

### Fourth Sunday of Advent (12/20/2020)

The Gospel we heard from St. Luke sets the scene for the great celebration of the Lord's Nativity later this week. Luke anchors us in a specific point in human time - indicating that the eternal and timeless God becomes one of us by entering time and the frail material world while still remaining the same God. This coming has been foretold by the prophets, it was a plan developed by God to counteract the tragic fall in the Garden - a plan in which God will come to save his people. His saving action is not restricted to a military engagement or establishing a period of peace in this temporary world. He enters time in order to escape it again at his resurrection, and in the process provides the way for us to do the same.

John says that he is the one spoken of by Isaiah the prophet. The voice that calls in the wilderness, a faint voice in the distance that calls peoples' attention. The other night I was at my desk and I heard the whistle of a train in the distance. Just like that far off horn could reliably predict the coming of the train, the voice of John reliably predicts the coming of the Lord. There are many passages in Scripture that speak about the one who is to come, the anointed one, the Messiah - many were read in a way that sees this Messiah as a human being come to liberate the people, others, like the one John references, indicate the coming of a more cosmic figure, and even the Lord Himself. This may have been a source of confusion for people for centuries - but we now know that all were correct. A human being yes, but not an ordinary human being, a unique individual who is fully human yet fully divine, a cosmic figure like no other. A man born in time of a kingly lineage, but also the eternal God who sits outside of time - come to earth to save.

John's call to prepare a way - a road - for the Lord was as relevant then as it is today. He announces the coming of the Lord in time. In John's day, he was referencing a specific, unique, and powerful manifestation of the Lord. In our time, this feast of the Nativity is an opportunity for us to spiritually welcome Jesus again. Each Christmas is a time to reflect on the coming of God in time, and to enter into that same moment of time in the body of Jesus Christ. We can retreat to the Body of Christ and touch again that moment when the eternal word became flesh. This is not so strange. At each Mass we leave our own time and are joined to the drama of the Last Supper and Cross - we experience again a powerful manifestation of the presence of the Lord which leaves behind for us the physical presence of that Body that transcends space and time.

The Body of Jesus which will be born of the Virgin Mary, which will suffer and die for us, and which is now glorified and to which we have been joined, has a great promise and power. Without the coming of the Body in time there would have been no cross, without the cross no resurrection, and without the resurrection no transformation of the Body which permits our entry into heaven. All of this would seem impossible (and even laughable) to many people: A virgin birth, the death of Jesus without injury to his Godhead, a resurrection from the dead, a transformation, an eternal God forming in the Body of Jesus a bridge between the human world of time and frailty and the eternal world of God in heaven. Although others in ignorance laugh, we know it is all true. Many mountains and hills have been laid low, many crooked ways made straight for all this to happen. As the angel said to Mary at the annunciation: *nothing is impossible for God.*

Remember this as you approach Christmas and are struck by all the commercial activity that draws attention away from the great mystery. However, the Godlessness of our civilization cannot snuff out our hope and faith. The mockery that our Lord continues to receive at the hands of those who deny him, does not change the fact that he came to save even the Godless. Through all of these things the voice of John continues to call out to the world. While others may go about their own personal activities at the call of the Baptist - we are the ones who go to the train track at the sound of the faint whistle to welcome his arrival. We are the ones who enter this Church to greet him in the Eucharist, we are the ones who must give voice of the truth of Jesus Christ in our words and actions. As we approach the celebration of the Nativity, let us strengthen our resolve to not be drawn into a Godless celebration of Christmas as a secular holiday, but promote it aloud as a religious feast. In this way we prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus and, like the voice of the Baptist, call others to do the same.