

December 20, 2009 4th Sunday in Advent *He Who Comes,*
 Lk. 1:46b-55; Micah 5:2-51 Lk. 1:39-45 *Comes Through You*

The Word of God has a way of making itself a part of the very fabric of your life, if you let it. If the Word of God ever implants itself, even a little bit, in the world, it will influence, shape, and form all of life. That's the message of Advent. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, was born in Bethlehem, one of the little clans of Judah (as the Prophet Micah called it), in a stable to two poor parents in 1st Century Galilee. From that insignificant beginning the world is saved. That's the Good News of Advent. That's what we celebrate at Christmastime. That's what we embrace again as we receive this great gift of love.

The Word that created life,
 empowered prophecy,
 imparted divine promises,
 brought forth blessing,

the Word of God has a way of doing all of that with you, right now, if you let it. That's what makes this story of two kinswomen who are about to have babies so interesting and vital to us today. Why else would the impending birth of two children in that insignificant part of the world so long ago make any difference at all to us today? It is because the Word of God made itself a part of the fabric of 1st century life in this very small way that we now prepare to celebrate that same gift to all the world at Christmastime.

This is a message of Advent we often miss. The Word of God comes, implants itself in the midst of life in an insignificant way in you, and through you the world is blessed. That's how God works. That makes the message of Advent so very personal. That is Good news. Good news spreads far and fast, if you let it. That is Good News.

That's what happened to Mary's older relative, Elizabeth who, at the angel's announcement to Mary, was already 6 months along in carrying her own child, John (to be called the Baptist), her only child with whom she was blessed while she was well on in years. When Mary arrived to visit her, there was no need for Mary to announce she was with child also, for Elizabeth's child leaped for joy within her as Mary greeted them—Elizabeth already knew and she blesses her young relative, the mother of her Lord. You see, the Word of

God has a way of making itself a part of the very fabric of your life, if you let it. Good news spreads far and fast, if you let it.

And so Mary, so full of the blessing and grace of God, offers spontaneous song and praise and thanksgiving to God. The Magnificat boldly declares that even as God has blessed Mary, the lowliest of God's people, so God will bless all people through every generation, bringing down the strong and proud and lifting up the lowly; filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty. Mary truly believes that good news spreads far and fast, if you let it.

Now much has been said about the origins of our Christmas holiday. It is no secret that the date of Christmas was not set until the 4th century. It is no secret that one of the main reasons for the setting of the date of Christmas by the church as December 25 was to counter the popular pagan holidays so prevalent at the time involving

- special rituals and celebrations in Europe to welcome back the sun as longer days approached,
- the Scandinavian Yuletide feast to welcome the sun's return,
- or the Roman festival "Saturnalia" celebrating their god Saturn with garlands of laurel and green trees lit with candles.

You know what I say to that? Good for the church! If the culture needed redeeming by the displacement of immoral and misguided revelry through the moral influence of the Christian Gospel then I am glad the church tried to make it right. Bad news, you see, travels so far so fast almost all by itself. Human culture and society is so easily infected by the improper, the immoral, the short-sighted, and the penultimate. Unfortunately we are still living with the inappropriate excesses of these earlier pagan festivals as we all too easily indulge ourselves in the greediness and gluttony so prevalent among us this time of year. It seems the church has not completely succeeded in displacing misguided holiday revelry even today! But that's the way bad news is. That which is not so good for us so often infects us so easily.

But the message of Advent is that good news spreads far and fast, if you let it. You see, people of God, Advent people, Christmas people are called by God and blessed by God to spread good news, not bad. God knows that bad news doesn't need any special help to spread itself around. You and I know how poisonous it is for any of us to spread around despair or disappointment or anger or frustration among one another. We human beings so easily catch hold of that bad news and soon it affects us all.

But Mary didn't have to say a thing. Elizabeth's baby wiggled and kicked with joy within her as soon as Mary came near. Mary had good news and Elizabeth knew it even before she was told. Good news spreads far and fast, if you let it. Life finds a way.

At Christmastime the planet Jupiter is particularly visible in the sky. According to the recent broadcast of the public radio program "Star Date," if you look right next to the moon at its rising you can just see it. Jupiter has many moons. One of those moons is called Europa. The interesting thing about Europa is that it is covered with ice and it may well have water underneath its surface. To the extent that the conditions there match the exact conditions of earth millennia ago, this makes Europa about as similar to earth as any other heavenly body. All the conditions are there, it is said, for the formation of life. One of the reasons we know so much about Europa is because of the exploration of the Galileo spacecraft. Launched from the cargo bay of the Space Shuttle Atlantis ten years ago, it brought cameras and detection equipment to this part of our solar system. But there is one more thing that Galileo brought to this part of space—life. It is certain that some form of earthly life, bacteria perhaps, survived the years of radiation bombardment, especially in the internal portions of the craft. Here's the thing. If even a little bit of that bacteria, if even a little bit of that life, somehow made its way to Jupiter's moon Europa, the fear is that it could multiply and contaminate that moon's entire environment. There was a mathematically small chance that, with the loss of its ability to maneuver upon the depletion of its propellant, Galileo's path might one day cross Europa's orbit. To avoid that risk, the spacecraft Galileo's mission ended 3 years ago when it was deliberately directed into Jupiter's shadow and disintegrated in its dense atmosphere.

It only takes a little bit of life in the proper environment for it to spread everywhere. What is the good news here? We don't have to do very much at all as life's agents to bring life into our environment. It really does have a life of its own if you let it do what life does.

How does the song go this time of year? "Oh, we need a little Christmas, right this very minute!" The real spirit of this season can be so contagious if we just listen carefully enough and let it spark in us the love, compassion, and justice in which God created us. That's what happened to Elizabeth and Mary, that's what can happen to you, that's what can happen to the church, that can surely happen to the world. Yes, the greed and excess and extravagance that are so prevalent among us this time of year can also infect us, but good news spreads far and fast, if you let it.

It really is up to you. Are you one who just can't wait to spread the latest bad news you hear or does your heart leap within you whenever you find yourself anywhere near good news and just can't wait to share that? Are you one whose sole focus this Christmas is on what you are going to GET, or are you one who just can't wait to see the joy on the faces of those to whom you GIVE? Are you one of life's agents or are you an agent of death?

We celebrate the coming of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, at Christmas. The Word of God has a way of making itself a part of the very fabric of your life, if you let it. Jesus Christ is born anew in our hearts this season. Even as God came through Elizabeth and through Mary, so God comes through you and me every day. The message of Advent, the promise of this time of year, and the calling of Christmas is this: He Who comes, comes through you!

William G. Davidson