

In the 4th step of the Pilgrimage of Hope, we ponder the experience of being ALONE AND IN COMMUNITY. As we step our way through our journey as pilgrims, sometimes we are alone, sometimes in community.

The notion of pilgrimage does not appear in the gospels, but occasions of sacred travel do. Three such accounts concern Mary, the mother of Jesus:

**The Visitation
The journey to Bethlehem
The flight into Egypt**



*Images: Annunciation, Fra Angelico;
Visitation, Church of the Visitation in Ein Kerem, Jerusalem*

The first, the **Visitation**, is in Luke's gospel, straight after the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is pregnant with the Son of God. Once the angel leaves Mary and she is alone, her immediate action is to undertake a trip that would have been highly unusual for a young woman who was pregnant and unmarried. She *'set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth'* (Luke 1:39), who was her cousin. Elizabeth was considerably older than Mary yet she also was pregnant, carrying John the Baptist (Luke 1:39-40). The understanding provided by those who have studied the culture of the time suggests Mary would have joined a caravan of travellers to ensure her safety on roads that were often dangerous, especially for a young woman. Staying for three months, Mary then returned home, presumably again within the safety of a caravan of travellers: *'And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home'* (Luke 1:56).

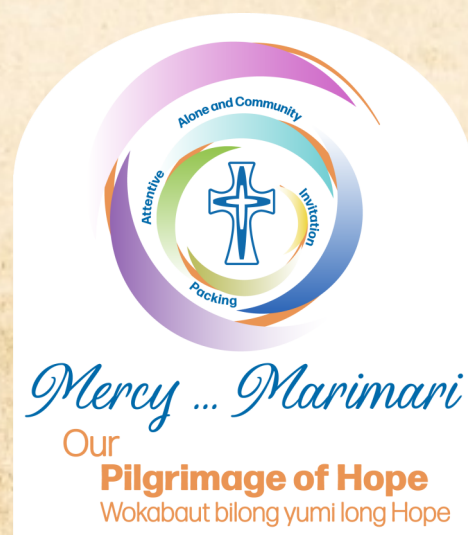




Image: *The Visitation*. Stained glass window, Holy Trinity Church, Rottneist Is, WA.

To ponder: Mary was alone when the angel Gabriel appeared to her and the conversation that followed was extraordinary—life-changing, in fact. As she travelled to share her good news with Elizabeth, she remained alone—though in a caravan of travellers, she could not share her ‘secret’ with them.

Ponder Mary’s extraordinary situation at this time—trusting fully in God’s will for her, yet so alone. No wonder she rushed to visit Elizabeth!

The *Magnificat* is recorded as the fruit of this visit. Together, Mary and Elizabeth shared the good news of their unexpected pregnancies and prayed a song of praise to God.

Together, they formed a tiny community of faith.



Image: Section from *Madonna del Magnificat*, Sandro Botticelli, 1841

The Magnificat:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favour on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

Luke 1:46-55