

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT Year C

Readings: *Micah 5:2-5a, Hebrews 10:5-10, Luke 1:39-45(46-55)*
 Cant: Luke 1:46-55

"His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. "

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear friends, today we continue our countdown to the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I am sure most of us have sent out the necessary cards and other things that go with this time of the year. For those in work and other places, the Christmas parties have taken their toll. Most have learnt more about their colleagues in one day than they must have done in one year. These activities must have been going on since early December. Today, we pause and examine our journey so far. What does the Church want us to reflect on today?

The readings are clear indicators as to what the reflection today is all about.

In the first reading, the prophet Micah predicts a happy time for the beleaguered inhabitants of Jerusalem that a ruler will come from Bethlehem who will bring them peace. At the time Micah was writing, Jerusalem as it today was under siege and David's dynasty was in state of collapse. Salvation was however to come from a fairly insignificant place - Bethlehem. From there, a new leader will emerge to gather together the scattered exiles and unite the nation once more.

Christians see this promise as foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, the prince of peace who was born in Bethlehem and descended from David.

The second reading from the letter to the Hebrews states that justification comes from the obedience of Jesus was all that was necessary to appease God. In the Old Testament, appeasing God meant sacrifices and burnt offerings. In the new dispensation, that is to say the New Testament, obedience following the footsteps of Christ becomes the way to appease God. The sacrifice of Christ put paid to all other

sacrifices and so it was necessary that it continued in the new dispensation. His sacrifice did what the Mosaic Law was unable to do.

The Gospel is a narration of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. The story concerns two sets of parents and two children. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of the Baptist, belong to the Old Testament. They were promised by God a child in their age. Their child was to mark the end of the age of the Law and the Prophets. His vocation was to turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. Zechariah, his father, was struck dumb because he did not believe. Mary, the mother of Jesus had been informed by Gabriel how in a wonderful intervention of God, she would become a mother without the cooperation of a human father. Both Elizabeth and Mary are pregnant. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth praises Mary and hints at the uniqueness of the child she has conceived.

The meeting of the young Mary with the old Elizabeth was indeed an extraordinary encounter. Good news becomes great news when it is shared. No two women ever met before or since, with greater expectations.

They are together caught up in the drama of God's unfolding promise. We can picture the two mothers-to-be running to meet each other, thrilled with excitement and overcome with joy at the good news that they exchange.

As they shared each other's dreams, they had plenty of cause to rejoice and wonder about God's marvellous works. Before Jesus came to the rest of the world, Elizabeth had the extraordinary privilege of having the Christ child pay her a visit in the womb of Mary. It was so great an honour that the child she was carrying in her own womb leapt for joy. That child would be John the Baptist who was to prepare the way for the Lord.

This time, in the run up to Christmas, is one of hectic activity. There is excitement in the air. The spirit of Christmas season is infectious and seems to catch hold of us before the actual day arrived. It has a marked effect on many people who act differently and are more polite, generous and outgoing than at other times of the year. For a few days we forget our animosities, rid ourselves of bitterness and the whole world seems to be a better place.

It is essentially a family feast and we do our best to put the necessary preparations in place so that we can be at home and part of the family circle for the occasion. What makes it a feast of the home is the realisation that God first made his home with us at this time of the year.

He came among us and showed us that we are called to be children of God. Advent is a time when we prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of Jesus into our lives. It is a time of grace, when we accept that Jesus is the saviour sent by God. In this Gospel, Mary shows us one example of how to prepare for Christmas.

Out of the goodness of her heart, she visited an elderly cousin who was confined. Her visit brought great joy to both of them. There is no reason why we won't follow her example with a visit to some sick or elderly person in the neighbourhood. It is a time to be generous and think of those who are a little less privileged than us. God rewards generosity with generosity.

With these in mind, my dear friends, we continue our celebration.

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.