

COMMENTARY 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT – YEAR C

RESOURCES:

- Balthasar, *Light of the Word*.
- Wansbrough, H. (2012). *The Sunday Word: A Commentary on the Sunday Readings*. London; New York: Burns & Oates.
- Bishop Robert Barron homily

FIRST READING: Micah 5:1–4a

²But 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.

³Therefore 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. ⁴And 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; ⁵and 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.

“Seen from the perspective of salvation history, Micah’s astonishing prophecy in the first reading glimpses more of the future than the prophet could have possibly realized. In the time of tribulation following the destruction of Samaria, he returns to the origins of David, who had come from Bethlehem and the tribe of Ephraim in the distant past. According to the prophecy, after the tribulation of the exile had passed, the Shepherd of Israel will come from that place to establish a worldwide peaceable kingdom... The prophet reaches back to David, but the “distant past of Jesus” is eternity, and his eschatological peaceable kingdom will far surpass Israel’s expectations. Perhaps the fulfillment in Mary and her Son reaches back to the Old Covenant only in order to tower high above it” (Balthasar, *LW*, 263-4).

“On this final Sunday of Advent all the concentration is on Mary as she prepares to give birth to her Son. The prophecy of Micah reminds us that God’s standards are utterly different from human standards. Bethlehem was an insignificant little hilltop town, the home of the smallest clan of Judah, in an insignificant and oppressed country. Yet it had two moments of greatness, one when David was anointed king there, the other when Jesus was born. David was the youngest of his father’s sons, left to look after the sheep when all the others were summoned. He stands in the long tradition in the Bible that God chooses the younger or less distinguished, Abel instead of Cain, Jacob instead of Esau, Joseph the youngest of all Jacob’s sons. Jesus seemed to have no visible father at all, and Mary no roof over her head for the birth of her first child. We cannot dare to estimate any person’s value in God’s eyes, but amid all our striving, all the pushing and shoving for priority, we do have a lurking suspicion that those nearest to God, most marked by the image of God, are the humblest and least distinguished of people. Mary was among them” (Wansbrough 38).

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 80:2–3, 15–16, 18–19

R. ³Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

¹Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
²before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

¹⁴Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
¹⁵the stock that your right hand planted.

¹⁷But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
¹⁸Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:5–10

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; ⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. ⁷Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’ (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).” ⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

“Now the very spirit and mission of the Messiah who comes into the world are revealed. His task is pure obedience, for even to enter upon this mission is a matter of obedience. This obedience does not engage in external liturgical activities, rather, his own body, created by God for this purpose, will be the object of his sacrificial obedience. The ancient external sacrifices in the covenant of man with God disappear into the man-become-offering. True “once and for all”, this completes the covenant and sanctifies all of us. Here the reference of the New Covenant back to the Old Covenant is merely formal: the concept of sacrifice is taken up, but its meaning is totally changed – from ineffective to infinitely effective” (Balthasar, *LW*, 264).

“Today’s reading from Hebrews tells us that Jesus was given a body to express his obedience. By his bodily obedience, the guarantee and expression of his full humanity, he brought all bodily men and women back to God. By our bodies, we express our obedience, in sickness and in health. Jesus, too, in his baby’s body, his child’s body, his youthful body, his fully mature body, expressed his obedience to his Father. In so doing, he prepared for the ultimate expression of loving obedience on the Cross. Question: What is lacking in my obedience to God?” (Wansbrough 38).

GOSPEL: Luke 1:39–45

³⁹ In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

"Question: Is there anyone to whom a visit from me would bring special joy at Christmas?" (Wansbrough 38).

What's the difference between Mary going in haste to the hill country of Judah and our going in haste to the shopping malls trying to get those last minute presents before Christmas day? Mary's purpose vs. our purpose. Mary's charity vs. our charity.

Mary proceed in haste to the hill country of Judah because she had found her mission – her role in the theo-drama. Whereas the ego-drama is the play that I'm writing, producing, directing, and starring in, the theo-drama is the great story that is written by and directed by God, who has a role for you to play, a specific purpose that will make your life thrilling. Gabriel announced to Mary her role in the theo-drama and Mary was gripped by her role. She didn't understand it fully nor was in control of it. She surrendered to it. Mary and Elizabeth were drawn together by their roles in the theo-drama, they had both fallen in love with God's purposes for their lives. Mass in where we insert ourselves into the great theo-drama. We must surrender to that drama, then we will find true life (paraphrase of Bishop Robert Barron's homily).