

Fourth Sunday of Advent



The hope and peace of our Lord await us as we approach the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. We are also moving toward the winter holidays, which can be a uniquely challenging time for those in recovery. Cultural expectations, stress, heightened family tension, or a general sense of loss and loneliness may impact the way we feel and behave this time of year.

We have a chance to reflect upon the willingness of the Blessed Virgin Mary as we hear from the Gospel of Luke this Sunday. Mary's "yes" paved the way for Christ's entry into our world, revealing God's ultimate love for us and salvation from bondage. We turn to this Sunday's Gospel reading to witness the story of Mary's visitation to her cousin Elizabeth:

*Mary set out
and traveled to the hill country in haste
to a town of Judah,
where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted
Elizabeth.
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting,
the infant leaped in her womb,
and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit,
cried out in a loud voice and said,
"Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
And how does this happen to me,
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached
my ears,
the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
Blessed are you who believed
that what was spoken to you by the Lord
would be fulfilled."*

Mary just learned that she was pregnant with the Messiah. As part of the angel's message, she also learned that Elizabeth was six months pregnant, and she proceeded in haste to be of service to her older relative. She does not travel for the mere sake of curiosity or to discover if the angel is really telling the truth. Instead, she sets out to uncover more of God's mystery and to do His will.

As we have been given peace and new life from the addictions, compulsions, and unhealthy attachments that once dominated us, we can set out to do the same. In addition to helping ensure immunity from a relapse or acting out, service to others helps us stay close to the true meaning of Advent and Christmas. We are surrounded by cultural attitudes that cleverly assure us that Christmas is about getting things. Underneath this belief runs a current of scarcity that reminds us of all that we do not have.

When we are committed to understanding our role in the greater context of God's kingdom, we find grace and blessings in abundance. Just as Mary came to understand her role in the story of salvation, we are awoken to our part in the same story. We might seek to pray alongside Mary as we proclaim the words, "May it be done to me according to Your word."

The more we offer ourselves to the process of recovery, the more our lives will be filled with love and purpose. When our recovery is overlapped with the sacramental life of our faith, we get to know Jesus in an intimate and personal way.

We may be inclined to share glad tidings with those we encounter in the coming days as we turn to God for inspiration and hope. We have been offered a priceless gift of peace and freedom and find joy in the experience of sharing it with others.

Reflection Questions

- How are you preparing for the coming of Jesus while also anticipating things like expectations, potential family tensions, or a sense of loss? What spiritual tools will help you remain at peace and open to the will of God this holiday season?
- What inspires you to share peace and hope?
- Looking back on the past year, what growth and new life do you recognize taking place within you?

Christmas Marathon Meeting

Join the CIR community for a Christmas Marathon Meeting and be of service by committing an hour of your time

- Marathon begins the morning of Tuesday, December 24 and concludes at 10p ET/7p PT Wednesday, December 25
- Volunteers are needed to commit for an hour or more
- Commit here: tinyurl.com/cir-christmas-marathon-2024
- Invite a friend or others from your CIR meeting to join!
- Drop in any time day or night via phone or Zoom:
 - Zoom Meeting ID: 841 9988 9323
 - Passcode: 121212 | Dial in: (669) 900-6833

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45