

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 2018
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 1:26-45; 2:1-20, 40

Our old Testament lesson today tells us that Bethlehem bore the reproach of her neighbors because she was such a small village. Our gospel included mention of the pregnancy of Elizabeth, who bore the reproach of her neighbors because she was unable for years to conceive a child. And, of course, we heard about the miraculous conception of Jesus in the womb of our Blessed Mother, who bore the reproach of her neighbors because she was pregnant out of wedlock.

In each case the reproach was off the mark because the people involved were faithful to God's will. Bethlehem, as small as she was, would be the town from which the Savior of the world would come. Elizabeth was barren, true, but not because she was unfaithful. The Scripture records that she and her husband were both blameless in their observance of the Law. Her pregnancy late in life would show God's faithfulness. Likewise, the pregnancy of St. Mary. She wasn't pregnant, an unwed mother, because she had sinned, but precisely so that her divine Child would not bear the stain of sin. Indeed, she herself had been preserved from sin in anticipation of the pregnancy that would change the world.

Reproaches in our own day don't make any sense either. In a country that approves the recreational use of marijuana, a mind-altering drug, our neighbors are reproached for smoking cigarettes. If we don't seat-belt our children, we bear the reproach of the law; but to promote the annihilation of the same children before they are born is framed as standing up for freedom. We who are still alive because we have been faithful to God's commands are reproached for being simpletons, while the world applauds those who chart their own path, even when that path so often leads to their own destruction.

My point is that there is only one reproach we need to be concerned about, and there is only one commendation we ought to seek. Are we, like Bethlehem, Elizabeth, and Mary, being faithful to God? Then the reproaches of the world mean nothing. Are we by our manner of life being commended by the immemorial teaching of Holy Mother Church? Well, then we are a step closer to the eternal commendation we will receive on the Last Day: "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master."

Reproaches are meant to alter our behavior. Thank God that the reproaches that Elizabeth and Mary bore did not lead them to change course. Thank God they remained faithful in the face of those who were less than charitable to them.

We have to do the same. I hear the reproaches, too, that our Mass is too long, that our families are too large, that our music is antiquated and we'll never attract those with modern sensibilities. But I ignore them, because we are doing what the Church says is right, what the Church teaches is true. And I don't alter what we're doing because I believe what God has given us through the Church is so beautiful.

You know, we have at Mass each week five infant boys who could have played Jesus in the pageant we just saw. Imagine the friendships they're going to forge, the love they will share because of the Faith in which they'll be raised. All five boys have bright futures, because they all have humble parents. No

one asked me to make his son Jesus, and I was preoccupied with burying one of our fellow parishioners yesterday morning, so I neglected to ask anyone. I'm grateful to have parishioners who are open to life and at the same time aren't glory hounds. I'll bear reproaches for you all day long and ask that you pray God gives you the fortitude to do the same. We're doing what God has given us to do; and if we keep doing it, we can be certain that by God's grace a good number of the reproaches will be turned to praise for the Lord who inspired our good works.