**4th Sunday of ADVENT, Cycle. C. 2024.**

Today we begin the **final Sunday of Advent**, the great mysteries and personalities we have travelled with over the past weekends suddenly converge in new ways. The prophetic promises made to Israel become **stories of a child to be born, the son of Virgin, conceived power the Gods’ Holy Spirit**.

As it is always, we all have come to this day prepared and ready; but may be sometimes we all feel that in certain areas of our life we are going in disarray and are nearing to a state of panic, right? We have tried to be spiritually prepared for Christmas. We lit the **Advent Wreath** each Sunday, we prayed together as a family, and tried to remember the needy in our community and have considered what we can do more throughout the year.

It is easier to put up decorations and buy presents and plan for parties and write Christmas cards and do all the tangible things and say, “***I am ready for Christmas***”. Of course these are needed, they are all part of our celebrations. **But is it enough?. I** imagine that God is looking to see **how much our love has grown and hearts have changed.** What we have learned during this Advent season that we can take with us into the New Year?

As we are nearing the end of Advent, we are gently led into the lives of Mary and Elizabeth. Through overwhelming grace and faith, these two ordinary women, without title or prestige, stand center stage in the great drama of salvation: Stitching together the old and the new covenants and witnessing to God’s fidelity and eternal mercy. There is a reason why **Mary and Elizabeth are always the focal point of the fourth Sunday of Advent.** Simply, stated, women understand Advent better than men. Why? Because women have babies and men don’t. Women know what waiting for new life is all about; they know what **active preparation** is. Pregnant women know new life from inside out; they have the experience. That is **why Mary visits Elizabeth.** Their visit and their conversation tell us all we need to know as we enter the final hours of our waiting.

**As Mary does in today’s Gospel**, touch base with your own self and valuable relationships. Get ready and hurry up with your visits. **Open your arms in reconciliation and welcome. Recognize Christ in others you meet**. Take that first step in your life to greet others gently and to settle your disputes, **and be a symbol of joy for others.**

Remember Christmas celebrates the gift of God’s presence in our lives. Let us present to the people who need us. **The Gospel today presents** before us **two mothers meet who shouldn’t be mothers.** One is too old, the other a virgin. They are cousins, but their deeper bond is the two things they have in common: **an impossible pregnancy, and faith in an inexplicable Go**d- who is also ours- let us ask them to share that faith with us. **The words of Elizabeth echo the surprise of God’s gift for the entire hu**manity. Recognizing the greatness of Jesus, for who he is: the Son of God, the blessed fruit of Mary’s womb she exclaims: “***How does this happen to me that the mother of the Lord should come to me***”? If we reflect within the depths of our heart we might say **with Elizabe**th, “***And how does this happen to me, that the Mother of the Lord should come to me”***? Not that Mary actually visited us but the one whom she bore has indeed come into our lives. ***What has occasioned such a visit? What has brought the Lord into my space and my journey?*** Nothing less than God’s favor has come to us in the word made flesh, the one who dwells among us as Emmanuel. **The joy of Elizabeth is our joy** in these final days of Advent.

**World catastrophes, family trials, and personal suffering don’t stand back for Christ**mas. When winter darkness falls across the crib and our lives, as it must, **let us also pray for their courage**. The courage sustains the joy until the morning sun breaks through the night, as it did for Mary, and as it will for us to face any kind of challenge in our Christian living.

So, as we celebrate in three days the gift that God has given us through the incarnation of His Son, let us also pray we can be gifts to one another and to those whom God has sent us to serve. Let us pray that **like Eliza**beth, we might be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to see God’s work in unexpected places and people and **like Mary**, we can give birth to **Jesus in our world to**day- that through us, Jesus might be the Shepherd of the troubled souls whom we encounter in our daily lives.