

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

Today's readings remind us that Jesus is reborn every day in our living conditions, provided we have the willingness to respond to God's call and the openness to do God's will. The readings suggest that Christmas should inspire us to carry out God's word as Mary and Jesus did, in perfect obedience to His will, in cheerful kindness and unselfish generosity.

In the first reading, the prophet Micah gives assurance to the Jews that God is faithful to His promises and He will send them the long expected ruler, from the unimportant village of Bethlehem. The second reading, taken from Paul's Letter to the Hebrews, reminds us to be thankful to Jesus Christ, who offered the perfect sacrifice of obedience that liberated us from sin. By his willingness and eagerness to do God's will, (*"Behold, I come to do your will"*), Christ gave Himself in the place of all the other ritual sacrifices offered as the means of sanctification.

In the Gospel, Luke tells us how two seemingly insignificant women met to celebrate the kindness and fidelity of God. It shows us how sensitive Mary was to the needs of Elizabeth, her older cousin who had miraculously become pregnant in her old age. For Luke, discipleship consists in listening to God's word and then carrying it out, Mary does both, and becomes the most perfect disciple.

*We need to carry Jesus to others as Mary did:* We can make a real difference in the lives of others by carrying Jesus to them. However, we cannot give what we do not possess, so, Christmas is the ideal time for us to be filled with the spirit of Christ, allowing his rebirth within us. Thus, he enables us to share his love with all whom we encounter by offering them humble and committed service, unconditional forgiveness and compassionate caring. Sharing Jesus with others is the best Christmas gift we can give. God wants each of us, like Mary, to carry to those around us the Lord of Life.

It is easy to send flowers, Christmas cards or gifts. However, giving the gift of oneself is the greatest gift of all. Let us take the time to visit others this Christmas, to bring some inspiration into their lives, and hopefully to bring them closer to God. Let us share with them the Spirit of God, the Spirit of consolation, Spirit of courage, Spirit of peace and Spirit of joy, just as Mary did.

During the Christmas Season, God calls us into action as Mary did. Is there anyone we know who is lonely, who is in a nursing home, who is ill or bedridden? Can we help them with a brief visit? Is there extra food in our pantry that a poor family could use? Look for organizations as the Ladies of Charity or St. Vincent de Paul Society, who can find such a family for us.

*We need to bless and encourage the younger generation:* Elizabeth demonstrates the responsibility of the older generation to inspire the younger generation. We need others to recognize our gifts, to honor our true being, and to pronounce "the goodness of God upon us." Grandparents, parents, teachers, and leaders have the responsibility of encouraging those around them by saying, "You are an important person, valuable to God and to me." During this Christmas, parents and older people might convey a blessing to others, especially the young. Complimenting and encouraging one's spouse, children and friends, let us make them know, how valuable they are to us and to God.

*We need to recognize the real presence of the Emmanuel (God Is with Us) and say "yes" to Him:* The Visitation of Mary reminds us that, through his holy ministry, Christ continues to be present among us. The same Christ "dwells among us" in the Bible, in the Sacraments, and in the praying community. The hill country of Judea is right here in our sanctuary. The same Jesus who dwelt in Mary's womb and who caused John to leap in Elizabeth's womb now dwells among us in our liturgy and in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus lives with us and in us through the Holy Spirit. What is expected of us during this Christmas is, the readiness to say "Yes!" to the Father, "Yes!" to Jesus, "Yes!" to all and "Yes!" to every call that God makes and will make on us.

*Mary's pilgrimage should be our model:* As we journey with Mary to the hill country, let us continue to contemplate our own life's journey's joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies. Our Christian journey began *in Christ* at our Baptism, where Christ joined Himself to us forever. Our journey continues *with Christ* as he nourishes us along the way with the food of his Word and the food of his Flesh. It will end *with Christ* as we await our blessed end and join him and all his Saints in Heavenly splendor. It is up to us to prepare for that great day by spending our lives glorifying God in serving others with love and commitment.