then can say, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."