

Advent 4A 2013

God with Us

On this fourth Sunday of Advent a certain calm and quiet comes upon the church. The liturgy no longer speaks about the coming of Christ at the end of the ages. We no longer hear the thundering voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. Instead, today's liturgy focuses our attention on the Virgin Mary.

Mary waits in quiet hope and anticipation for the birth of her child. Like every expectant mother she wonders what her child will be like. Like every expectant mother she is filled with joy at what will be. Like every expectant mother, Mary knows that her child will be special, unlike any other. And so Mary waits and hopes for the birth of her child, her firstborn.

As Mary waits and hopes, she wonders about this child who has been conceived through the power of God's Spirit. She wonders about this child destined to save his people from their sins. She wonders about this child in whom God will be present to his people. She wonders about this child who will be the fulfillment of all the hopes and promises of Israel. Mary wonders and waits for the fulfillment of God's promise.

How did this happen? How did this come about? How was this child conceived and formed in her womb? Why was this child conceived and formed in her womb? Why did God choose her and no other?

The Son of God could have been born into the world at another time, in another place. The Son of God could have been born to a woman who lived in a royal palace. But God chose to be born of Mary, a young girl of no account, a virgin the world did not know. God chose to be born of Mary.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent we are beginning to enter into the mystery of Christmas, the mystery of our salvation, the mystery of our faith. On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we begin to see the mysterious ways in which God is at work in our lives and in the world today. We begin to understand that God is present in those people and events we hardly take note of. God is present in the weakness and poverty of the world. God is present in people we hardly notice. God is present in Mary and in those like her again and again.

Our Christian faith is built upon two foundations: the mystery of the resurrection that we celebrate at Easter, and the mystery of the Incarnation that we celebrate at Christmas. The mystery of the resurrection, assures us that the power of God is greater than the power of death, and it promises us eternal life, resurrection life, with Jesus Christ. The mystery of the incarnation teaches us that God is present in our world because the eternal word of God became flesh in Jesus Christ.

The mystery of Christmas proclaims that God is with us in Jesus Christ; God is present in our world. God is with us in our fears and sorrows, our shame and disappointment, our weakness and failure. God is present in this world because God is present in Jesus Christ.

This last and final week of Advent, these final days before Christmas, should fill us with the same quiet hope and wonder that filled Mary. For, how is it that the eternal God, the creator of this infinitely expansive universe, has come into our lives in Jesus Christ? But he has; and this makes all of the difference. God is present to us in Jesus Christ. Who can be against us; who can harm us? For if God is present in Jesus Christ, if Jesus is Emmanuel, then all will be well.