

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

4 Advent  
December 18, 2005  
Fr. Bill McGinty

**“When God Speaks We Need to Listen!”**

Today is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent, our Advent wreath candles tell us that Christ is eminent and that Christmas is upon us. But today, we also welcome Charlie and his family, for today December 18 is the day of his Baptism. The New Testament last week told us that Jesus baptized his disciples in the River Jordan and he instructed them to baptize others.

Baptism is a rite of initiation, it is a beginning. Its symbol is water because water symbolizes life. As a parish family we unite with Charlie’s family in welcoming him as a gift of God to his parents.

The Book of Samuel today tells the story of David, Israel’s favorite King and the hero of the nation’s greatest political era. David is the young warrior who finds favor with God. He is brave, courageous and charismatic. He is depicted as the perfect hero who can do anything, even write music.

Yet, David is far from perfect; he is prone to deep depressions and sometimes fits of rage. He is a hero with feet of clay, and breaks every moral law God has ever set for his people. Although God punishes David, he never abandons him and he never rejects him. David remains as his favorite.

But David himself is never thought of as a Messiah. Moses was a Messiah but not David. In a sense David is more like an “Adam” figure. He is more like you and I, a man in need of redemption. But when God speaks, David listens. When God speaks in our lives we need to listen.

After David, prophet after prophet speak of a Messiah. He would come from the line of David, but he would not be David. In a sense he had to be better than David. David could free his people from oppression and their enemies. He could fight battles and build cities, but he could not cure things that really truly ailed his people.

He could not turn his people back from sin or the need for immediate gratification of all their senses. He could not lift their heads out of the trough when they chose to eat or act like pigs. He could not lead them to God when they had turned their backs on all that was good and all that was holy.

Somehow, Israel’s prophets knew this. They knew that Israel needed a new kind of King and a new kind of Kingship.

Three thousand years ago men were standing alone against the crowd and against the world to say it was time for a different kind of Kingdom. It was time for a different concept of how power and authority could and should be used.

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Messiahship, as spoken by the Prophets, is the promise of a different world with vastly different values. It spoke of an ideal time, a time without war or hate or violence. The Messiah would come to put things right. To return man to the beauty of his created state. When that man came a new era would begin and God's life would enter the world to dispel darkness and herald a new kind of Kingdom.

After three thousand years you'd think we would have learned to sit down and talk out our differences. We could put a man on the moon, clone a sheep, and transplant a human heart, we could build an internet where you can speak to everyone around the globe, you can even put 10,000 songs on an Ipod the size of a box of matches, but no one has found an alternative to wiping a couple of hundred thousand human beings off the face of the planet rather than sit down and talk.

The beauty of the Christmas Story in today's Gospel is that God chose to come and ask a young girl to participate with him in man's salvation. He did so because what God holds as valuable is so different from that of the leaders of the world.

In Mary God found truth and honesty, compassion and reverence. They are the ingredients that Jesus spoke and taught in the Sermon on the Mount. We think of Jesus as the healer and the great teacher. Yet there is a sense in which what Jesus must have learned from Mary, he placed at the forefront of his ministry. With Joseph, Zachariah and Elizabeth she belongs to that small group of faithful Israelites who await God's Messiah. They wait the Agawam, the Remnant of the true faith of Israel. They wait for the promise of the Prophets to be fulfilled. God spoke, Mary listened, and it is the story of today's Gospel.

If we cannot grasp why Christ came, what his true teaching was, or even why he chose to die for what he believed, then God's plan of salvation in history has failed. For the heart of true Christianity cannot be found in the building of Churches and Cathedrals. The heart of true Christianity lies in the fact that God visited us and left us a blueprint for life, that gives life, a blueprint for love that grows love and a blueprint for reconciliation that brings wholeness and healing.

Don't we all weary of conflict and strife whether it is at work, home, marriage or on the nation stage? We long for peace and tranquility and we tire of politicians asking for money for more guns. We look at our children and we say, enough, there has to be a more intelligent answer other than to educate him, graduate him, give him a gun and ask him to kill or be killed.

Messianic prophecy spoke of a Savior who would make the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear. He would lift up the lowly and set the prisoners free.

There is a code in the Bible but it is not something as stupid and superficial as the DaVinci code. It is the underlining God talk that reveals and calls for a life of the Spirit that can elevate each one of us to a new level of being. When we taste it, when we sample it we want

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more. The magic of the Advent readings that speak of Angels and dreams, prophecy and Messiah only hint at a world of the Spirit that is ours for the asking.

How do we obtain it? We take Jesus' teaching seriously, we make the Beatitudes the way we live our lives. But more, we are not content to hunger after "the things of God," we go after them. Deepen your knowledge, reach for that book, explore your Bible and pray. Pray for the Spirit. Pray for the gifts of the Spirit and they will become a part of your life. Most of all we need to listen to God and seek out his revelation.

People and the media can argue every year about the place of Jesus in Christmas, but they do not know what we know. They do not know that we are heirs of an amazing grace that flows into our lives each and every time we turn and evoke the Holy Spirit.

God turned to a sixteen year old village girl, two thousand years ago in order to bring himself into the world. Why should we wonder that his mystery, his message and his revelation is not obvious to the wise, the clever and the most power and rich of the world? It is arrogant not to listen to God?

Paul tells his readers, if following Christ is foolish, then for Christ's sake I am a fool.

Today we mark Charlie with a secret sign. We mark him as belonging to Christ. His family claims him as their own and as a precious gift of God. With the words of the Gospel we all ask what can this child grow up to be? With the protection of the Holy Spirit, with the Christian love of his family, and with the help of our prayers, we answer: "anything, but most of all he will grow his Spirit to be an inspiration to others."

When we make his baptismal promises for him today, we promise to teach him the Jesus story. When we repeat what we all believe, we recommit ourselves to this changing of the world, our world through the Gospel message.

Become a person of the Spirit and you can cast doubt out of your life. Bring the Holy Spirit into your life and anything is possible. We can only do that if we approach God's word with humility and listen to his voice speaking to us.

Let us pray.

Come Holy Spirit, let Jesus come into our hearts in this season of Messianic joy and fill us with the graces we need to change what needs changing. Come Holy Spirit.

Amen+

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