

Today we're celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup>. Sunday of Advent; preparing, in the words of the prayer at the end of Mass, that: "As the feast of our salvation draws ever nearer, so may we press forward all the more eagerly to the worthy celebration of [the] Son's Nativity."

To be honest, I'm willing to bet that most people at Mass today are thinking more about the secular celebration of Christmas.

Is the turkey big enough? Will I fit everyone round the dinner-table? I'll worry about paying for it all next year.

In a few short hours we'll be back here to celebrate the Birth of the Saviour.

So, as this Sunday is so close to Christmas, why didn't we just cancel it as there's so much to do at home?

Precisely because it's our last chance to have time away from the madness of the secular Christmas so that we can put Christ back into Christmas – that's what Advent is all about.

And in Advent we look into the Old Testament; there to see the imprint, the footsteps of the Saviour, made visible through the Prophets, like Micah.

He will be born, Micah says, from somewhere you will least expect Him to come, and in a way that is beyond your deepest imaginings.

He will be born, as we all are, from a woman; but His: "Origin is from old, from ancient days." Mic. 5: 2

And that word, 'ancient,' leads us to the Book of the Prophet Daniel.

There, the thin veil that separates this world from eternity is lifted, and he sees the Ancient of Days – God Himself.

Then: "With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." Dn. 7: 13

This 'Son of Man' is certainly a person, but He's also God – God, the Son; but how do we know that?

Because only One who is God can come on the clouds.

That cloud, which, as the Lord led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He: "Went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them." Ex. 13: 21

Jesus, speaking of His return at the end of time, tells us this: "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Lk. 21: 27

And John, in his great vision of the Second Coming of Jesus in the Book of Revelation, says: "Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man."

Rev. 14: 14

The Old Testament, it's littered with clues that the Messiah – the Saviour – will come as a person; and yet, at the same time, is God.

And the New Testament spells it out in black and white.

But when the Wise Men visit Herod to ask him where the Saviour has been born so that they can go and worship Him, Herod and the Scripture experts don't get it.

Those Magi – Wise Men – probably had little or no knowledge of the Scripture – the Old Testament – yet they knew they had to worship this baby as the Lord God.

Those who should have known could only say He was to be born: "In Bethlehem of Judea." Mt. 2: 5

They had no concept of the beauty and holiness of the Lord; and certainly no desire to open their hearts to Him.

The Wise Men, on the other hand, to quote the Lord's words in the Letter to the Hebrews, said: "Here I am! I am coming to obey your will." Heb. 10: 7

They were open-hearted, ready to be surprised by God, ready to go – physically and spiritually – wherever He led them.

I wonder if we're like Herod and the experts, or like the Magi?

Do I want to remain stock-still – stunted spiritually – or do I want to follow the Star so that I can live life in its fullness?

Do I really desire to go to the manger; there to encounter the power of God's love, made flesh in the powerlessness of the Baby Jesus?

If we do, then we have to let go of all those things within us that prevent us from saying: "Here I am! I am coming to obey your will." [Heb. 10: 7](#)

For us, I think, the main stumbling-block to discovering the real joy of Christmas is the way we live our faith.

If it's become a matter of habit, something we take for granted, something we put on when it suits us, then it becomes empty, and soulless.

Today, let's ask the Lord: "To fan into a flame the spiritual gift." [2 Tim. 1: 6](#) He gave us when we first became a Christian.

So, as we walk through the world, which, at times, seems like a 'vale of tears,' let's turn to Mary, Mother of the Saviour, whom we meet today in the Gospel.

Mary tells us that grace is greater than sin, that God's mercy is more powerful than evil, and it's able to transform it into good.

We experience evil every day, in one form or another: either in our own lives, or in the world at large. But, however evil is manifested, its root is in the human heart; a wounded, sick heart that's incapable of healing itself.

However, the core at the centre of Evil is the Evil One – Satan.

God's love is infinite, limitless, and eternal.

Satan's hatred is limited, twisted and, ultimately, defeated.

Defeated by the new and eternal Covenant, which has been sealed in the Blood of Jesus; the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world: "The source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."

[Heb. 5: 9](#)

The Son of God who humbled Himself to be: "Born of a woman." [Gal. 4: 4](#)

And, because of Mary's loving obedience to God, became the means through whom our salvation entered the world.

She tells us to entrust ourselves whole-heartedly to God.

When God knocked at the door of her young life, she welcomed Him with faith and love, and the Holy Spirit brought Jesus to birth in her.

Once again, Mary is inviting us to journey with her in spirit to the manger of Bethlehem: to, once again, gaze with love upon Jesus in the crib.

When we do so, may our hearts leap for joy so that the Lord Jesus

Finds in each of us a good, and open heart He can fill with His gifts this Christmas-tide.