

Advent 4B 2014

God's Surprising Presence

On the first Sunday of Advent the church focused our attention on the powerful coming of Christ at the end of the ages to judge the living and the dead. Then, on the second and third Sundays of Advent the church turned our attention to John the Baptist, the last and greatest of the prophets who prepared for the coming of the Messiah. But today, on this fourth and last Sunday of Advent, when all of the candles of our Advent wreath have been lit, the church draws our attention to the Virgin Mary who points to the coming of Christ in the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of the Incarnation.

There is no talk about the fearful coming of Christ at the end of the ages. We no longer hear the thundering voice of the John the Baptist calling us to repent and prepare for the coming of the Lord. Instead, our attention is drawn to a young girl, to a virgin. For it is though this young girl of little importance that God will perform the great work of salvation. It is in this virgin whom the world does not know that God will bring about the work of redemption in Christ.

But Mary is troubled and puzzled. Everything the angel says to her seems impossible. Can *she* be the mother of the Savior, the mother of God's Son? Why has God chosen *her*, a simple young girl to bring about the fulfillment of God's plan? Surely there must be another way, a better way. But God's redemptive plan

does not depend on human power and wisdom. God rarely works in the way we expect God to work. God is always at work in new and surprising ways. That is why God redeems the world through the weakness and folly of the cross. That is why God chooses a young girl, a virgin, to be the mother of the Savior.

There is no need for Mary to be afraid because the powerful Spirit of God will come upon her and do what no human can do. There is no need for Mary to question because all things are possible with God. There is no need for Mary to be afraid because God works in what the world counts as weak and foolish to confound the wise and powerful. The eternal Word of God takes flesh in the womb of a simple virgin. The eternal Son of God redeems us by the wood of the cross.

As we begin this fourth and final week of Advent, we wait for the coming of Christ in Christmas Mystery. Today's liturgy reminds us that nothing is impossible for God. God is always at work in our lives in new and surprising ways. God is present in our weakness as well as our strength, in our failure as well as our success. God is present in our foolishness as well as our wisdom. God is present to us when we least expect it. God is present in a virgin, in a child, in a man hanging on the cross. God is present, saving and redeeming us, even when we try to resist God's grace. This presence of God in our lives is the mystery of Christmas we are about to celebrate. The presence of God in Christ is the good news that saves and redeems us.