

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday of Advent | For Sunday, December 18, 2022

The Greatest Gift

Written by Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

Isaiah 7:10-14

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-24



*The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
"Joseph, son of David,
do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.
For it is through the Holy Spirit
that this child has been conceived in her.
She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus,
because he will save his people from their sins."
All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:
Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means "God is with us."*

—Matthew 1:20-23

If we have really been following the readings and other texts of the liturgy during the first weeks of Advent, we see that the Church has been inviting us to focus our attention on that day when, in the fullness of time, Christ will return in glory. In the final days of Advent, however, the focus shifts and we recall those prophecies, people, and events that preceded the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem more than two millennia ago. In the readings for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear God making a promise to King Ahaz — through the words of the prophet Isaiah — that virgin shall bear a child and how that promise was fulfilled in Mary, the betrothed of Joseph of Nazareth.

These are stories that we know well. Some of us learned the story of the Jesus' birth through Christmas pageants or holiday TV specials. For others, it was Bible stories, attending church services at Christmas, and in classic carols and hymns. In a sense, the Christmas story has become part of our spiritual DNA, and because of that, there is the risk that we lose sight of how shocking these events really were to those who were living those events and we miss what they reveal about the mercy and love of God.

However, if we are able to take time to pray with and reflect on the readings for this week, we begin to recognize a thread — a central idea — pulling these wonderful texts together: Gift.

In the first reading, God makes the promise of *Emmanuel* who will lead the Chosen People in freedom despite the king's unwillingness to even ask for anything from God. In the Gospel, God's angelic messenger interrupts Joseph's sleep, breaking into one of the most ordinary human acts with the most extraordinary news. And St. Paul names the grace and call that he himself received and which he, in turn, shares with the Christians of Rome (in the second reading). In each instance, we are being confronted with the truth that God offers us deliverance, grace, and mercy freely, simply out of love for us.

In an Advent reflection, spiritual writer [Loretta Ross-Gotta](#) remarked:

Jesus observed, "Without me you can do nothing," (John 15:5). Yet we act, for the most part, as though without us God can do nothing. We think we have to make Christmas come, which is to say we think we have to bring about the redemption of the universe on our own... "Oh, but nothing will get done," you say. "If I don't do it, Christmas won't happen." And we crowd out Christ with our fretful fears. (Found in [Watch for the Light: Reflections for Advent and Christmas](#))

Prayer

A prayer for the final days of Advent

O Divine One,
you came into our world
in the form of a newly emerged child,
fresh and fragile as all of us are at our birthing.

You came as a beloved one
filled with the radiance of eternal Light.
As you grew in humanness,
your life and teachings revealed
the vast goodness of your inner being.

We now carry your loving Spirit of radiance within us.
We can easily miss this gift in the press of our activities
and our clouded, inner vision.
Skim away the inattentiveness of our minds
and the crusts of unloving on our hearts.
As we prepare to celebrate the wonder of your birth,
help us discern your concealed presence
in each part of our life. Amen.

(— From the writings of [Joyce Rupp, OSM](#))

How much time and effort do we waste holding our breath, treading water as we navigate wave after wave of expectation and responsibility? Rather than trying to hold on to some semblance of control or the sense that we have to keep things moving forward, God is inviting us to let something new come to birth within us.

Exhale.

Remember: the one who is both Giver and Gift asks us only for open heart and a willing spirit. Dwell in the mystery that is being made present to us in the liturgies of Advent and Christmas: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father / and the Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 1:7).

— Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS