

Homily for 4th Advent Sunday

December 20, 2018

On Dec. 17, the liturgy stops celebrating the final coming of Jesus and has us look forward to our remembrance of his coming 2020 yrs ago. That coming as Messiah is what fuels our energy to live as Christians today.

For the ways in which we have failed to be true disciples of this Messiah who loved us to death, we ask pardon and healing.

Readings:

Micah tells us that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem, the smallest of Judah's tribes. He will rule Israel. Although this is the eternal plan of God, it will not come to pass until this messianic child comes of age to shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord God. Under his guidance, Israel will stand firm against further invasions, for his rule, reach to the ends of the earth, will bring international peace.

Luke then tells us how God fulfilled this prophecy. When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, these are the ways in which he describes her son: he will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. He will receive the throne of David his father, to rule over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end. All these are descriptions of the messiah foretold by prophetic oracles; even the title *Son of the Most High* is a messianic title, indicating divine protection of a human being designated and guided by God.

Today's gospel shows Elizabeth's response to the presence of the messiah in Mary's womb. First, her son in her own womb, destined to be the one who prepares for the coming of the messiah, leaps for joy at the presence of the messiah in Mary's womb. This leads to Elizabeth's profession of faith: Mary is the mother of her messianic Lord. Mary is blessed because of her faith that the Lord's promise to her is being fulfilled: she will bear the messiah foretold by the prophets Micah and Isaiah.

The Meaning for us today:

First, Jesus is our messiah. He is not only the king of Israel, but his reign reaches to the ends of the earth. His rule brings peace to all the nations.

But second, it is Mary who shows us how Jesus rule becomes real in our world. Recently, while saying the Rosary, it occurred to me that the reason Mary went to visit Elizabeth is that she needed a confidant. Perhaps her mother was already dead, but in any case, it would be difficult to explain to her mother that she is pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is also the recipient of a miraculous pregnancy when she is barren well into menopause; she can believe and give counsel.

But the gospel gives a better reason for the visitation. Mary stays with Elizabeth for three months because that will see her through Elizabeth's difficult birth. The reason for Mary's trip is compassion for her older relative, a desire to serve the weak. She is the first Christopher, the first to carry Christ to someone in need.

And so the third point is the message for us. We will be disciples of Christ when we bring his love and compassion to the vulnerable in our world. When we resonate, grieve for women in difficult pregnancies, mothers and father or homeless children or refugees, mothers who see their infants starve to death because they themselves do not have enough nourishment to provide milk for their babies, mothers and fathers who see their children die in bombed schools and hospitals, THEN we will be disciples of Christ, because such

profound empathy will lead us to aid these vulnerable people, and even devise policies and strategies to alleviate their misery. We will do as Mary did.

When we are *active* disciples of the Messiah who showed his compassion by healing the blind and the lame, who ate with tax collectors and sinners, then will the Messiah bring peace to all the earth.

As Jesus said to those listening to his parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise."

Be the good news of Christmas.