The Collect for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, in its petition, spans the whole of the New Testament presentation of salvation history, from the Incarnation of the 2nd Person of the Blessed Trinity to His Resurrection – which, with the Ascension, completed the work on earth of the physical Person of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary.

The Church’s Prayer begins with a plea for a new influx of God’s grace into us (lines 1 & 2). “Grace”, as the Catholic Catechism defines it, is: “...favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.” (#1996) God the Father’s sending of His Only-Begotten and beloved Son is already a free and undeserved gift to us sinners. With the upcoming festival of Christmas, the Church celebrates that Gift – in His Person, but also in the great works of salvation which He did while on earth. In effect, the Church is praying that God might renew that Gift in us this season.

The Gift was prepared for by the entire Old Testament dispensation – the giving of freedom in the Exodus from Egypt; the giving of the Law, which is an insight into God’s kind of acting; the giving of the Promised Land, which is a kind of foretaste and sacrament of the true Promised Land of heaven that is reserved for God’s people, His chosen ones; the giving of direction and formation through the prophets. Then, the Gift was proclaimed officially, we might say, when the angel Gabriel visited Mary and asked for her consent to become the mother of “the Son of the Most High.” (Luke 1:26ff) This “message of an angel” is what is referred to in line 4 of the Collect. Finally, God’s Gift, prepared for throughout many centuries, came to be and was made physically visible to human eyes, in the Incarnation of Christ. (line 3)

This was just the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Once He had arrived at adulthood, He then spent His life making God’s Grace, God’s wonderful Gift, present in new forms. The Gift, which the Gospels often call “the Kingdom of God”, was to be found in the teaching of Jesus. It was to be found in His many miracles of healing, of reaching out to sinners, even in raising persons from the dead. The Gospels are filled with the stories of these various forms of “God’s Gift.”

And all this culminates in the Paschal Mystery. The Passion and death on the Cross of Jesus shows the depths of God’s love for us, God’s willingness to give to the ultimate degree. (Cf. line 5) And this culminates in the glorious Resurrection of Jesus from the dead (line 6). The rising of Jesus from the dead shows that God’s Gift will not be thwarted, even by death that is caused by the jealousy and sinfulness of men.

It is this certainty that gives the Church the courage to pray for a new influx of God’s Gift, God’s Grace, in our lives. In effect we pray that the entire saving Mystery of Jesus may be made present to us and for us, by the Church’s liturgy throughout this new liturgical Year.

Reflection by Abbot Marcel Rooney, OSB. This may be reprinted for use within the Diocese of Madison. Outside of the Diocese of Madison, please email worship@straphael.org.