

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Year C



FIRST READING
Micah 5:1–4

PSALM
Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

SECOND READING
Hebrews 10:5–10

GOSPEL
Luke 1:39–45

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PRAYER

Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned
upon the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim
and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted.
But let your hand
be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made
strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back
from you;
give us life,
and we will call on your name.

READING THE WORD

First Reading
Micah 5:1–4

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me

one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up
until the time
when she who is in labor
has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred
shall return to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his
flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty
of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure,
for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.
If the Assyrians
come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them
seven shepherds
and eight installed as rulers.

Second Reading
Hebrews 10:5–10

Consequently, when Christ came
into the world, he said,
“Sacrifices and offerings
you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘See, God,
I have come to do your will, O God’
(in the scroll of the book it is written

of me).”

When he said above, “You have nei-
ther desired nor taken pleasure in
sacrifices and offerings and burnt
offerings and sin offerings” (these
are offered according to the law),
then he added, “See, I have come to
do your will.” He abolishes the first
in order to establish the second.
And it is by God’s will that we have
been sanctified through the offer-
ing of the body of Jesus Christ once
for all.

Gospel
Luke 1:39–45

In those days Mary set out and
went with haste to a Judean town
in the hill country, where she en-
tered the house of Zechariah and
greeted Elizabeth. When Eliza-
beth heard Mary’s greeting, the
child leaped in her womb. And
Elizabeth was filled with the
Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a
loud cry, “Blessed are you among
women, and blessed is the fruit
of your womb. And why has this
happened to me, that the mother
of my Lord comes to me? For as
soon as I heard the sound of your
greeting, the child in my womb
leaped for joy. And blessed is she
who believed that there would be
a fulfillment of what was spoken
to her by the Lord.”

HEARING THE WORD

“Bearers of Good News”

The readings of the fourth Sunday of Advent take us to the threshold of Christmas by focusing on the theme of bearing and sharing the Good News of the Lord's imminent arrival. To announce this Good News, God chooses the ordinary, unassuming, simple and humble people, making them his heralds and instruments for accomplishing his plans for the salvation of the world.

In the first reading, we find a famous Messianic prophecy announcing the place for the birth of the awaited Messiah. The prophet Micah brings the good news to the people of Judah, speaking about the rise of a new king in the house of David. Micah lived and prophesied in the 8th century B.C. He came from a small village called Moresheth, not far from Jerusalem. He was a controversial figure. Coming from the countryside, Micah was an outsider to the Jewish leaders residing in Jerusalem, and their fierce critic. Micah was no friend of the elite.

The prophecy we read comes from the section of Micah's book dealing with a leadership crisis. Micah first observes that there is “no king” in Zion (4:9), and that the ruler of Israel is taken away in disgrace (5:1). The exact historical context for these words is

not clear. However, Micah undoubtedly reveals God's displeasure with the Judean royalty, because of its failure to maintain the kingdom, and the people, in the covenant with their God. It was a failure that had disastrous results for all. In these threatening circumstances, Micah announces the rise of a new ruler in Israel. Surprisingly, this new king will not come from Jerusalem, where the Judean kings resided. Instead, he will come from the smallest and most insignificant town among the towns of Judah – Bethlehem! Bethlehem was the home town of David, but all his royal successors resided in palaces in Jerusalem. By speaking about a royal birth in humble Bethlehem, Micah refers to a re-birth and a renewal of monarchy. This is a messianic prophecy promising a leader of a new quality, one who, like a shepherd, shall “feed his flock” in the strength and tenderness of the Lord. His rule will establish perpetual peace, which is the hallmark of God's kingship. Micah bears the good news declaring that God's design for his people will not be frustrated by the inadequacies and failures of the Jerusalem leadership. A new leader, raised by God from humble stock, will revive all the ideals that his forefather David stood for, namely loyalty and faithfulness to God and to God's covenant.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews confirms that Jesus' coming into the world is the good news for believers. In the text of the second reading he begins

by affirming that Jesus' mission as a human being coming into this world was willed by God. God “prepared the body” for Jesus and sent him into the world. Jesus willingly accepted this mission, as he stated, “see, God, I have come to do your will”. The author describes Christ's mission in the world as offering a once only sacrifice of his body for the sanctification of believers. Christ's sacrifice replaces the sacrifices and offerings of the old covenant, as those animal sacrifices had to be repeated time and again. Furthermore, unlike the offering of animal blood, Christ's sacrifice consisted in his personal fulfilment of the will of God. He offered himself on the cross in fulfilment of God's will. Such a sacrifice cannot be matched by any animal sacrifice offered under the first covenant. Christ became the bearer of good news, and the good news itself. As the bearer of good news, he announced God's will to save his people, and, by fulfilling God's will, he made this good news real and effective for all believers.

Today's Gospel reading contains Luke's story of the visitation by Mary to Elizabeth. These mothers to be are both bearers of the good news. When they meet face to face, they share the joy of the gifts they have received from the Lord. Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth happens as a response to the announcement she received from the angel Gabriel. In fact, Gabriel made two announcements. Firstly, he

told Mary about God's offer to make her the mother of the Saviour. Secondly, he told her that, "your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren" (Luke 1:36). It was likely, that hearing these announcements, Mary wanted to share her joy with someone who would understand her experience of being chosen for a special purpose. Elizabeth would know how God works mysteriously to fulfil his divine plan, as she herself was the recipient of God's transforming power growing in her womb.

In the encounter of the two expectant mothers, they both become bearers and announcers of the good news. Mary brings with her the Saviour, as yet unborn, causing Elisabeth and her unborn child to rejoice. As the angel Gabriel had greeted Mary, Mary now greets Elizabeth. Being graced to be the Mother of God, Mary's simple greeting stirs joy, as Elizabeth understands that the Saviour has been brought into her house.

Then Elizabeth herself becomes a prophetic messenger and an announcer of the good news. Filled with the Holy Spirit she declares Mary "the mother of my Lord", that is God's mother. Speaking of her own child, John the Baptist, leaping in her womb, Elizabeth may be alluding to king David who rejoiced and danced before the Ark of the Covenant as it was carried in a solemn procession to Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam 6:12-16). Thus, she declares the child in Mary's

womb the bearer of God's presence. Finally, she pronounces Mary "blessed" among all women, because of Mary's faith in accepting her role as the mother of the Saviour. All these pronouncements make Elizabeth a proclaimer of the good news, just as Mary was its bearer.

As we approach the feast of Incarnation, the liturgy of this final Sunday of Advent places before our eyes the bearers of the good news. The prophet Micah brought the good news to his people speaking of the promised ruler who will lead them towards renewal as God's special people. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author proclaims Jesus Christ as the ultimate bearer of the good news, and the good news himself, the one who sanctified the people by fulfilling God's will. The Gospel depicts two women who bear and announce the good news as they rejoice and affirm to one another God's mysterious work in their lives. In all these cases, it is evident that those who accept God's divine will and trust in his mysterious ways become bearers of God's Good News. The psalmist well expresses the desire of all those who long to see and experience the effects of the good news as he prays, "You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, ... shine forth, stir up your might and come to save us!"

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

It is often said that "bad news sells faster than good

news". Media houses will often search frantically for bad news in order to stir unhealthy excitement and make more financial gains. Consequently, our world is filled with so much unpleasant news that it blurs and obscures the beauty of life. No wonder that cases of suicide continue to increase in many parts of our world, the world appears so bad that an escape from it appears a tempting option. However, amidst widespread bad news, there is one piece of outstandingly good news that appears not to have received enough publicity. It is the good news of God's intervention in human history.

Our Gospel text presents us with the story of two women whose life was dramatically changed because of their personal experience of God's good news enshrined in the person of Jesus Christ. As members of the same extended family, Mary and Elizabeth might have previously met during some family gatherings. It is highly possible that Mary knew of Elizabeth's social and family stigma which she bore as a barren woman (cf. Luke 1:36). Still, up to the moment of their encounter with God's good news, these two women led a very ordinary existence, completely unknown and insignificant in the context of the broader Jewish community. Everything changed, and their lives took on a new dimension with the inbreaking of the good news of the coming of the Saviour. The status of both women changed dramatically. They became active participants in the proclamation of the

best news that history has recorded so far.

The Krobos of Ghana have a saying, “good news is like an unsealed perfume. The more you share it, the more you keep the fragrance in your hands”. Any bearer of an important news will himself /herself make news. Because of the readiness of these two women to participate in the proclamation of the good news, their names have echoed on the lips of every generation that has come after them.

In recent times, some Christians have also made the headlines and front pages of newspapers and other media platforms. Unfortunately, quite a number of these headlines are not news of heroic faith and witness to the Christ’s teaching but scandals and shocking abuses. These irresponsible Christians damage others and themselves. They also discredit God and Christ’s Gospel before the world. Misrepresenting the good news they turn many away from it. Unlike the two women of today’s Gospel, such Christians divert the good news from the world instead of bringing it into the world.

Faithful Christians, by virtue of their union with the person of Christ, are called upon to become bearers of good news. Like Mary and Elizabeth, they are called to give birth to God’s Son so that he may be present here and now. This “birth” happens when we talk about this good news with others, and, more importantly, show God’s Son forth by the

way we live our lives.

During these few remaining days of Advent, we are invited to look to Jesus and allow the forthcoming celebration of his entrance into the world to bring about a transformation and a change in our status in life, so that we might be bearers of good news in a world besieged by bad news.

PROVERB

*“Good news
is like
an unsealed
perfume.
The more
you share it,
the more
you keep
the fragrance
in your hands.”*

ACTION

Self-examination:

What kind of headlines am I making for Christ? Am I furthering the cause of Christ and the Gospel or I am bringing the Christian message into disrepute?
Can people readily identify

me with the person of Christ when I speak and act? Why or why not?

Response to God:

As I reflect on how God empowered different people to bear his message in different epochs of the history of salvation, I offer myself to God as a willing bearer of the good news to my generation.

Response to your World:

During this week I will intentionally speak only about the positive side of life and seek to convey to others the sense of hope and joy that comes from my faith.

In our meeting, we will engage in a brainstorming session to find creative ways to tell the good news of salvation using the means and methods available to us today.

PRAYER

*Eternal Father,
as the Blessed Virgin Mary
humbly accepted
to bear your Son
and bring him into the world
surrounding all her life to you,
I submit my entire being
to the service of your Word.
Make me a bearer
of your good news
and use me for your glory.
Amen.*