

4th Sunday of Advent C, 2012

One morning a Sunday school teacher asked “Can anyone tell me what is brown, furry, has a long bushy tail, stores nuts and lives in a tree?”

Little Johnny raised his hand and said “It sounds like a squirrel..... but I’m guessing the answer is supposed to be Jesus?”

Today’s readings are a lot like that. They certainly appear to be about Mary and Elizabeth and John the Baptist. They sound like they are about rulers, and Israel and Bethlehem and ritual sacrifice. And on the surface, they do speak about all of those things, but the focus is Jesus.

We have come to the fourth and final Sunday of Advent and today the Church reveals to us the true identity of the Christ.

As the prophet Micah tells us, He is the one “whose origin is from of old, from ancient times”. He is the one who will “stand firm and shepherd his flock”.

His is the face of salvation as the psalmist proclaims. He is the hope of Israel and the promised one of God. He is the protector of the vineyard, a symbol today for Israel and for us.

He is the perfect sacrifice, his life and death a holocaust, which is an offering that is entirely consumed.

Elizabeth rightly identifies Him as her Lord. The author of Hebrews says He is the “giver of new life” and “the Christ, the Messiah who will take on flesh and “come into the world”.

(PAUSE)

In the Gospel we are invited to see Jesus in the words and actions of the others present. Each has much to tell us about our Lord and about ourselves and about relationships.

Let us look briefly at Elizabeth. She is a living witness to the providence of God. Well past her prime, she is miraculously pregnant – in her sixth month – as Gabriel tells Mary at the Annunciation. She is a relative to Mary and

the wife of a priest of Israel in the service of God. What strikes me is that she is so open to God. She seems as if she is ready for the Christ, and when she hears Mary's greeting, she is immediately aware that the Messiah is present. **"And 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."**

She is also kind and affirming to Mary saying **"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."**

On this final Sunday of Advent we are asked consider some questions:

Like Elizabeth, are we prepared for the coming of our Lord? Are we anticipating the wonder of God, and perhaps even more importantly, will we recognize Him when He comes? Do we see and hear Him in the presence of others? Are we a living witness of God?

Her infant is John the Baptist. He is the son of a priest and therefore, according to Jewish custom, a priest himself. He is already a prophet as promised by the angel Gabriel to Zechariah, his father. As a priest and a prophet, John symbolizes Israel and all her hopes. In the presence of the Messiah, he is moved to express his joy in the only way he can, he leapt, he jumped, he lunged. It was no "kick" like most mothers experience.

It was the joy of both an infant and, through him, all the peoples of Israel. The redeemer is here! It was John's "yes" to God and an expression of his desire to start his mission, even in the womb.

Jesus and John, through Mary and Elizabeth, are relatives, but their relationship is much greater. Even at this encounter of the mothers, we can hear in our hearts the words that will be spoken by the older John **"He who comes after me is before me."**

Like John, do we know our vocation, our part in God's plan? Do we expect it with joy? Do we delight in the presence of Christ? Do we live with a sense of mission?

And now we come to Mary. Her role in the scriptures today is both simple and profound. She has said “yes” to God’s plan, she has believed that God would do what He promise. In her coming to serve Elizabeth, she brings the Good News to those she encounters. For hidden within Mary, perhaps no larger than a mustard seed, is the Christ. In the darkness of her womb shines the light of the world.

Along with Mary and by her Holy Example, do we bring Jesus to those we meet? Do we believe that God is a Father who keeps His promises? Are we humble enough to allow God to be great in us?

The season of Advent is nearly over.

The next time we gather, it will be Christmas.

Are we any different because of this purple season? Will we jump for joy at the coming of the Lord? He is swiftly coming – are we ready?