

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent

### ***First reading:***

(Micah 5 .1-4)

*The Ruler from Bethlehem*

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.

### **Question:**

*Does the Church give special honour to the poor?*

### ***Second reading:***

(Hebrews 10.5-10)

*'I am coming to do your will.'*

As we prepare for Christmas we are reminded that Jesus came to overtrump the disobedience of Adam by his own perfect obedience. It was not the suffering of Jesus itself that redeemed the world, as though suffering had some value in itself, or paid some penalty. The medieval theology that suggested this tied itself in knots about the recipient of this payment: God or the devil? Neither recipient works out!

In Romans, Paul is quite clear that the redemptive factor was Jesus' obedience even to the point of suffering on the Cross: 'Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience are many to be made upright.' Adam is the image of human disobedience, the disobedience of us all.

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?*

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## Gospel:

*(Luke 1.39-44)*

### *The Visitation*

Luke's account of the birth and infancy of Jesus is built on the comparison and contrast of the two stories of John the Baptist and Jesus: the Annunciation to the parents, the birth of each, the joy on earth and in heaven, the circumcision, the growth of the child.

In each incident, John is shown to be great, but Jesus greater still. Only in this incident do the two families meet, the two stories cross. The two mothers meet each other to marvel at the destiny of their children. The journey from Nazareth to even the nearest of the towns in the hill country of Judah (traditionally Elizabeth's home is located at Ain Karim, now on the outskirts of Jerusalem) would have been arduous, a week's walk for a fit young woman. This special exertion and generosity shows her love and care for her elderly relative, as well as the natural excitement of the two in sharing their motherhood.

Luke has already told us that Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit. Now Elizabeth, too, is filled with the Holy Spirit as they share and exchange the praise of God for the gift of their child.

## Question:

*Is there anyone to whom a visit from me would bring special joy at Christmas?*

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