

4th Sunday of Advent Year C. Mic 5:1-4a; I Sam 17:12; Heb 10:5-10; Lk 1:39-45

The Church can never celebrate the role of Mary in the birth and mission of Christ enough. God demonstrated through David and Mary that human beings can and do make a difference. God invites us and trusts us to make the difference today as we await the celebration of the Lord's birth in a few days' time. _

When the prophet Mica was writing [around 8th century BC], Jerusalem was under siege and David's dynasty was in jeopardy. But according to the prophet, salvation would come to the people from a comparatively little, obscure and insignificant place, Bethlehem in Judah]. Bethlehem was God's choice. Also Some 2006 years ago, in a city named Nazareth, a young girl was approached by the Archangel Gabriel with a special message and a very special mission. Her name was Mary and her mission was to become the mother of Jesus Christ, the messiah, the Son of the most high God. Mary was just a peasant girl, neither wealthy nor of noble birth. Back then, there was no test tube babies, no in-vitro fertilization or artificial insemination, no surrogate motherhood or genetic engineering of any sort. Mary asked the necessary question and believed. The gift and honour and the blessings was such that she chose to go down straight to their hill country to share this marvelous experience with her kinswoman Elizabeth who was also herself a beneficiary of this great benevolence of God. Mary and Elizabeth were chosen by God for special missions. They fulfilled those missions very faithfully. The obscure city of Bethlehem was a potent tool in God's hands for the birth of the Messiah. It became the most popular.

In his book titled "Christmas", the Kerry writer John Keane talks about 'the urging' of Christmas. He tells about a man who in normal circumstances wouldn't give you the crumbs from his table, but who when imbued with the spirit of Christmas, phoned his estranged daughter in England and begged her to come home for Christmas. The daughter accepted his invitation and on both sides all was forgiven and reconciliation ensued. John Keane remarks that the difficult man wasn't as mean afterwards. He concludes in that book 'so my friends, take Christmas by the horns, it can work wonders. He advised that we shouldn't be weepy or sentimental about Christmas, because we might not get another chance during the year to show our humanity to the world. Christmas is about taking stock of our humanity and dispensing it to the world where it is most needed. So, if we feel the impulse to be forgiving and charitable and loving, we shouldn't think twice about it or we will miss the boat. The milk of human kindness does not come from cows and goats, it comes from that great repository of compassion and hope which is the human heart.

The Spirit of Christmas cannot be killed. It has survived, Napoleon Bona Parte, Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Idi-Amin Dada, Mussolini, Sanni Abacha, and so many other political tyrants. It has survived human greed and jealousy and every other human failings conceivable. It might be good to ask ourselves the question: what is God calling me to do this Christmas? What is at stake for us this Christmas? Is it to mend a failing and crumbling relationship, to break an unholy and bad or undignifying habit, to reach out and talk to people who come to church and not just those I am comfortable with alone. As we do this pondering, let's not forget that God might choose to stretch us as he did to Mary. Can we move beyond the realm of the simple and possible so as to explore the complex and mysterious?