

'And blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.' (Lk. 1:45)

This month, too, the Word of Life refers to a beatitude. It is the joyful and inspired greeting of one woman to another: Elizabeth is speaking to Mary who has come to help her. They are both expecting a child and, being profound believers, they have both welcomed the Word of God and experienced its creative power in their humble lives.

Mary is the first blessed in Luke's gospel: she is the first person to experience the fullness of the joy of intimacy with God. With this beatitude, for the first time, the evangelist reflects on the relationship between the announcement of the Word of God and the faith that welcomes it, in other words, between God's initiative and the person's free response.

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Mary is the true believer in the 'promise made to Abraham and his descendants for ever.' She is so empty of herself, so humble and open to listening to the Word, that the Word of God itself can become flesh in her womb and enter the history of humankind.

No one can experience the same motherhood as Mary, but we can all imitate her and trust in God's love. If we welcome the Word with an open heart, its promises can become incarnate in us too and make our lives fruitful in many different ways - as citizens, parents, students, workers or politicians, whether we are young or old, healthy or sick.

What if, like Zechariah, our faith is uncertain? We can still continue to trust in God's mercy. He will not stop seeking us, until we too rediscover his faithfulness and bless him.

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Among the same hills of the Holy Land, in far more recent times, another mother who had deep faith, taught her children the art of forgiveness and dialogue that she had learned from the Gospel. This was a small sign in this land, cradle of civilisation, which has always been in search of peace and stability even among the followers of different religions. Margaret recounts, 'We children were offended and upset because the other children who were neighbours said that they did not want to mix with us. Our mother told

us to invite these children to our house and she gave them some bread that she had freshly baked and told them to take it home to their families. Since then, we have been able to build friendships with these people.'

Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich, also supports us in having this courageous faith. She wrote, *'After Jesus, Mary is the one who knew how to say "yes" to God in the best and most perfect way. This is the source of her holiness and her greatness. If Jesus is the Word, the incarnate Word, Mary, because of her faith in the Word, is the Word lived, but she is also a creature like us, equal to us. ... Therefore, we can believe like Mary that all the promises contained in Jesus' Word will be fulfilled and, if necessary, like her, face the absurdity that his Word sometimes brings. Great and small, but always wonderful things happen to those who believe in the Word. We could fill books with the true stories that prove this. ... When, in our daily lives, in reading the Holy Scriptures we encounter the Word of God, let us open our hearts to listen, believing that what Jesus asks of us and promises will come true. It will not be long before we discover ... that he keeps his promises.'*

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In this time of preparation for Christmas, we recall Jesus' surprising promise to be present among those who accept and live the commandment of mutual love: 'Where two or three are united in my name - that is, in evangelical love - I am in their midst.' (Mt. 18:20) With firm belief in this promise, let us allow Jesus to be born again today in our homes and in our streets by welcoming each other, by listening deeply to one another and through our fraternal embrace, like that of Mary and Elizabeth.

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