The entire preparation for Christmas can be nerve-wracking to many people. In the next four days we may see a last-minute scramble for Christmas presents. Homemakers will carefully plan the dishes to be served for Noche Buena. The traditional Christmas celebrations among families and in the workplace can also take much of our energy and time.

If you feel like you are constantly running out of time, and that you are unable to cope with the many obligations, take it as a signal that you need to step aside and have a second look at your activities. Christmas is a joyful occasion, and as we look forward to this special day we need not punish ourselves with impossible tasks which weigh down our spirit and cause us to lose our sense of equanimity. The four weeks of Advent are precisely meant to guide us in preparing ourselves spiritually so that we can celebrate Christmas with joy. The last days of Advent lead us to an increasing anticipation of Jesus’ birth. This season reminds us that, thousand of years ago, God himself already made necessary preparations for the birth of his Son by choosing women like Elizabeth and Mary.

In the Song of Songs, God is presented as a passionate lover who woos us. He springs across the mountains, leaps across the hills, then peers into the window of our home. God is very much excited to find us—and in finding us, to delve into our most private spaces and preoccupations. He awakens us from slumber, calls us to abandon our “comfort zones” and to see the landscape transformed in springtime. There are flowers, there are vines ready for pruning, the fig tree puts forth figs, the vines give forth fragrance. The dove is singing a song! The lover solemnly declares: “For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone.”

Springtime comes to both Mary and Elizabeth. God’s wonderful plan was unfolding before their very eyes. Mary wasted no time and took the long journey to the hill country of Judah after the archangel had told her about her cousin Elizabeth, already six months pregnant. The angel also told Mary that she was to become the Mother of the Messiah. Her child is to be named “Jesus” because through this child, God is going to save his people.

Advent is about new life bursting forth in the wombs of Elizabeth and Mary. The elderly cousin who was thought to be sterile is soon giving birth to a son who, in turn, will grow up and become John the Baptist. The younger cousin, a virgin, is giving birth to Jesus, the Savior.

The Visitation is not the private story involving one family alone. This event, at first appearing quite usual, actually points to the ripening of God’s plan not only for the two cousins, but for the entire chosen people Israel to whom they belong. God has shown mercy on Israel, and will now set things right. He will begin doing this by putting life in the womb of a sterile woman and in the womb of a virgin—women who, in the reckoning of the Jews, were disappointments since they have not as yet borne a child.

“The winter is past, the rains are over and gone.” The people who cowered in darkness and fear for a very long time are now going to see the light in the Savior who brings new life to all.

Fr. Paul Marquez, SSP
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
[Cf. Is 7:14, 8:10]
(Replied when there is no opening song)

The Lord and Ruler will be coming soon, and his name will be called Emmanuel, because he will be God-with-us.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(The priest may address the assembly with these or other similar words)

P — At the Annunciation, Mary is told by the angel that her elderly cousin Elizabeth has conceived. This sign is given to help Mary believe the words of the angel. Elizabeth’s pregnancy shows that “nothing will be impossible with God.” Sensitive to God’s will, Mary immediately leaves to visit Elizabeth. The meeting of the two mothers becomes a joyful hymn of praise to God.

Penitential Act

P — Brothers and sisters, let us acknowledge our sins, and prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.
(Pause)

All — I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, (strike your breast) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

P — Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.

P — Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

Gloria

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Merciful Lord, hear the prayers of your people, who celebrate the coming of your Son in human flesh, that when he comes again in glory we may gain the prize of eternal life.

We ask this through your Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Sg 2:8-14] (Sit)

The Song of Songs reflects God’s love for his people Israel. Here, the young woman, who symbolizes the people, is delighted when the bridegroom, who is the Lord, comes to visit her.

A reading from the Song of Songs

HARK! my lover—here he comes springing across the mountains, leaping across the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Here he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattices. My lover speaks; he says to me, “Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come! For see, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of pruning the vines has come, and the song of the dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance. Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come! “O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and you are lovely.”

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 33)

R — Cry out with joy to the Lord, you holy ones sing a new song to him.

[Music: sr. m.c.a. parco, fsp]

1. Give thanks to the Lord on the harp; with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises. Sing to him a new song; pluck the strings skillfully, with shouts of gladness. (R)

2. But the plan of the Lord stands forever; the design of his heart, through all
generations. Blessed the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen for his own inheritance. (R)

3. Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield, for in him our hearts rejoice; in his holy name we trust. (R)

Alleluia (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia. O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God! Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Lk 1:39-45)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

MARY set out in those days and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. But how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Prayer of the Faithful (Stand)

P — Let us glorify the Father, who chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. Let us ask him:

R — Lord, hear your people.

C — Through Mary’s intercession, grant peace to our land, wisdom and strength to our Church and civil leaders, and confidence and unity to our people. We pray: (R)

C — May parents foster love and holiness in their homes, may children contribute to the building up of the family, and may the elderly may be seen as guardians of the collective memory of the family and offer young people precious advice and guidance. We pray: (R)

C — May our homes be havens of love and places of welcome for those who come in need. We pray: (R)

C — May Filipino families living overseas serve as examples to other families in becoming a genuine “domestic Church” by humbly and lovingly living out the Christian vocation. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause), we pray: (R)

P — Lord, hear the prayers of your people. May we who celebrate with joy the birth of your Son as man rejoice in the gift of eternal life when he comes again in glory.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

Presentation of the Gifts (Stand)

P — Pray, brethren…
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — Lord, accept from your Church these gifts which in your mercy you have given us to offer and which by your power you transform into the sacrament of our salvation.

Grant this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Acclamation (Stand)

All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father…
P — Deliver us, Lord…
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)
P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (LK 1:45)

Blessed are you who have believed, that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Lord, may the divine mysteries we have shared keep your people safe from harm, so that, ever faithful to your service, we may enjoy salvation of mind and body.
Grant this in the name of Jesus our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Prayer over the People

P — Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing. (Pause)
Lord, may the divine mysteries we have shared keep your people safe from harm, so that, ever faithful to your service, we may enjoy salvation of mind and body.
Grant this in the name of Jesus our Lord.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.