

The Fourth Sunday of Advent © - December 23, 2018  
(Micah 5:1-4a; Ps. 80:2-3,25-16,18-19; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45;)

For the last three weeks we have been focused on preparing for the coming of Jesus. If we look at Jesus, as some do, a good teacher, one who tried to bring peace, we are greatly underestimating who he is and why he came. The people of the time and place of Jesus would have seen him in light of the Old Testament – the Torah. Our first reading today is from the Book of Micah. “Thus says the Lord: You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” Bethlehem was the city of David. It was his birth home. It was to Bethlehem that the prophet Nathan came and anointed David in front of his father and brothers. So the Messiah, the anointed one, is to be an earthly ruler of David’s line.

But it goes on (His) “origin is from of of old, from ancient times...” “He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, his God;” He is to be a divine or heavenly ruler. If we see Jesus only in light of the world today or only in an historical view we miss his true identity.

The Ark of the Covenant, which contained the stone tablets of the Law, given to Moses by God on Mt. Sinai, was a symbol of God’s presence with his people. They carried it with them in battle. But there was one time, after they had been unfaithful, that they lost the battle and the Ark of the Covenant was taken from them. Although it had been a source of strength for them, it caused hardship for their enemies. So they sent it off in the desert on a donkey. It was eventually discovered in the hill country of Judah, by the Jews. As they carried the Ark of the Covenant to the new temple David danced with abandonment – so full was his joy.

Our gospel today takes place in the hill country of Judah. The Angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary and revealed to her God’s plan for her to bear his only begotten Son. He went on to say that her relative, Elizabeth, had conceived a son in her old age – for nothing is impossible with God. Mary then consented with the

reply - "I am the handmaid of the Lord, may it be done to me according to your word." The angel departed from her.

Mary then traveled in haste to the hill country of Judah to visit Elizabeth, to share the joy of them both - the new life within them. Today Mary entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in the womb of Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, she cried out in a loud voice, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" the Holy Spirit inspires her to recognize the infant in Mary's womb to be her Lord, which is both an earthly and divine title.

Elizabeth continues, "For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." Like King David, in the presence of the Word of God, in the Ark of the Covenant, jumped with abandonment of joy, the infant, who would become John, the Baptist, leaped in Elizabeth's womb for joy at the voice of Mary, the New Ark of the New Covenant.

It is in the light of the Old Testament that we can fully appreciate who Jesus is, as Lord of Heaven and Earth. As the prophet Daniel revealed a couple of weeks ago, one like a Son of Man, was enthroned in heaven. Beginning, especially with Mohammad and what would become the Islamic Faith, and many others today, they recognized Jesus as a good teacher and a holy man. But unless we recognize him as Son of God and Son of Man, we miss his true identity.

As our reading from Micah concludes today, "...for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace." It is only through Jesus that a true peace can be reached and established. I get requests from a couple different groups that are trying to bring bibles to the people of the Mid-East. They say that because of the unrest in Muslim nations, many are turning to Jesus in order to find the truth and in him true peace.

That is what we have been seeking and preparing for, especially during Advent, Jesus who is the Good News, who is Emmanuel, God-with-us. For us it is

a renewal of what we already have (Jesus) God, within us. When Jesus walked the earth he was Emmanuel. People could see him, hear him, touch him and be touched by him. He is still Emmanuel and comes to us as we are, both physical and spiritual beings. The sacraments are signs given to us by Jesus, now through his Church, of his presence here and within us to give us his grace – his life within us. They are physical signs of the spiritual life of Jesus shared with us.

In Baptism the water, sign of life and cleansing – we are cleansed of sin, and the new life of the Holy Spirit is given with-in us. Confirmation – anointing with oil as priests and prophets are anointed – we are given the full gifts of the Spirit to proclaim God’s message to others with our words and with our life. Holy Communion, bread and wine brought forth and changed by the prayer of the priest and the power of the Holy Spirit into the Bread from Heaven, as Jesus said he was. (Jn. 6:-- ) The sacrament of Penance – a sign of our repentance, invoking the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:--), gift of the forgiveness of sins. Anointing of the sick, with oil and laying on of hands – invoking the Holy Spirit. Matrimony, like Mary, as spouse of the Holy Spirit, going in haste to serve Elizabeth. Holy Orders, a sign of the priesthood of Jesus, bridegroom of his Church, in service to his people.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, we do well to meditate on the Blessed Virgin Mary, as she walked in haste to the hill country of Judah, with Jesus in her womb. We seek to walk in service of God’s people with Jesus in us. Like King David and the infant John, the Baptist, we walk with great joy for He is God-with-us and God-within-us. May God be with you as you prepare and celebrate this now among you.