



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 2018

Time for Joy: The Lord's Coming

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Not long ago, I had the great opportunity to make a pilgrimage to Israel with a group. We began our journey each day in prayer. We visited many holy sites; we walked where Jesus walked. Each day our chaplain celebrated the liturgy in one of the many churches that mark the location of significant stories in the Bible: where Jesus was born, where he died, where he celebrated his first miracle at Cana. The prayer was profound, and the members of the group quickly became friends. We

still greet each other with gladness and affection.

One of the more moving experiences was a visit to the Church of the Visitation. Located at the top of a small hill, the church welcomes visitors with a wide plaza and a wrought-iron entryway. Immediately to the right of the courtyard is a tall bronze statue of Mary and Elizabeth greeting each other. The figures are slender and visibly pregnant. The artist captured their joy with a slight arch in their backs, their arms beginning to ascend, and their heads lifted up as though laughing in delight. The statue made us smile.

I think about that statue now and believe this is how we should always greet the Lord—with delight, joy, and an understanding that we are pregnant with his grace and presence. We are called to reveal that presence to the whole world. In these last few days before Christmas, reflect on the ways you will show your joy in the Lord's coming. +

Sunday Readings

Micah 5:1–4a

He shall take his place as shepherd by the strength of the LORD...
And they shall dwell securely.

Hebrews 10:5–10

When he came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me."

Luke 1:39–45

[Elizabeth cried out,] "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus keeps knocking on our doors, the doors of our lives. He doesn't do this by magic, with special effects, with flashing lights and fireworks. Jesus keeps knocking on our door in the faces of our brothers and sisters, in the faces of our neighbors, in the faces of those at our side.

—Meeting the homeless,
Washington, DC,
September 24,
2015



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS
REFLECTION

*Greet the Lord with delight,
understanding that we are
pregnant with his grace
and presence.*

- At Christmas, how will I show my joy at the Lord's coming?
- How can I express this delight to family and acquaintances?

Why Did Jesus Come?

By Michael D. Guinan, OFM

It happened years ago on Christmas. As the parishioners left church after Mass, a woman approached me, all smiles, and said, “This is such a beautiful feast! I’m not sure exactly why God did it, but I certainly am glad!”

The Incarnation, from the Latin for “flesh” (*caro/carnis*), affirms the “enfleshment” of the Word of God. This doctrine, which is at the center of our Christian faith, upholds the mystery that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is one divine person but possesses both a divine and a human nature. As it turns out, we do have some idea why God did it.

The Creed tells us that the Incarnation was “for us and for our salvation.” Before the birth of Jesus, Joseph is told that Mary will bear a son and “you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). It is the incarnate Jesus who then saves or delivers us from the condition of sin and death.

But can this be the whole story? Does the Incarnation really depend on sin? It would seem that the Word of God became human not because of sin, but rather because God wanted Christ to be the most perfect work of creation, the goal and direction of creation.

Overflowing Love

In a real sense, the Incarnation is



connected with the very life of the Trinity. The inner life of God is a life of ever-giving love. The second person, the Son, is at the center of this flow of love. God freely chooses to let this love overflow outside; creation flows out of this fountain of divine goodness. Here too, the incarnated Son stands at the center as the

focus of God’s outpouring love and the one capable of directing and returning that love back to God.

The prologue to St. John’s Gospel affirms that the Word was in the beginning before all things; that all things were created through him and that this Word became flesh in our midst (1:1–18). The hymn in St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians is similar: He (the incarnate Jesus) is before all things; all things were created in him and for him; in him all things hold together (1:15–20; see also Ephesians 1:3–14).

In other words, everything that exists is always in relationship to the Father, through Christ, and in the Spirit. Because of sin, the Incarnation took the form and shape that it did, but the Incarnation itself is primary.

Viewing the Incarnation this way can help us to appreciate and share the insight of St. Francis of Assisi: All parts of creation—sun, moon, stars, air, water, animals, people—are our brothers and

sisters, children in Christ of the one Creator God. Each creature is a unique embodiment and reflection of God deserving our care and respect.

Aesthetic Adventure

It is only in this light that we can recognize sin and brokenness as a disfiguring of the beauty of creation. Through sin we are like the deranged man in Rome who took a hammer to Michelangelo’s statue, the *Pietà*. The Incarnation delivers us from sin, but in so doing it restores the goodness and beauty of creation intended from the beginning. In our living the Christian life, we are embarked on an aesthetic adventure: to live the beauty of the Incarnation.

The woman on that Christmas years ago spoke more truth than she realized. It is indeed a beautiful feast, but we do have some idea why God did it. And we—each of us and all creation—are certainly glad! +



*Lord, your Word gives me life,
joy, hope, and peace.
May your Word find a home in me
and inspire me to live a life
rooted in gospel values.*

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 24–29

Monday, Advent Weekday:
2 Sm 7:1–5, 8b–12, 14a, 16 / Lk 1:67–79

Tuesday, Christmas: Is 52:7–10 /
Heb 1:1–6 / Jn 1:1–18 or Jn 1:1–5, 9–14

Wednesday, St. Stephen:
Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59 / Mt 10:17–22

Thursday, St. John:
1 Jn 1:1–4 / Jn 20:1a, 2–8

Friday, the Holy Innocents:
1 Jn 1:5–2:2 / Mt 2:13–18

Saturday, Fifth Day in the Octave of
Christmas: 1 Jn 2:3–11 / Lk 2:22–35