FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, CYCLE C

Opening prayer: Take a moment to become aware of God's presence. Then pray together the following prayer or some other prayer of your choice: Father, your eternal Word took flesh on earth, when Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Help us to open our whole being to you so that your Word may also take flesh in you. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing of life: Are you ready for Christmas?

Facilitator reads focus statement: "Elizabeth's question, 'Who am I?' underscores the surprising wisdom of God who seems to choose the least likely people (in the Gospel, Mary and Elizabeth), the least likely places (first reading, Bethlehem; second reading, human flesh) and the least likely methods (second reading, Jesus' sacrifice) in order to give his people his saving presence." (Patricia Sanchez)

Read the readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not already done so.

FIRST READING: Micah 5:1-4

Speaking to a people who had turned away from God, Micah paints a hopeful picture of a future era when God will raise up a good and faithful King-shepherd. Like his ancestor, David, he will come from humble origins - Bethlehem (also called Ephrathah). The Messiah King, empowered by God, will shepherd and lead his people in strength. Because of him, Israel's time of suffering and separation from God will come to an end.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 80

This is the prayer of a beleaguered people asking for deliverance.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 10:5-10

This reminds us of the connection between Bethlehem and Golgatha, the connection between Jesus' birth and sacrificial death. The central passion of Jesus' life was doing the will of his Father. In and through his obedience, we are saved and united with God.


Just as the small and otherwise obscure village of Bethlehem seemed an unlikely place to host the promised Messiah, so also are Mary and Elizabeth unlikely candidates to witness his presence in such a special way. As women of poor means their election would have been looked upon by people of that time as unacceptable.

Both Mary and Elizabeth had experienced miraculous conceptions. Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and Elizabeth conceived in her old age. As a result, they would have had much to talk about. In their precious time together, they could celebrate the awesome deeds of God in their lives. Then inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth eulogizes Mary and her child. She calls Mary "blessed" for two reasons: she has been chosen to be the Mother of the Lord, and she has placed her trust in the Word of God. Elizabeth, like her son, humbles herself before her much younger cousin. Even before his birth, Jesus' presence is "good news" and cause for joy. In its Advent context, the reading inspires awe for the mystery of Christ's coming in the flesh. Who is this woman to be greeted in this way? Who is the child in her womb that even before his birth he inspires prophetic utterances? Mary's greatness is her fidelity to God's Word and her cooperation with his plan.

FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you the most?

2. God asked a lot of Mary and Elizabeth. Can you give an example of where God asked a lot of you (or a member of
3. God made Elizabeth fruitful in her old age. How might this speak to the older members of your parish? ("fruitful",
meaning useful to God)

4. Two thousand years ago, God used unlikely places (Bethlehem), unlikely people (poor women) and unlikely methods
to carry forward his plan. Can you think of modern day examples?

5. How has your Advent been?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

What is one way you can act on this Sunday's readings? Some suggestions: Help an older person to see how she, like
Elizabeth, can be fruitful in her old age. Pray the second decade of the Joyful Mystery of the rosary, the Visitation, for
pregnant women, especially those considering abortion and for couples longing to have a child. Live the Christmas
spirit by reaching out to someone in need.

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray for all travelers this season, for those separated from loved ones, for people who will have a painful Christmas,
for expectant mothers.©