

Fourth Sunday of Advent



A Prayer of Anticipation

God, our loving Father,
you who send us the gift
of your Son Jesus,
look upon your children now
as our excitement for Christmas grows.
We wait for the coming of Jesus
to transform us into people like him:
imaginative, compassionate, forgiving,
obedient to the Father.
Bless our celebrations with
friends and family;
pour your grace on those
who are alone.
May we seek affirmation like Mary,
and give it, like Elizabeth.
We ask this through the same Christ our
Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 23, 2012

Moving Forward



Today's Readings: Micah 5:1–4a; Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19 (4); Hebrews 10:5–10; Luke 1:39–45. What were Mary's thoughts as she "went with haste . . . to the hill country"? Did she repeat Gabriel's announcement mentally, trying to understand? Most people need time to absorb sudden news. Mary probably did too. She must have walked with a mixture of doubt, fear, confusion, and anticipation.

The important thing is: she moves forward. Many of us, hearing a similar message, would be locked into paralysis. But Mary has a crucial combination of trust and imagination. The angel promised her a great son with an unending kingdom; God would accomplish things once thought impossible. Knowing her heritage (how her foremother, Hannah, conceived, how God had always been faithful to

her people), she moves surely into the future.

If she grew tired on her journey, did she question, as most people would? The angel told her she was favored. Was she remembering rightly, or was this wishful thinking? Ah no, for the angel's affirmation is confirmed by a trustworthy older relative. From a human voice, she hears it again: she and her child are blessed. No longer alone or worried, Mary can celebrate both babies with Elizabeth.

And what of us who read the story? Have we lived with doubt too long? Do we need to seek affirmation from someone we trust? Mary would encourage us to move in that direction. Or should we give courage to someone who is younger or confused? Either way, let's get going—in haste.



This Week at Home

Monday, December 24

Creating a Canticle

It's hard to be alone at Christmas. If you are, remember: you are so infinitely precious to God that Jesus became human—and would have done it for you alone. Gather in grateful prayer all who have ever loved you, including the deceased. They make up a fine company; savor the memories. Then do something kind for yourself today.

Old Zechariah, in today's Gospel, had failed to appreciate the grace of the angel's announcement: his wife, also elderly, would indeed bear a son (1:8–20). Today, however, he is redeemed, and sings a beautiful canticle to our merciful God. Today's Readings: Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16; Psalm 89:2–3, 4–5, 27 and 29 (2); Luke 1:67–79.

Tuesday, December 25

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

What would Christmas feasting be without breads—plump with raisins or dipped in honey? They take on special significance since Jesus is born in Bethlehem (meaning “house of bread”) and placed in a feeding trough to nourish our lives. Today's Readings (Day): Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4, 5–6 (3c); Hebrews 1:1–6; John 1:1–18.

Wednesday, December 26

Feast of Saint Stephen

Wonderful saints crowd the calendar during the octave from Christmas to New Year's. The martyred deacon, Saint Stephen, comes first. Immediately after angel song and newborn innocence comes violence and bloodshed. Jesus saw it coming. In today's Gospel, he predicts the persecution, betrayal, and exile of the first Christians. Jesus never promises the Apostles earthly triumph. But he assures them of his continued presence. Today's Readings: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16bc and 17 (6); Matthew 10:17–22.

Thursday, December 27

Feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist

John's gospel account, read during Lent and Easter, is quite different from the synoptics (the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and tells stories not found in them. The writing in John is poetic and highlights the symbols of blindness and sight, water and thirst. Some scholars believe that in today's gospel reading, the beloved disciple's arrival before Peter at Jesus' tomb shows the primacy of love over authority. Today's Readings: 1 John 1:1–4; Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 11–12 (12); John 20:1a, 2–8.

Friday, December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents

Today the Church courageously confronts evil that never appears in Christmas carols, cards, or pageants. Herod's brutal massacre of boys under age two, a futile effort to eliminate Jesus, continues in many parts of the world today. Children fall victim to adult wars, starve because of political corruption, and fail to receive vaccines for treatable diseases. In our own country, too, poor children suffer, despite society's means to feed and heal them. What can you personally do to change that situation? Today's Readings: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Psalm 124:2–3, 4–5, 7b–8 (7); Matthew 2:13–18.

Saturday, December 29

Optional Memorial, Saint Thomas Becket

For those accustomed to the separation of church and state, the struggle between Saint Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, and King Henry II of England, may be puzzling. Thomas died opposing the king's attempts to assert his authority over the Church. After Thomas's murder, he was quickly revered as a saint. Henry was required to do public penance, and Canterbury Cathedral, where the archbishop was murdered, became a popular pilgrimage site. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:3–11; Psalm 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 5b–6 (11a); Luke 2:22–35.



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Keeping the Seasons

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