

in the presence of the Lord. Jesus is there among them, hidden in Mary's womb. Mary is blessed because she is pregnant with the saviour of the world. Elizabeth rightly calls her the mother of the Lord: the fruit of her womb is the one who will take away the sins of the world.

We speak of God's coming to live a human life as the incarnation. This word literally means "taking flesh". It's a very physical reality; it's about God working in and through a real body and real people. The Israelites had long described God in human ways. Today the prophet Micah and the psalmist foretell how God would come as a shepherd, but one with divine power and majesty. In the same way, God would descend from heaven and protect the people like a gardener caring for a vine. God's hand would stretch over them. God had promised to be close to the people. In becoming one flesh with us, Jesus fulfils this promise, standing beside us. His physical body becomes the place where people can meet the living God, and in the sacrifice of that body on the cross our sins are forgiven.

Application

Very soon we shall be placing the child Jesus in the manger of our Christmas cribs. The figure of that tiny baby reminds us that God has not only blessed us by creating us but also chose to become one with us. God can work through human lives and make them extraordinary. Mary and Elizabeth had faith to believe God's promises; they were prepared to trust God's word.

The visitation is more than a nice story. It's an invitation to deepen our faith and trust in God's love. It's a call to recognise the presence of Christ in the people we meet and to allow Christ to shine through our often fragile human lives. Mary and Elizabeth were unique in what God asked of them. We too have a unique calling. As someone once said, we are all meant to be mothers of God, because Jesus needs to be continually born in our lives.