

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT [C]

Micah 5: 2 - 5

Hebrews 10: 5 - 10

Luke 1: 39 - 44

This evening/morning we're celebrating the 4th. Sunday of Advent.

But in our thoughts we're standing on the threshold of the stable in Bethlehem asking that Christ will truly come into our hearts, because in a five short days we'll be back here to celebrate the birth of the Saviour.

But, to be truthful, I'm willing to bet that our thoughts are far from that aspect of Christmas Day.

More likely than not there are milling around in our minds questions like:

'How will I get everything done before Friday?'

'Have I got the cards sent, and the presents bought?'

'Did I remember to order the turkey, and the Brussel Sprouts!?'

And all of that's fine because, after all, we are celebrating a Birthday - the Birthday of the Lord - and He doesn't want us to be gloomy and kill-joys, but to enjoy ourselves because He's come among us.

However, we must never let all of that secular stuff drag us down, and drag us away from the true reality of what we're celebrating on Friday.

Let's use this Eucharist of the 4th. Sunday of Advent to spend a bit of time to get away from the mad rush, and to reflect for ourselves on the meaning of the birth of the Saviour.

And no better company to do it in than to look at it from the perspective of Mary, the Mother of the Lord.

But to do that we need to look at the background to the birth of Jesus through the witness of the Old Testament Prophets like Micah.

So, expressed through the words of the Prophet, Micah, we can see the footsteps of the Saviour coming towards us down the centuries before His Birth.

From a small and obscure part of Israel, he says, the Saviour will come.

From somewhere you would least expect Him to come, and in a way you would never expect Him to come.

He will be born, as we all are, but His origins are to be found before that human birth, in eternity.

Micah says that the Saviour's: "Origins are from of old." Mic. 5: 2

And he also says that the Saviour: "Will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." Mic. 5: 4

Being a shepherd in those days wasn't an easy job by any means.

You were on your own with the flock, prey to wild animals and robbers.

Sometimes, the shepherd had to lay down his own life to save his sheep.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jn. 10: 11

Jesus spoke those words of Himself many hundreds of years after Micah's prophecy that the Saviour would be like a shepherd to His people.

I wonder if the people who heard those words of Jesus made the connection between what Micah said, and those of Jesus, and believed He was the long awaited Saviour?

I wonder if we really make the connection between the baby Jesus in the crib, and Him being our Saviour, who was crucified, died and was buried, and on the third day rose again?

Perhaps we'd rather have Him in the crib because we think we're safe from His claim on our lives, if we keep Him as a baby.

But Jesus grew up to be an adult; and we too have to grow to be spiritually mature, adult Christians.

To understand that what we celebrate on Christmas Day isn't just for the children: a heart-warming story and nothing more, but a moment to really see that the baby in the manger is God in the flesh.

For long centuries the people of Israel, and their Prophets like Micah, longed to see the Saviour.

They didn't. We have. But so often we take it for granted.

Just think for a moment what our lives would be like if Jesus hadn't come, and we didn't know Him..... Our lives would be joyless.

But very often our Christianity is joyless, and soulless, because we've not taken the time to cultivate a friendship with Jesus.

Consequently our faith has become a thing of habit rather than happiness.

But the Gospel we've just heard dispels the idea that Christianity is joyless. Luke invites us take Mary as a role model for our Christianity because of her immediate joyful reaction to the "yes" she gave to Gabriel's call for her to become the Mother of God:

"At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth." Lk. 1: 39 - 40

She can't keep it to herself; she's so happy she rushes off to tell someone else.

The person she goes to is her relation Elizabeth, and John the Baptist in her womb kicks for joy when the Saviour comes in Mary's womb.

The Holy Spirit was at work here to produce this remarkable response from John when he met his Saviour for the first time.

In fact, the whole of the Gospel passage today is dripping with the presence of the Spirit.

Elizabeth says of Mary: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!" Lk. 1: 45

Mary said "yes" to having the physical presence of Jesus living in her.

But it went far deeper than Mary just being a receptacle to house God for nine months as so many of the pagan myths present the birth of a god.

She couldn't contain it, or keep it to herself, because she'd accepted the Christ Child into her life at a deeply personal level, which, as Jesus said in His adult life of those who accept Him as their Saviour: "Those who drink the water I give them will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." Jn. 4: 14

The living water of the Holy Spirit living in Mary just bubbled over in her, and flowed into Elizabeth and John.

As Mary accepted the Lord Jesus into her life, He too asks us to accept His living presence into our lives this Christmas so that He may come to life in our lives.

When we say "yes," as Mary did, then the Holy Spirit brings Jesus to birth in each of us.

Today's Eucharist exhorts us to look to Mary, and to walk with her towards the manger of Bethlehem.

Today's Gospel says that: "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled." Lk. 1: 45

The Gospel speaks of Christ, and invites us to prepare our hearts to receive Him just as Mary did; because: "The Incarnation required the consenting acceptance of the human heart [of Mary] chosen to be the Mother of the Word, and only in this way do [Word] and Flesh really become one"

Cardinal Josef Ratzinger: Mary: the Church at the Source; p.93

And: "When God knocked at the door of [Mary's] young life, she accepted Him with faith and love.

Let's allow ourselves to be attracted by her [devotion to her Son], Jesus, so that 'The God who comes' will find in each of us a good and open heart He can fill with His gifts." Pope Benedict XVI: Angelus Address Sunday 3 December 2006

Pope Benedict XVI: Angelus Address Sunday 3 December 2006

And: "Let us pray, as Advent draws to a close, that Christ will truly come into hearts [this Christmas]." 4th. Sunday of Advent: Opening Prayer