



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 23rd December 2018 - The Fourth Sunday of Advent

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for 23rd December 2018 (Luke 1:39-44): The Visitation

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

Luke's account of the birth and infancy of Jesus is built on the comparison and contrast between the two stories of John the Baptist and Jesus: the annunciation to the parents, the birth of each child, the joy on earth and in heaven, the circumcision, the growth of the child. In each incident John is shown to be great, but Jesus greater still. Only in the incident narrated in today's gospel do the two families meet, the two stories cross. We see the two mothers together, marvelling at the destiny of their children. The journey from Nazareth to even the nearest of the towns in the hill country of Judah (traditionally Elizabeth's home is located at Ain Karim, now on the outskirts of Jerusalem) would have been arduous, a week's walk for a fit young woman. This special exertion and generosity shows Mary's love and care for her elderly relative, as well as the natural excitement of the two in sharing their motherhood. Luke has already told us that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now Elizabeth too is filled with the Holy Spirit as they participate in and exchange the praise of God for the gift of their children.

Is there anyone I know to whom a visit would bring special joy during Christmastide?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

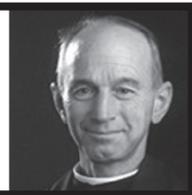
4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 23rd December 2018



First Reading: *The Ruler from Bethlehem*

Micah 5:1-4

The Lord says this: You, Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel; his origin goes back to the distant past, to the days of old. The Lord is therefore going to abandon them till the time when she who is to give birth gives birth. Then the remnant of his brothers will come back to the sons of Israel. He will stand and feed his flock with the power of the Lord, with the majesty of the name of his God. They will live secure, for from then on he will extend his power to the ends of the land. He himself will be peace.

On this final Sunday of Advent all the focus is on Mary as she prepares to give birth to her Son. The prophecy of Micah reminds us that God's standards are utterly different from human standards. Bethlehem was an insignificant little hilltop town, the home of the smallest clan of Judah, in an insignificant and oppressed country. Yet it had two moments of greatness, one when David was anointed king there, the other when Jesus was born. David was the youngest of his father's sons, left to look after the sheep when all the others were summoned to meet the great prophet Samuel. He stands in the long tradition in the Bible that God chooses the younger or less distinguished: Abel instead of Cain, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph from among Jacob's sons rather than his elder brothers; Mary had no roof over her head for the birth of her child. We cannot dare to estimate any person's value in God's eyes, but amid all our striving, all the pushing and shoving for priority, we do have a lurking suspicion that those nearest to God, most marked by the image of God, are the humblest and least distinguished of people. Mary was among them.

What qualities distinguish those who have value in God's eyes?

Second Reading: *I am coming to do your will*

Hebrews 10:5-10

This is what Christ said, on coming into the world: You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, "God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will." Notice that he says first: You did not want what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

As we prepare for Christmas we are reminded that Jesus came to trump the disobedience of Adam by his own perfect obedience. It was not someone suffering which is the key to the redemption of the world, as though suffering had some value in itself, or paid some penalty. The medieval theology which suggested this tied itself in knots about the recipient of this payment: God or the devil? Neither recipient works out! In Romans Paul is quite clear that the redemptive factor was Jesus' obedience even to the point of suffering on the Cross: 'Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience are many to be made upright.' Adam is the image of human disobedience, the disobedience of us all. Today's reading from Hebrews tells us that Jesus was given a body to express his obedience. By his bodily obedience, the guarantee and expression of his full humanity, he brought all bodily men and women back to God. By our bodies we express our obedience, in sickness and in health. Jesus too, in his baby's body, his child's body, his youthful body, his fully mature body, expressed his obedience to his Father. In so doing he prepared for the ultimate expression of loving obedience on the Cross.

What does it mean to you to live in "loving obedience" to God?

“The ultimate expression of loving obedience is the Cross.”

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*

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