

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**December 22, 2018**

As we reflect on the gospel today I want to focus on a very specific group of people in our parishes. I want to talk about grandmas. All the grandmas in our parishes are represented by a central figure in the gospel today. Elizabeth, even though she is just now expecting her first child, it is in her old age, or better put, beyond her childbearing years, that all this takes place.

So grandmas and all women who are of a grandma age, this is about you. I see it all the time in our parishes. Women who form the backbone of our parishes serve in the sanctuary and work in parish offices; visit the sick and train the young. They pass on their wisdom to the next generation, as Elizabeth is doing in this story. It is our grandmas who care for children when parents are at work or absent; they listen with compassion to the stories of the needy, humiliated and wounded. Grandmothers, often are the ones who greet us with a smile and listen to our troubles. Their life experience gives them perspective and grandmas that I know do not put up with boloney. Thanks to their humor they can teach us not to take everything so seriously – and isn't that a gracious gift from God?

Pregnant women say they find comfort in being with one another, sharing hopes and fears, gaining practical information about pregnancy and their changing bodies. Both Elizabeth and Mary have much to share, both have experienced blessings – both are surprised. Both their pregnancies, to say the least, were unexpected. Elizabeth expected to go to her grave without having children. Mary is young, but her pregnancy will pose problems for her, Joseph and her family. Neither woman planned these events to happen in this way. Elizabeth proclaims what is happening: the Spirit of God is present and acting on behalf of humanity. The Word of God is being "fulfilled." Three times Elizabeth announces the good news; God is doing a "blessed" thing for Mary and also for all humanity. "Blessed are you among women, blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

When I speak with grandmas these days I hear a common theme. Of course they are concerned about their children and grandchildren. They worry about their well-being. So often they expressed to me their deep concern that their children or

grandchildren have left the church. They worry about drugs and prurient influences. They worry about suicide and depression in our community.

I don't doubt that estrangement from the church and the looming drug and suicide and depression problems are related. At Christmas time it is very popular to go to grandma's house. We go there for comfort and reassurance. What we receive is far more than milk and cookies. May the journey to grandma's house this Christmas be a stepping stone in coming back to Jesus and his church.

My grandma and my great grandma lived with me in my early years. Even though that was over half a century ago, they deeply influence my life. Over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we go. It is a tangible journey to Bethlehem and the hope and joy of Christmas.